

# **The Mauritius Command Study Guide**

**The Mauritius Command by Patrick O'Brian**

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# Plot Summary

Captain Jack Aubrey is appointed Commodore and sent to capture the French-held islands of La Reunion and Mauritius. Using a small fleet and drawing support from the British-held island of Rodriguez, Aubrey sets about reducing the French Indian Ocean fleet. Aubrey's particular friend, Stephen Maturin, assists by making intelligence contacts, distributing anti-French propaganda, and gathering local intelligence. After many months and several setbacks, Aubrey and Maturin are ultimately successful and both islands are captured from the French.

Aubrey's command is hampered by the fact that the French forces on land and at sea are superior in number and weapons. Also, Aubrey's nearest base is nearly three thousand miles away at Cape Town, and in addition to prosecuting military conquest he must protect British commercial shipping from India. His French opponent wisely declines combat on any but the most advantageous terms. Aubrey proceeds with his characteristic vigor, however, and makes an initial strike before the French are even aware that he is in the area. Taking infantry forces from Rodriguez, Aubrey strikes at a central port and main fortress of La Reunion, capturing and holding them for a day. During that time, his men destroy military stores, demolish the local fortresses, burn government records and buildings, and leave the civilian populace entirely alone. Meanwhile, Maturin distributes much British gold and anti-French broadsheets and makes local contacts.

Aubrey continues to coordinate his activities and gains additional local forces. Assisted by Colonel Keating, Aubrey then launches a large-scale invasion of La Reunion and captures the island after a brief campaign. With a new base of operations, he installs Governor Farquhar and concentrates his forces. Along with La Reunion, Aubrey captures a huge amount of stores and weaponry for his fleet. These events find Aubrey at the pinnacle of his individual success in the campaign. What follows is a series of military disasters precipitated by his subordinate captains' competition. As each tries to outdo the next, they enter into a bumbling series of disastrous engagements that leave nearly the entire British fleet captured or destroyed. When a reinforcing frigate arrives, its hot-headed captain closes with a superior French force without waiting for a tactical advantage, and the new frigate is nearly destroyed. After this series of naval disasters, Aubrey finds himself at the nadir of his personal command. There is a very real fear that the French will recapture La Reunion.

Meanwhile, Maturin undertakes a difficult surgery, and the superstitious Aubrey links his own fate to the recovery of the patient. Fortunately, the man survives and recovers, and Aubrey manages to gain a small tactical victory over the French forces. And then an Admiral arrives with a vast fleet stuffed with marines, and Aubrey's days of independent command are effectively ended. The superior British forces quickly capture Mauritius and Aubrey is returned to England bearing the happy news of Mauritius' capture. His various actions have earned him wide repute and a goodly amount of prize money, too.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Captain Jack Aubrey is appointed Commodore and sent to capture the French-held islands of La Reunion and Mauritius. Using a small fleet and drawing support from the British-held island of Rodriguez, Aubrey sets about reducing the French Indian Ocean fleet. Aubrey's particular friend, Stephen Maturin, assists by making intelligence contacts, distributing anti-French propaganda, and gathering local intelligence. After many months and several setbacks, Aubrey and Maturin are ultimately successful and both islands are captured from the French.

The novel opens at Captain Jack Aubrey's home in Hampshire, England; a country cottage of smallish size surrounded by failing gardens and otherwise typical country life. The year is 1810 and England is at war with France. Napoleon leads a global dynasty that threatens to conquer all of Europe and is held at bay only by England's superior naval might. Aubrey is ashore on half-pay, awaiting some command as there are more captains than ships, a typical state of affairs even during wartime. Aubrey is visited by his particular friend and long-time confidant, Stephen Maturin. Maturin is a physician of renown, a natural scientist, and a covert intelligence agent for the British crown. The two men have not met for some time and spend several hours getting caught up. Aubrey spends his time grinding lenses for telescopes and devising methods of determining the longitude at sea. He is consumed by a desire to return to the sea and finds domestic life—in particular his two infant twin daughters—uninteresting and a bore. Aubrey lives with his wife Sophie, his mother-in-law, Mrs. Williams, and Sophie's niece Cecelia. Mrs. Williams is a loudmouthed and overbearing woman of much opinion and little substance. Cecelia is an often-sick waif, highly favored by Mrs. Williams. Sophie is lovely as always, but Maturin finds her nervous, rail-thin, and highly worried. All the family is much reduced by stress and penury. In a quiet moment, Sophie asks Maturin to locate some command for Aubrey, but Maturin states he has no influence.

As the rambling visit continues a message arrives from one Lady Clonfert, requesting passage alongside Aubrey as far as Cape Town. Aubrey chuckles at Lady Clonfert's request, noting that it would require a ship to begin. Maturin subtly pulls Aubrey aside and tells him the real visit of his purpose. The French have positioned a strong naval force, comprised of *Vénus*, *Manche*, *Bellone*, and *Caroline*—four heavy frigates, at Mauritius. The French squadron has been capturing British Indiamen and exerting regional pressure—it must be stopped. Maturin is to voyage there alongside Mr. Farquhar, the prospective English governor. Aubrey is to accompany them in the frigate *Boadicea*; Maturin after all has considerable influence. The French force is to be met by an English force comprised of *Néréide*, *Sirius*, and *Otter*—smaller ships with lighter cannon. Maturin deplores the rumor mill that has informed Lady Clonfert of Aubrey's command before Aubrey himself. A few moments later an official Admiralty messenger arrives with Aubrey's actual orders.



Aubrey proceeds to sea and deliberately contrives to accidentally miss Lady Clonfert's arrival as a passenger; she will have to take an Indiaman several days later. In the first few days of the voyage Aubrey is fortunate to take two prizes—Hébé and Intrepid Fox. He sends the prizes into Gibraltar with letters and prize crews comprised of unfit elements from his crew. Aubrey and Maturin spend much time in company with Mr. Farquhar, who will be the English governor of Mauritius should the military campaign prove successful. Aubrey finds Farquhar somewhat tedious but generally agreeable. The three men discuss the respective captains of the British fleet likely to be involved in the Mauritius campaign. *Néréide*, a thirty-six gun frigate, bears only twelve-pounders but is captained by Corbett, known to be a rigid disciplinarian and a fighting captain. *Sirius* bears eighteen-pounder guns and is captained by Pym, a captain that Aubrey holds in particularly high regard. *Otter*, eighteen guns, is a sloop commanded by Lord Clonfert. Clonfert has a reputation of being a fop but also a courageous man. Aubrey insinuates that various bizarre stories regarding Clonfert circulate regularly, but does not say more. As the voyage proceeds to Cape Town, Aubrey re-rigs the ship, re-stows the hold, exercises the great guns, and trains his men in seamanship. By the time they reach the equator and beyond the crew functions smoothly.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

As with most of the novels in the series of novels dealing with Aubrey and Maturin, the initial chapters introduce the main characters, provide characterization for Aubrey, Maturin, and the others, and establish the setting and basic plot. One of the construction difficulties of the group of novels arises in the interplay of fairly strict adherence to historical facts of military service and positioning two friends upon the same ship. This is contrived by Maturin's suggestion to the Admiralty that Aubrey would make an excellent commodore. The result and situation are plausible. Note the typically humorous introduction of Aubrey where he comes across as barely capable and somewhat bumbling—his wilted cabbages and his bug-infested gardens, his shrewish mother in law, and his tiny cottage are all somewhat pathetic and somewhat risible. The man is simply incapable on land—at sea he is another creature entirely. In most respects, Maturin is the opposite—a veritable tiger ashore and a bumbling incompetent concerning all things nautical. Sophie is introduced as a loving and devoted spouse—she is a recurrent character throughout the series and is always presented in a positive way. Aubrey's general negativity directed toward the female sex is unusual in the series of novels and doubtlessly arises from his close and involuntary proximity to Mrs. Williams for a prolonged period of time. The thinly-veiled reference to Sophie's sexual unavailability since delivery culminates in a sexual encounter on the night before Aubrey sails—he will hear of the happy result of this happy event after about a year at sea.

Lady Clonfert is known to Aubrey, and he views her possible presence aboard his ship with something akin to horror—spending several months entertaining a pretentious minor noble is not Aubrey's idea of a good naval cruise. He thus goes to great lengths to appear to attempt to offer her conveyance while at the same time makes sure that the signals are misinterpreted and the reunion is bungled. Lady Clonfert takes a later passage to Cape Town aboard a commercial vessel. After departing England, most of



Chapter 2 is devoted to establishing the naval setting and introducing several minor characters. The material also presents a good amount of detail regarding life in the Royal Navy of the period and the methods used to train raw recruits into able seamen. The rather frank discussions between Maturin and McAdam about Clonfert will continue throughout the remainder of the novel and form an enjoyable but ultimately minor plot element.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Boadicea reaches Cape Town and Aubrey calls on Admiral Bertie. The Admiral re-states much of the same information as Maturin has provided, notes that several additional Indiamen have been captured, and tells Aubrey that the island of Rodriguez, near Mauritius, has been garrisoned by British soldiers. Bertie is generally polite to Aubrey and gives him several official honors. He gives Aubrey permission to hoist a commodore's broad pendant aboard Boadicea and entrusts Aubrey to execute the naval portion of the military campaign. Needless to say, Aubrey is very pleased. Aubrey immediately tours the fleet, inspects the various ships present, readies the fleet for the sea, and interviews his captains and officers. He finds Clonfert and Corbett feuding, and finds Clonfert's ship heavily decorated in bizarre fineries.

Meanwhile Maturin travels widely ashore and makes the acquaintance of Dr. McAdam, Clonfert's personal physician and ship's surgeon. McAdam and Maturin discuss Clonfert's strange personality and while Maturin theorizes a physical base for some of Clonfert's bizarre behavior, McAdam insists that it is all mental in origin. McAdam drinks heavily. One day Maturin accidentally meets Barrett Bonden, a friend and past shipmate. Bonden is stationed aboard *Néréide* and flatly states that Corbett is a sadistic tyrant and that the men of the ship are very near mutiny. Maturin finds Bonden's opinion entirely credible and relates the information to Aubrey who must add this to his complicated command. He does use his station of commodore to request Bonden and Killick, his personal coxswain and steward, be reassigned to his crew. He then retires aboard *Raisonné*, an ancient and obsolescent frigate and the squadron—comprised additionally of *Sirius*, *Nereide*, *Boadicea*, *Otter*, and *Wasp*—sails for Mauritius, some 2,885 miles away. On the lengthy voyage Aubrey has the squadron continually practice gunnery and seamanship. On the voyage Aubrey learns that Clonfert is well-acquainted with the shores and locales of the islands; he also suffers from anxiety and physical cramping, which Maturin refers to as a *tormina*. McAdam explains they are physical ailments resulting from mental distress and, ultimately, Maturin comes to agree. It also develops that Maturin is fighting a deep depression and is heavily addicted to opium.

After arrival, Clonfert helps land Maturin on La Reunion where he makes various contacts, spreads anti-French propaganda, and distributes numerous anti-French broadsheets. He also gathers a considerable amount of local intelligence. The squadron then sails to Rodriguez, an island garrisoned by the British. There, Aubrey meets the infantry commander Colonel Keating and the two men quickly become friends. Keating joins Aubrey in a great exploit and his men board the squadron and are landed on La Reunion where they capture a key city, destroy strong French fortifications, burn government buildings, and then retreat. The exploit also captures *Caroline*, a French frigate, and recaptures a few Indiamen and smaller vessels. Because of Maturin's insistence, the local citizens are not molested and the entire venture is resoundingly successful. After, tensions between Corbett and Clonfert escalate. To solve the problem,



Aubrey promotes Corbett into Caroline and sends him home to England via Cape Town with the news. Clonfert is then promoted into Nereide. Maturin spends his free time discussing Clonfert with McAdam and the two physicians develop a course of palliative treatment.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

The primary action of the novel focuses on three tiny islands in the Indian Ocean—La Reunion, Mauritius, and Rodriguez—that lie in a generally west-to-east orientation in the order listed. The island group is roughly 2,885 miles from Cape Town, and the general area and details of two of the islands are offered as maps in the introductory material of the book. References to the La Reunion map in particular help shape a solid understanding of the military tactics employed throughout the book. For the entire novel, Rodriguez is in British control. La Reunion is the site of most of the military action of the novel and, under Aubrey's leadership, is captured from the French. Mauritius is also captured from the French at the end of the novel, but by that point Aubrey is no longer in local command. The major assault on La Reunion takes the French by surprise and proves a resounding success, even though the island is not captured outright. The prizes captured bring many thousands of pounds in prize courts and, eventually, make Aubrey a fairly wealthy man—until he squanders the money, of course.

Clonfert's physical distress and mental agitation continue to receive a large amount of attention in the text. His psychosomatic illness afflicts him with stomach and intestinal cramping but has no apparent physical basis. Clonfert obviously devotedly holds Aubrey in high regard but also feels an overwhelming feeling of professional rivalry that occasionally borders on outright hostility. This continues throughout the novel, seriously clouds Clonfert's judgment, and drives Clonfert into a suicidal attack toward the end of the novel. Given that Clonfert fills a fairly minor role in the novel, he remains one of the most-developed characters in any of the novels of the series, which is slightly out of balance. Clonfert is based very loosely on the historic person Commander Nisbet Josiah Willoughby. Similarly, Corbett is based on the historic person Captain Robert Corbett; Pym on the historic person Captain Samuel Pym; and Keating on the historic person Colonel Henry S. Keating. In fact, even many of the minor characters are based on historic persons. This all accords with the author's front-matter statement to the effect that the novel is tightly coupled to historic events.





# Chapter 5 and 6

## Chapter 5 and 6 Summary

Aubrey and some of the squadron return to Cape Town where Reasonable is retired, and Aubrey moves his flag to Boadicea. At Cape Town the British officials and Admiral Bertie are all enthusiastic about Aubrey's early and rapid successes. Various plans are made and the ships refit. Maturin and McAdam continue to discuss Clonfert's psychosomatic illness and refine their palliative treatment. Indeed, Clonfert's condition and characterization are presented in great and lengthy detail. Maturin writes a lengthy journal entry in which he muses about Clonfert, about the nature of courage, makes statements about his own deep depression, and wonders about the nature and rationale of addiction. Maturin continues to use opium—laudanum—in heroic quantities. Meanwhile McAdam continues his alcoholism; both men find the other's addiction distasteful. News arrives of the capture and re-capture of various ships; rumors about various British ships-of-war circulate, and Maturin obtains a huge sum of gold coins to make bribes in Mauritius. Aubrey's squadron is reinforced with *Magicienne*, captained by Curtis—though the ship bears only twelve-pounder guns, it proves a welcome addition. Aubrey also learns that the French garrison has been reinforced by *Minerva*, a frigate, and various smaller vessels. The squadron then returns to La Reunion and Maturin again goes ashore to pay bribes, gather information, and disseminate anti-French propaganda. The French ships are blockaded in port for several weeks until Christmas, 1810, passes. Then a hurricane develops, and the British fleet is separated and the individual ships are generally heavily damaged.

The squadron returns to Cape Town again. This time, the British officials are less than happy, and Aubrey is infuriated by the shipyard's uncooperative attitude. Maturin and McAdam continue to mull Clonfert's situation. Happily, letters from home arrive though they are much damaged by unfortunate transportation incidents. *Iphigenia*, captained by Lambert, joins Aubrey's squadron. The captains make plans and on one evening engage in a lengthy consideration of naval discipline. The squadron then returns to La Reunion. Much of the French fleet is discovered in harbor at Port Louis, though two frigates are cruising and *Astrée*, a new frigate, is anchored south of St. Louis in a protected area. Leaving some ships to blockage, most of the squadron continues on to Rodriguez where Maturin happily meets Tom Pullings, a former shipmate and now captain of *Groper*, a transport. The squadron boards numerous British infantry reinforcements led by Colonel Keating and proceeds again to La Reunion. They land the infantry in a heavy swell, necessitating the sacrifice of *Groper* to act as a temporary breakwater. The campaign makes astonishingly rapid advances. Maturin's propaganda has seeded discontent in the local populace and the French forces don't have much fight in them. After only a few hours of active combat the island capitulates. Aubrey and Maturin have captured one of the two French islands—a decisive blow in favor of England.



## Chapter 5 and 6 Analysis

This segment of the novel begins the presentation of a dizzying number of ships joining and leaving the two squadrons; in net effect, the English grow slightly stronger and the French remain about the same. The deployment of various ships is considered at length and frequently changes giving the campaign a kaleidoscope feeling of advantage and disadvantage. La Reunion's capture marks the high-water mark of Aubrey's command—from this point onward things generally progress poorly for the British until the final events of the novel. The length of the entire campaign is somewhat clouded by the novel's portrayal of events as episodes—one need only consider the number of round-trips between Cape Town and Mauritius to quickly discern that the events described transpire over many, many months.

Clonfert continues to receive a disproportionate amount of narrative attention. The man demonstrates exceptional courage on several occasions; he is much beloved by his men and runs his ship in a remarkably democratic fashion. Maturin, and indeed Aubrey, consider him capable and brave if somewhat affected. Maturin briefly wonders about Clonfert's sexual orientation, but McAdam dispels any notion of homosexuality. In essence, Clonfert is a very tightly wound man with a vast inferiority complex and a compelling need to be liked. He views Aubrey as a competitor more than an accomplice and constantly strives to outdo Aubrey in all ways. Clonfert is not above promoting abject falsehood if he believes it will further his reputation—for example, he relates a lengthy and banal tale of hunting unicorns and demonstrates a putative unicorn tusk—in fact a Narwhale tusk—and claims to have chopped it from the slain unicorn's head himself. Clonfert is somewhat balanced by the appearance of Tom Pullings, a level-headed and competent seaman of no bluster and little fanfare. Humorously, Pullings' first independent command—Groper—is run ashore and ruined under Aubrey's order to form a temporary seawall to allow the landing of infantry. Pullings is devastated but, needless to say, complies exactly and promptly with the order.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Farquhar is established as the Governor of La Reunion and begins to look forward to also governing Mauritius. Meanwhile Aubrey confers with other military advisors. Maturin determines to proceed to Mauritius and joins Clonfert for the voyage. During the trip the bumbling Maturin is accidentally dropped overboard, sustaining a light concussion and nearly drowning. He is placed under the care of McAdam and begins a long but successful recovery, complicated by pneumonia. The two men while the hours discussing Clonfert and arguing about which drug—alcohol or opium—is more onerous. During the voyage Maturin sees a dugong—the crew refers to it as a mermaid and McAdam calls it a manatee. Meanwhile, Pym has led a successful but bloody raid against a fortress near Ponte du Diable. Upon hearing of Pym's success, Clonfert immediately becomes agitated and pursues some engagement for himself.

Clonfert sails to Port-Louis and captures a fort there just as several French ships arrive. A complex situation develops and over the course of many hours Clonfert mishandles the tactical situation, resulting in heavy damage to his ship. The French ships reach the safety of the harbor—their ultimate goal—and yet Clonfert characterizes the situation as some great victory, claiming to have the vastly superior French force bottled up. He is highly active, nearly frenzied. Pym then joins Clonfert and, as the senior captain, takes command. Several English ships then proceed into the difficult harbor to destroy the French ships—yet two English frigates run aground and Pym delays a third in efforts to help draw his own ship off the ground. Clonfert alone closes haphazardly and engages the entire French force which pour in a withering fire. As action is joined it is discovered that McAdam—the ship's surgeon—is unconscious from alcohol and thus Maturin acts as ship's surgeon. The fierce action continues for hours and Clonfert's face is shot away by small-arms fire. After being bandaged, he returns to the deck. Eventually Nereide is captured, as is Clonfert, but Maturin slips away in a ship's boat. Some hours later Magicienne and Sirius are given up as hopelessly grounded and burned. A fourth English frigate, Iphigenia, is captured, and the battery captured the previous day by Clonfert is recaptured by the French. It is a calamitous loss for the English, indeed, and Pym and Maturin escape on the sole surviving British ship, returning in utter defeat to La Reunion.

Later, Aubrey on Boadicea has a chance to take two French frigates but needs help. He sends a message to a senior captain in port requesting him to quickly ready a merchant ship with guns and come out to assist. No ship appears for a long time and Aubrey becomes agitated. Then Pullings arrives with Emma—the senior captain has declined to assist and so Pullings has more-or-less commandeered the transport Emma to render what assistance he can. It is a valiant and appreciated gesture but in the event, Emma proves too slow to bring the French ships to combat. Later still, Corbett returns in HMS Africaine, a new and strong frigate. Aubrey is happy to receive the reinforcements and goes out in Boadicea to join Africaine in pursuit of Astree and Iphigenia—now in French



hands, of course. Corbett becomes impatient, however, and instead of waiting for Boadicea to close he engages the French ships single-handedly. Aubrey watches the combat develop from several miles away. By the time Boadicea closes Africaine has been mauled and captured. The two French ships sail away and Aubrey recaptures Africaine, her deck awash in blood.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

This segment of the novel sees Aubrey's command fall from the pinnacle of early success to the nearly catastrophic as unrestrained personal egos lead British forces to constant defeat. Pym's early tactical success is strategically meaningless and causes Clonfert to rush off to a putatively greater exploit. Clonfert's judgment is seriously clouded by his psychological need to demonstrate bravery. His attack on the French port is impetuous and his bungled handling of the minor victory turns it into a bloodbath and rout. Even so, his dogged attack upon the French forces—which Clonfert sees as bottled up—could have succeeded had Pym enjoyed a greater vision. Instead, while Clonfert's ship is pounded into ruin by the combined French ships, Pym prevents English ships from assisting because he is determined to have his own ship taken off the ground. Note the example here of the necessity of an educated man at the helm—the French and Clonfert run into the harbor with no problem while all the other English ships run aground during the approach. The end result is a catastrophic defeat for the English. Clonfert and McAdam are captured—Clonfert surprisingly survives his ghastly wounds. Maturin and a few others slip away from first one ship and then another to return bearing news of the ill-fated attack.

As if Clonfert's and Pym's loss was not substantial enough, Aubrey's reinforcement—Corbett in Africaine—also throws away a chance for victory by impatiently engaging the enemy under unfavorable conditions. Recall that Corbett has been characterized throughout the novel as a brutal captain and petty tyrant. Upon the opening shots of combat, Maturin later learns that Corbett's own men kill him and throw his body overboard. By the time Boadicea enters the fray Africaine has been rendered useless—the French attack prosecuted beyond all normal reason. Truly, Aubrey's odds in the campaign have gone from bad to impossible. Finally, a golden opportunity is lost when a captain refuses to support Aubrey—Pullings tries, but in vain. Note Maturin's flabbergasted anger at the captain who refuses assistance. The normally level-headed Maturin demands some strict punishment, but the much-diminished Aubrey notes that a captain legally may refuse a command—though it is seldom done.



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Boadicea takes the dismantled *Africaine* in tow. Maturin learns that the brutal Corbett is dead—had been killed by his own men, apparently, during the opening moments of combat, and his body thrown overboard. The ship subsequently valiantly fought led by the first lieutenant but to no avail. Aubrey faces bleak prospects of total defeat—the odds against the British forces are seemingly insurmountable.

Maturin enlists the assistance of Mr. Cotton to operate on a depressed fracture of the skull of a seaman named Colley. A piece of broken skull is removed and the hole is covered with a piece of silver fashioned from a British coin. The operation is difficult but successful and Aubrey secretly and superstitiously links the success of his overall command to the recovery of Colley. As Colley begins to recover so does Aubrey's luck improve. Boadicea encounters *Venus*, a lone French frigate, and captures her by boarding. Aubrey believes the capture—and Colley's rapid recovery—to be the turning point in the campaign. Meanwhile Maturin goes ashore at Mauritius and spreads anti-French propaganda, including the singularly decisive information that Napoleon has been subjected to the greater excommunication of the Catholic Church.

The novel's concluding chapter begins with Aubrey writing a lengthy letter home during which he reports a sanitized version of recent events to his beloved Sophie. Colley makes a full recovery, and Aubrey is entirely convinced of complete victory. And then Admiral Bertie and a vast fleet of ships arrive. Pullings in Emma closes with Boadicea and he comes aboard, beaming with pleasure to be the first to inform Aubrey that he is once again a father—and this time of a boy child. Aubrey dutifully hauls down his commodore's broad pennant in deference to the Admiral—who graciously requests that Aubrey retain his broad pennant. The vast armada lands a huge British force, and Mauritius is conquered in a mechanical and inexorable process. As with *La Reunion*, the local populace welcomes the English rulers.

As the conquest nears completion, Maturin and McAdam hold a final conversation about depression. Maturin worries that Maturin has literally lost the will to live and turns to McAdam for advice. McAdam states that Maturin's suicide can only be temporarily postponed by ever-increasing opium use. He instead suggests that Maturin must become involved in a case of burning lust—only this will regain the spark of life. Meanwhile Clonfert, recuperating in a hospital with a shattered face, hears of Aubrey's ultimate victory and rather than accepting it magnanimously, rips the bandages from his face and opens his neck arteries, dying in a pool of blood. McAdam weeps for Clonfert as Mauritius celebrates. Admiral Bertie favors Aubrey by commanding him to return quickly to England and deliver the good news—Aubrey knows that such messengers are showered with favor from the Admiralty and looks forward to a new desirable command.



## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The concluding segment of the novel sees Aubrey's fortunes once again reversed—from the nearly impossible to victory on the professional and personal fronts. Maturin's surgery upon Colley is a repetition of a similar surgery described in a previous novel of the series. Colley suffers from a depressed fracture in the skull, and Maturin uses a trephine to bore through the skull and lift out the shattered bone fragments. He then uses a silver coin, shaped on an anvil, to cover the hole and sews the man's scalp back together. Maturin enjoys great success with this improbable operation and, like his predecessor, Colley survives. The scene is equal parts ghoulish and comedy and is an example of the fine and strong writing which characterizes the novel. Aubrey, always the suspicious seaman, links Colley's survival to the success of his own campaign as commodore. The linking is simultaneously nonsensical but also intelligible—who hasn't performed a similar mental gymnastic at some point during trying circumstances? Thus, as Colley begins to recuperate, Aubrey begins to enjoy victory.

Aubrey's difficult situation is effectively solved—in an unfortunate way—by the arrival of Admiral Bertie with a vast armada. The French on Mauritius are entirely outnumbered and outclassed at this point, and the conquest of Mauritius proceeds in a clockwork fashion. Although Aubrey is no longer in local command the admiral extends a great courtesy in allowing Aubrey to continue to fly his broad pennant as commodore. The novel wraps up one narrative loose end by having Clonfert commit suicide upon hearing the supposedly happy news that Aubrey's campaign has successfully completed. This complex and enjoyable character is thus, unfortunately, not met with again in the remainder of the series of novels. McAdams demonstrates amazing insight in attributing Maturin's lasting and deep depression to a case of unrequited love—his prescription of a new and burning lust is ironic given that it is directed to Maturin, a restrained and taciturn man if ever there was one. The novel ends with Aubrey as a beaming new father returning home in glory—and considerably wealthier for his efforts, too.





# Characters

## Commodore Jack Aubrey

Aubrey is one of the principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Stephen Maturin. Aubrey is a larger-than-life character with dash and charisma. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of the sea; a legendary captain, a masterful navigator, a superb tactician, and an undefeatable warrior. Although he is intelligent, he relies more on experience, insight, and a nearly infallible instinct to carry him through the various perils he encounters. Aubrey is a recently-appointed commodore and commands a squadron of ships in their mission to capture the French-held islands of Mauritius and La Reunion. Just as Aubrey is a master at sea, he is nearly incompetent while ashore—he is usually engaged in a number of poor fiduciary choices and typically finds himself in debt and penniless. He is excited about his huge financial gains during the Mauritius campaign and spends much time thinking about how his life will improve as a result.

Aubrey is married to the beautiful, young Sophie Williams, and he dotes on her with vigor even though he finds most of her moods unfathomable. Throughout the novel, Aubrey frequently worries about Sophie, writes prolonged letters to her, and often acts as if she were present to approve of his decisions. Refreshingly, Sophie returns his love and concern. Aubrey's self-esteem is a sure thing, however, and he is rarely afflicted with internal doubts.

Aubrey wears his blonde hair in a long queue and dresses in the traditional ship captain's uniform. His hair has earned him the nickname of Goldilocks, and his superiors usually refer to him as Lucky Jack Aubrey because of his unparalleled successes at sea. He is usually adorned with a sword and hat, which he wears in the style preferred by Vice-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson, Aubrey's idol. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent; Aubrey weighs about 224 pounds. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds.

## Stephen Maturin

Maturin is one of the principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area of medicine and he is also a natural scientist of some repute. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science and his medical opinions are surprisingly modern and always correct. Maturin has performed several miraculous cures through advanced techniques and is considered, by the crew, to hold life in the



palm of his hand—a trust no better demonstrated than by their calm assurance that Colley's life will be preserved even after Maturin has operated on his brain. Maturin has hereditary holdings of considerable extent in Spain, though he rarely visits that country. Although possessed of some financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct. Maturin, in addition to being a physician and scientist, is an agent for the secret intelligence network of England. This relationship explains why Maturin is so often able to obtain choice assignments by request, why he is allowed to travel upon Royal Navy vessels without enlisting as crew, and why he is so often found to be involved with various Royal Navy activities. This is also the principle plot device used to secure command of a frigate for Aubrey and place Aubrey and Maturin together again in the current novel.

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

## **Captain Tom Pullings**

Pullings has served under Aubrey as a lieutenant during the previous novels in the series. He eventually gained promotion to captain, largely through Aubrey's efforts. He is an enthusiastic and optimistic captain, a devoted supporter of Jack Aubrey, and an extremely capable navigator, seaman, and officer. Pullings preceded Aubrey into matrimony, and Aubrey occasionally views his relatively inexperienced friend as a sort of savant on the nature and essential characteristics of womanhood. Pullings demonstrates his ability during the novel by arming the transport Emma and coming to Aubrey's assistance when a senior captain declines to help. He also demonstrates his unswerving devotion to duty when he sacrifices his first command—Groper—during the landing of infantry troops on La Reunion. Pullings is always dependable and is an always memorable minor character.

## **Preserved Killick and Barrett Bonden**

Killick is Jack Aubrey's steward and has been a faithful servant for many years and on many occasions. Killick is keenly aware that his personal fortunes are inextricably linked





to Aubrey's success and ensures that Aubrey is always presented in the most favorable circumstances possible. Beyond professional interest, however, Killick is a loyal friend and defender of Aubrey and goes to great lengths to provide hot coffee, good food, plentiful drink, fresh fruit, clean clothing, and other amenities under often-difficult circumstances. Killick often serves as a sort of comic relief within the narrative; his presumptuous and rude lines delivered in a whiny nasal tone set Aubrey's teeth on edge.

Bonden is Aubrey's coxswain. He is easily the most dependable character in Aubrey's crew. Aubrey demonstrates his complete trust in Bonden by selecting him to look after Maturin on several dangerous missions. The reliable Bonden always demonstrates complete tact, honesty, and devotion. Both men are serving under Corbett and are all too happy to transfer into Aubrey's service when he becomes commodore.

## **Sophie Aubrey and her children**

Sophie Aubrey, née Williams, is Aubrey's wife of several years and the mother of his two twin daughters. She is the only sympathetic female character presented in any detail. She is an exceptionally beautiful and very devoted young woman, though the financial stresses of marriage have left her over-thin in Maturin's estimation. Although Sophie is rather rough around the edges, being raised in the country and largely uneducated, she has a natural grace and sympathetic bearing that carries her successfully through social engagements. Sophie has two younger sisters who are married, and her niece lives in the home with Sophie and her mother. Unlike her mother who is stern, penurious, and abrasive, Sophie sees wealth as simply a means to an end. Sophie's natural disposition is trusting, open, and honest. Maturin values her as a particular friend. One of the novel's elements of construction lies in the presentation of Aubrey's letters to Sophie as plot development. Sophie does not occur as a character beyond Chapter One.

## **Lord Clonfert**

Lord Clonfert is one of the captains serving under Commodore Aubrey during the period of time described in the novel. He is an Irish Lord and, as described by Maturin, therefore of dubious nobility. Clonfert is a foppish dandy and is much devoted to the external appearances of wealth. His captain's cabin is decorated in a bizarre style and indeed his ship itself is decorated nearly like a parlor, with leather-covered blocks and so forth. Clonfert's crew is so highly decorated that when one of them first boards Aubrey's ship he mistakes him for some kind of entertainer and, in horror, sends him away.

Clonfert is a bizarre mix of bravery, bravado, showmanship, and crushing self-doubt. Clonfert's military exploits are successful and well-known, but Aubrey holds many reservations about those exploits and in particular about the man. Throughout most of the narrative, Clonfert serves with an easy capability and typically is clear-headed. He has a pathological need to distinguish himself above other men, though, and therefore



finds Aubrey supremely intimidating. In the latter portion of the novel, Clonfert allows his competitive streak to cloud his judgment and thus precipitates a catastrophic naval defeat. Clonfert is the most fully developed secondary character in the novel, with many pages devoted to a discussion of his character. Maturin finds him compelling and enjoyable company. Clonfert is based very loosely on the historic person Commander Nisbet Josiah Willoughby; however, this is true only insofar as Clonfert commands the ships and participates in the actions of Willoughby—the fictional character's personality is a complete invention and is not based upon the historic person.

## Doctor McAdam

Doctor McAdam is Lord Clonfert's personal physician and follows Clonfert even as his command changes; this indicates he is not warranted to a ship but instead serves Clonfert directly. This personal arrangement obviously mirrors the friendship between Maturin and Aubrey and in a narrative sense establishes McAdam as Maturin's foil just as Clonfert is Aubrey's foil. And, just as Aubrey vastly overshadows Clonfert, indeed Maturin vastly overshadows McAdam. McAdam is an unusual physician inasmuch as he believes many, perhaps most, physical ailments are more psychosomatic than not. In particular, he holds that Clonfert's bizarre cramps and minor seizures are manifestations of psychological processes rather than based in any physical malady. At first, Maturin is skeptical of McAdam's diagnosis but he eventually concurs. The two men discuss Clonfert's malady at considerable length—indeed, most of Clonfert's characterization is derived from McAdam's description. McAdam and Maturin jointly devise a medically palliative treatment for Clonfert's physical problems but neither man attempts to intervene in Clonfert's mental gyrations. McAdam has thinning hair and is a smaller man. A competent physician, he is not notable for surgical skills and is hampered by alcoholism. McAdam is a keen observer of human behavior and advises Maturin on a few personal matters. McAdam is one of the more memorable minor characters in the novel.

## Captain Corbett

Corbett is a fictionalized presentation of the historic person Captain Robert Corbett, and like the actual man the fictional captain is known for his unrelentingly brutal treatment of his subordinates. Within the novel, the ships commanded by Corbett are the same ships commanded by the historic Corbett, and the combats and results involving the fictional Corbett likewise mirror the combats and results of the historic Corbett. For this character, at least, the author remains close to the touchstone of history.

Aubrey views Corbett as a capable commander with dependable courage—this opinion is informed by commentary of others, however, as Aubrey and Corbett have not served together directly. Maturin is rather shocked at Corbett's bloodthirsty tyranny, however, and is stunned to learn that Bonden has been flogged by Corbett's orders. Indeed, Corbett's commands are not welcomed by the crew and other officers, and his ship is said to be always near mutiny because of his cruel ways. In the end, Corbett proves



himself impatient and lacking in judgment as he closes with the enemy instead of awaiting tactical advantage. Once hostilities are joined, Corbett is killed by his own men and his body thrown overboard. The ship fights better without him.

## Governor Farquhar

Governor Farquhar enters the narrative as the presumptive English governor of Mauritius and La Reunion. He is an intelligent but reserved man and Maturin finds him suitable company. Farquhar is a bit too shy and intellectual for Aubrey's taste though the men do not clash. Farquhar spends most of the opening chapters of the novel as little more than a passenger on seemingly endless trips between Cape Town and the waters around Mauritius. He nevertheless actively participates in political actions designed to shorten the campaign, and once La Reunion is captured, he establishes himself as the actual governor of the island. Once in office, his character changes into a much more assertive man and he leads political machinations with a resolute will. Farquhar rather doubts Aubrey will be successful after Clonfert and Pym's catastrophic defeat, but he does take Maturin's assurances seriously. Farquhar is a minor but enjoyable character in the narrative.

## Colonel Keating

Colonel Keating is the commander of infantry forces based on Rodriguez during the time of the novel. In most respects he is a typical officer in that he is devoted to service, brave as a matter of course, and knows precisely how to conduct land-based combat. He quickly gains Aubrey's trust and friendship because of his energetic and willing participation in rapid action against the French. While other officers prefer to sit and debate, Keating prefers to land troops and open fire. Keating is a fictionalized portrayal of Colonel Henry S. Keating, the historic figure commanding infantry forces during the actual Mauritius campaign.



# Objects/Places

## Rodriguez

Rodriguez is the eastern-most island in a chain of three islands that forms the basic setting of the novel. Rodriguez is in English control throughout the narrative and has been garrisoned by British infantry. A tiny islet near Rodriguez, Flat Island, is often used by the English naval forces as a re-watering locale. Rodriguez is the scene of much planning but little action throughout the novel.

## Mauritius

Mauritius is the central island in a chain of three islands that forms the basic setting of the novel. Mauritius is in French control throughout most of the narrative and is a strongly fortified French redoubt. Much of the latter half of the novel focuses on the land and naval combats carried out in and around Mauritius—a detailed map of the island is provided in the book's front matter.

## La Reunion

La Reunion is the western-most island in a chain of three islands that form the basic setting of the novel. La Reunion is in French control at the opening of the novel and is the setting for much of the action in the first part of the narrative. The civilians on La Reunion are disenchanting with French rule and are easily swayed by Maturin's anti-French propaganda. Thus, when significant British forces are landed on the island, victory quickly ensues. La Reunion thereafter becomes the local base of operations for Aubrey's campaign. A detailed map of the island is provided in the book's front matter.

## HMS Boadicea

HMS Boadicea is a fifth-rate frigate that participates in many of the decisive events leading to the capture of La Reunion and Mauritius during the novel. She is said to carry twenty-eight, eighteen-pounder guns on her main deck and several other guns and carronades on her upper decks. As HMS Boadicea is a fiction representation of an actual ship, it may be assumed that she is like the historic vessel in all ways—and the same is true for all of the ships presented in the narrative.

## Broadsheets

A broadsheet is nothing more than a type of poster tacked on walls to convey information. Maturin develops and prints various anti-French broadsheets and distributes them at La Reunion and Mauritius. At least some of them are printed in Irish



(Gaelic), obviously to appeal to the Irish troops stationed on Mauritius. Maturin makes a joke during the novel that his broadsheets are as effective as Aubrey's broadsides, which is certainly reflected in reality.

## Cape Town

Cape Town is a city at the southern tip of Africa and in the narrative is presented as a lightly fictionalized version of a historic locale. It is some 2,885 miles from Mauritius and for most of the novel forms Aubrey's base of operations. During the narrative various ships transit from Mauritius to Cape Town on several occasions.

## Laudanum

Laudanum is a liquid medicine containing opium and intended for use as an analgesic and sedative. It was commonly used in medical practice during the period of the novel's setting. Maturin is addicted to opium and uses it in the form of laudanum, taking truly staggering doses of the medicine. His actual opium intake cannot be accurately calculated because the strength of the laudanum—it varied considerably—is not noted. Even so, it is apparent that Maturin is a committed user who uses vast amounts.

## Broad Pennant

A broad pennant is a swallow-tailed, tapering flag used to indicate that a commodore is aboard the ship flying the pennant. Aubrey hoists a broad pennant upon assuming command of the fleet—that is, upon assuming the position of commodore. Late in the novel Aubrey takes down his broad pennant because the admiral has taken over fleet command. The admiral requests Aubrey again hoist his broad pennant not as a token of local command authority but as a very nice compliment to Aubrey's skill over the previous many months.

## Indiaman

An Indiaman is a colloquial term for a British ship of commerce trading between some port in India and England. They were typically fairly fast-moving and comfortable ships, purpose-built for trading and commerce and not for warfare. Even so, most Indiamen carried some cannon to ward off pirates or privateers. During the period of the novel, much of England's real wealth was carried by Indiamen and the capture of several Indiamen could represent staggering national financial losses. Thus, one of Aubrey's primary responsibilities was to insure that local commerce was not disrupted.

## Frigate

A frigate is a type of sailing vessel designed for optimal mobility while still carrying substantive firepower. The actual classification varied over time, but at the time of the novel a typical frigate would have one or two gun decks and carry about forty great guns. Most of the larger ships in the narrative were frigates and represented the projection of naval power for both England and France during the Napoleonic wars. Frigates were by no means the largest ships fielded by the belligerent nations, but they were the hardest-worked type of warship because of their combination of mobility and firepower.



# Themes

## War

The novel features a dominant theme of war, even more than most of the novels in the series of novels. Aubrey's initial presentation as a participant in domestic life only serves to underscore his career as a military man—at the first opportunity, he willingly leaves home and sets out to war. Thus, his personal life is allowed only insofar as it does not interfere with his military duties. This dedication is echoed by the dedication of the many other officers and men sailing with Aubrey, such as Clonfert, Corbett, Pym, and Pullings. It is paralleled by Maturin's dedication and, indeed, even by the dedication of the French military officers.

Once at sea, Aubrey's entire purpose is to prosecute the war against France. A complex political and military history is described, and Aubrey operates in the area of the Indian Ocean around Mauritius as he attempts to reduce French influence and power in the area. Nearly all aspects of the narrative are devoted to the pursuit of military operations. Most of the novel's major scenes involve naval combat between British and French forces, and the plot's major turning points all revolve around military setbacks or victories. The novel opens with Aubrey's appointment as commodore and ends with the successful conclusion of the Mauritius campaign. After assuming command, Aubrey never deviates from his course of war, making war and warfare one of the dominant themes of the novel.

## The Position and Isolation of Command

Aubrey has been born and bred to the sea, and is a consummate seaman and military commander par excellence. He has spent years as captain of a ship, and is entirely used to taking the initiative and destroying the enemy. However, he is used to doing these things personally and taking responsibility for his personal successes and failures. In this sense, he is entirely familiar with the isolation of command. Yet in the novel he is appointed commodore and is placed in command of several captains. This is an entirely new experience and one which Aubrey grapples with in several ways. He quickly realizes that he can issue commands but that other men must execute the commands. He is no longer personally responsible for carrying out actions—only for putting those actions into motion. Aubrey keenly feels this when, for example, Clonfert and Pym fail spectacularly during one assault—indeed, they lose and nearly the entire British fleet is either destroyed or captured. Obviously, as commodore Aubrey is responsible for this failure even as he realizes had he been personally present, the outcome would have been far different.

This theme is also enjoyably developed in a meta-fictional way as Maturin and McAdam, two physicians, debate the nature and isolation of command within the narrative itself. They comment upon Clonfert's particular command—his need to be



liked by his men seemingly at conflict with his need to command his ship of war. They also comment upon Corbett—his tyrannical nature being ill-suited to a man placed in indisputable power over others. Indeed, both of these men fail spectacularly in their commands and contrast markedly with Aubrey and Admiral Bertie—two men comfortable with, and capable in, command of others.

## The Projection of Naval Power

England is at war with France, and only England's superior naval force keeps French forces from invading and dismembering the British Empire. While France conquers most of Europe and reigns supreme on land, England's warships and hardy seamen rule the seas. Aubrey is an example of the type of naval commander and tactician that stymies Napoleon's aims on England, while Bonden and Spotted Dick are examples of sailors and minor officers that ably support their leaders. This theme is nowhere more evident than in the Admiralty's decision to effectively export England's naval power to Mauritius.

England's commercial lifeline extends around the globe via the oceans. A major component of the British Empire consists of commercial trade with India, and unsurprisingly that trade is carried on by ships. Those ships pass by Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean. During c. 1809 France sends a considerable naval force to Mauritius where it begins to interrupt the British shipping, causing vast commercial losses in England. This is the novel's first example of the projection of naval power. England responds by sending a squadron under Commodore Aubrey to reduce or destroy the French naval forces and thereafter to destroy or capture the French bases of operation on the islands of Mauritius and La Reunion. This is the novel's second and primary example of the projection of naval power, and the resulting action constitutes the bulk of the narrative. Hence, naval power and its use in distant waters forms one of the basic themes of the novel.



# Style

## Point of View

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

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

## Setting

The terrestrial setting presented in the novel is diffuse and consists of numerous ports, cities, and islands. Of significance among these are the island of Rodriguez, the island and locales of La Reunion, and the island of Mauritius. Additionally, several significant scenes transpire in Cape Town. Most of these settings are transient, poorly described, and thought of by Aubrey and Maturin as temporary locations to refit, re-supply, or prosecute military activities. This varies markedly from the domestic setting which opens the novel, where Aubrey lives with Sophie and her relatives—this area is seen as a place to live and relax, and yet Aubrey doesn't manage to do either of these things very well.

Another setting for the wide-ranging narrative is aboard ship of a British man-of-war during the Napoleonic Wars. Several ships are presented in the novel, but the most-developed is HMS Boadicea, a lightly fictionalized presentation of a historic vessel. Boadicea is a frigate, ship-rigged, and designed for warfare. Her gundeck is somewhat cramped, but her officers' accommodations are better than Maturin is accustomed. Discipline is strict and punishment fairly harsh. Life aboard consists of routine work and repetitive drilling at gunnery and seamanship. Much of the novel's texture is derived from this rather diffuse setting of naval ships during a time of war.



## Language and Meaning

The novel's language is generally simple and accessible. Standard British punctuation is used to indicate dialogue and interior thoughts and descriptive text are easily distinguished. Most of the places, many of the objects, and even most of the events referenced in the narrative are identifiable as real geographical locations or historic events. Indeed, the author's introductory statement clarifies that the narrative follows history with remarkable fidelity. It is notable that the novel was originally written and published in England and uses standard English punctuation and spelling styles.

The novel becomes linguistically complex in two primary respects. First, when dealing with nautical events a somewhat complicated specialized language is used, which includes references to various parts of sailing craft and sailing techniques which are probably not particularly familiar to modern readers. For example, Aubrey intersperses one conversation with various naval commands as his ship gets underway. The technical language is accurate and interesting, and a reference to a general sailing encyclopedia will assist in a careful reading and complete understanding of the text. Second, the novel makes frequent reference to various events which occur prior to the novel's opening, proper. In many cases, these events are detailed in one or both of two prior novels in the series and readers unfamiliar with these novels may find the references vague or puzzling. The novel assumes the reader is familiar with the basic historical background of the Napoleonic War era.

## Structure

The 348-page novel is divided into ten enumerated chapters of roughly equal length, though the latter chapters are shorter than earlier chapters. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. Of course, references to previous events occur with some frequency and characters from time to time think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle timeline is accessible and easily followed.

The novel is intended to be read as part of a series of novels, specifically as the fourth novel in a series, which extends to twenty volumes. Many of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories well-developed in the prior three novels. Similarly, events happening prior to the scope of the current novel are often referenced—for example, the birth of Aubrey's twin girls. This structure proves somewhat difficult for readers unfamiliar with the prior novels. Nevertheless, basic character glosses and event recaps are provided.

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, events in the novel are fictionalized events which occurred in the period of time used as the novel's setting, namely the war between England and France during the years 1810-

1811. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically accurate representations.



## Quotes

"Captain Aubrey of the Royal Navy lived in a part of Hampshire well supplied with sea-officers, some of whom had reached flag-rank in Rodney's day, while others were still waiting for their first command. The more fortunate had large, comfortable houses overlooking Portsmouth, Spithead, St Helens, the Isle of Wight, and the constant procession of men-of-war; and Captain Aubrey might have been among them, since as a commander and as a young post-captain he had done so well in prize-money that he was known in the service as Lucky Jack Aubrey. But want of a ship, the failure of his agent, his ignorance of business, and the sharp practice of an attorney had reduced him to half-pay and no more; and in fact his cottage lay on the northern slope of the Downs, not far from Chilton Admiral, and the rising hill shut out all the sea, together with most of the sun." (p. 15)

"How come you to ask such a simple question, Jack? Hush: do not gape, but look privily towards the stair. There is a most strikingly handsome woman.'

Jack glanced around, and there in fact was a most strikingly handsome woman, young, spry, a lady very much alive, wearing a green riding-habit; she was aware of being looked at, and she moved with even more grace than nature had provided. He turned heavily back to the fire. 'I have no use for your women,' he said. 'Handsome or otherwise.'

'I never expected you to utter so weak a remark,' said Stephen. 'To lump all women together in one indiscriminated heap is as unphilosophical as to say...'

'Gentlemen,' said the host of the Crown, 'your dinner is on the table, if you please to walk in.'" (p. 33)

"But they crossed the line itself in style, with studdingsails aloft and alow, and with more than the usual merriment, for when they reduced sail to let Neptune come aboard, accompanied by an outrageously lewd Amphitrite and Badger-Bag, he found no less than a hundred and twenty-three souls who had to be made free of the equator by being lathered with rancid grease—tar was forbidden, being in short supply—and shaved with a piece of barrel-hoop before being ducked." (p. 67)

"Jack, Jack,' cried Stephen, running in. 'I have been sadly remiss. You are promoted, I find. You are a great man—you are virtually an admiral! Give you joy, my dear, with all my heart. The young man in black clothes tells me you are the greatest man on the station, after the Commander-in-chief.'

'Why, I am a commodore, as most people have the candour to admit,' said Jack. 'But I did mention it before, if you recollect. I spoke of my pendant.'

'So you did, joy; but perhaps I did not fully apprehend its true significance. I had a cloudy notion that the word commodore and indeed that curious little flag were connected with a ship rather than with a man—I am almost sure that we called the most important ship in the East India fleet, the ship commanded by the excellent Mr Muffit, the commodore. Pray explain this new and splendid rank of yours.'



'Stephen, if I tell you, will you attend?'  
'Yes, sir.'" (pp. 114-115)

"'I am happy to see you, gentlemen,' said Jack, 'and beg you will go aboard your ships at once. We knocked them about a little, I fear, but I trust they will be ready for sea before...' His words were cut off by an earth-shaking explosion, the upward flight of dark lumps of masonry, their corresponding downward crash, as the Lambousière battery disintegrated.

'That will be your friend Lord Clonfert,' remarked the Colonel, chuckling. 'A very active officer. Now, Commodore, shall we attend to the public property?'" (p. 152)

"'Good morning, Killick,' said Stephen. 'Where's himself?'

'Good morning, sir,' said Killick. 'Which he's still on deck.'

'Killick,' said Stephen, 'what's amiss? Have you seen the ghost in the bread-room? Are you sick? Show me your tongue.'

When Killick had withdrawn his tongue, a flannelly object of inordinate length, he said, paler still, 'Is there a ghost in the bread-room, sir? Oh, oh, and I was there in the middle watch. Oh, sir, I might a seen it.'

'There is always a ghost in the bread-room. Light along that pot, will you now?'

'I durs'nt, sir, begging your pardon. There's worse news than the ghost, even. Them wicket old rats god at the coffee, sir, and I doubt there's another pot in the barky.'

'Preserved Killick, pass me that pot, or you will join the ghost in the bread-room, and howl for evermore.'

With extreme unwillingness Killick put the pot on the very edge of the table, muttering, 'Oh, I'll cop it: oh, I'll cop it.'" (pp. 178-179)

"The boats ran in, landed and hauled up, half-swamped in most cases but rarely upset: the beach was filling with redcoats, forming neatly in line as they came ashore. Some, with Colonel McLeod, had taken up position a few hundred yards inland. Then the Groper's cable parted. A tall comber took her stern, wrenched it round, and flung her on that unforgiving beach: and since her bows were already stove, she went to pieces at once, leaving the surf the full sweep of the shore. The wave that broke her was the first of a growing series; and presently the belt of surf grew wider and wider, thundering louder still.

'Can another ship be sent in, Commodore?' asked Keating.

'No, sir,' said Jack.'" (p. 228)

"'Far be it from me to decry patient laborious staff-work,' said the Governor. 'We have seen its gratifying results on this island: but, gentlemen, time and tide wait for no man; and I must remind you that Fortune is bald behind.'

Walking away from the Residence through streets placarded with the Governor's proclamation, Jack said to Stephen, 'What is this that Farquhar tells us about Fortune? Is she supposed to have the mange?'



'I conceive he was referring to the old tag—his meaning was, that she must be seized by the forelock, since once she is passed there is no clapping on to her hair, at all. In the figure she ships none abaft the ears, if you follow me.'

'Oh, I see. Rather well put: though I doubt those heavy-sided lobsters will smoke the simile.' He paused, considering, and said, 'It don't sound very eligible, bald behind; but, however, it is all figurative, all figurative...'" (p. 235)

'Up and down, sir,' called the bosun.

'Thick and dry,' came Jack's answer, as automatic as a response in church; and he continued '...and he brought her in, cracking on regardless. That was the first I knew of the affair. Let fall, there,' he cried, directing his voice upwards.

The topsails flashed out, the frigate's head swung to the north-east and steadied: she heeled, steeper and steeper as the courses, topgallants and staysails were sheeted home in smooth succession and the way came on her, the water slipping fast and faster still along her side. She shaved the cruel reef off Saint-Denis, altered course two points to eastward, and setting a flying-jib she stretched for the Ile de la Passe, making her ten knots watch after watch, her wake a straight green line of phosphorescence in the dark." (pp. 271-272)

"Whenever they start talking foreign,' observed John Harris, forecastleman, starboard watch, 'you know they are at a stand, and that all is, as you might say, in a manner of speaking, p.'

'You ain't seen nothing, John Harris,' said Davis, the old Sophie. 'Our doctor is only tipping the civil to the one-legged cove: just you wait until he starts dashing away with his boring-iron.'

'Such a remarkable thickness of bone, and yet the metopic suture has not united,' said Mr Cotton. 'I have never seen the like, and am deeply gratified. But, as you say, it confronts us with a perplexing situation: a dilemma, as one might say.'" (p. 297)

"Stephen raised the piece of skull entire and held it up to peer at its underside with a look of sober triumph—a moment during which the audience might gaze with fascinated horror into the awful gulf, where Mr Cotton was now fishing for splinters with a pair of whalebone tongs. As he fished, and as a long transverse splinter stirred the depths, an awful voice, deep, slow, thick-tongued and as it were drunk, but recognizable as Colley's, spoke from behind the hanging skin and said, 'Jo. Pass that fucking gasket, Jo.' By this time the audience had dwindled, and many of the remaining ghouls were as wan as Colley himself; they revived, however, when the surgeons placed the silver cover on the hole, fastened it down, restored the patient's scalp to its usual place, sewed it up, washed their hands in the scuttle-butt, and dismissed him below. A pleased murmur ran round the ship, and Jack, stepping forward, said, 'I believe I may congratulate you, gentlemen, upon a very delicate manoeuvre?'" (pp. 298-299)

"The conquest of Mauritius ran its leisurely course, with the regiments marching and countermarching in a scientific manner that pleased the generals on either side. The



infantrymen sweated, but few of them bled. They had been landed smoothly, without opposition, and they presented General Decaen with an insuperable problem. His numerous militia was no use to him at all: most of its members had read Stephen's broadsheets, many of them had already seen copies of Governor Farquhar's proposed proclamation, all of them were more concerned with the revival of their strangled trade than with the welfare of Buonaparte's empire. His Irish troops were clearly disaffected; his French regulars were outnumbered by well over five to one; and his navy was blockaded by an overwhelming force of ships. His only concern was to delay General Abercrombie's advance until his surrender should meet certain arcane military requirements, so that he should be able to justify his conduct at home and obtain honourable terms at Port-Louis for himself and his men." (pp. 339-340)

"'In the course of my long career,' said the Admiral, 'I have been compelled to give many orders, which, though always for the good of the service, have sometimes been repugnant to my finer feelings. For even an Admiral retains finer feelings, gentlemen.' Dutiful laughter, pretty thin. 'But now, with His Excellency's permission, I shall indulge myself by giving one that is more congenial to the spirit of a plain British sailor.' He paused and coughed in a suddenly hushed atmosphere of genuine suspense, and then in an even louder voice he went on. 'I hereby request and require Captain Aubrey to repair aboard the Boadicea as soon as he has finished his dinner, there to receive my dispatches for the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty and to convey them to Whitehall with all the diligence in his power. And to this, gentlemen'—raising his glass—'I will append a toast: let us all fill up to the brim, gunwales under, and drink to England, home and beauty, and may Lucky Jack Aubrey reach 'em with fair winds and flowing sheets every mile of the way.'" (pp. 347-348)





## Topics for Discussion

Jack Aubrey ashore is a generally incompetent gentleman who is easily fooled. Jack Aubrey afloat is an incomparable seaman who is always essentially correct in his judgment. Compare and contrast these two aspects of Aubrey's persona. What is the essential difference in his spheres of competence?

The novel mentions prize money—money paid to commanders and sailors for the capture of enemy ships and stores. Do you think it was morally and ethically correct for Britain to remunerate their warriors by giving them a portion of the value of enemy goods seized during combat?

Maturin and Cotton perform a type of brain surgery—lifting a depressed fracture—on Colley. The entire crew watches in mute fascination. This same scene is repeated in another novel of the series, and in general the concept of brain surgery is socially fascinating. What aspects of practicing medicine on the brain are so fascinating to most people? Discuss.

Lord Clonfert is a particularly complex character who suffers from psychosomatic illnesses brought on—McAdam theorizes—by an inferiority complex. What aspects of Clonfert's personality make him such a successful leader of men?

The characterization of Clonfert consumes much of the narrative structure, but in the final analysis he remains a secondary character. How does the characterization of Clonfert contribute to Aubrey's persona in the series of novels?

McAdams is an alcoholic and Maturin an opium addict. Both men view the other's vice as disgusting. Both men make an exception for their own addiction. Discuss how people are apt to make exception for their own behavior while holding others to a higher rigid standard.

The novel presents very few women, and with the exception of Sophie, they are all presented in a generally negative way—Cecelia is sick and an inconvenience; Aubrey's twins are described as turnips; Mrs. Williams is a boor; Lady Clonfert is a flibbertigibbet; and Admiral Bertie's serving girls are little more than sexualized objects. Discuss the construction of gender in the novel—is there simply no space for women in Aubrey's world of naval combat?

Virtually every character in the novel is white, with the exception of an occasional sailor or serving girl. Yet the dominant setting of the novel is Cape Town, Africa, and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. Discuss the novel's construction of race. Is it possible to interpret McAdam's diatribe against the Irish as indicative of the Irish being a type of surrogate separate race within the novel?