

The Nutmeg of Consolation Study Guide

The Nutmeg of Consolation by Patrick O'Brian

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Plot Summary

Jack Aubrey, Stephen Maturin, and the other survivors of the wreck of HMS Diane spend several weeks as castaways on an unnamed island in the South China Sea. They recover food, tools, supplies, lumber, and nails from the wreck and begin to construct a schooner that they hope will carry them the two hundred nautical miles to Batavia. While Aubrey oversees the construction efforts, Maturin hunts the island's game for food. As the schooner begins to take basic form the island is visited by a small group of seafaring Dyaks who express much interest in the camp and promise to deliver a message to Batavia, asking for supplies. The Dyaks prove treacherous, however, and return with a huge piratical force intent on murdering the seamen and stealing their tools and wealth. A fierce combat ensues and Aubrey's men are victorious, sinking the pirate's large proa in the deadly tide rip as the few surviving pirates attempt to escape. Unfortunately for Aubrey, the pirates burn the partially completed schooner and the other supplies and stores. The situation looks grim indeed for the marooned British seamen. Fortunately, out hunting, Maturin stumbles upon a Chinese Junk anchored off the far shore. The Chinese captain takes the survivors aboard and transports them safely to Batavia where they are received by Governor Raffles.

Raffles provides Aubrey with a recently outfitted ship, the Dutch-built HMS Nutmeg of Consolation, its peculiar name derived from Aubrey's fancy. Aubrey supplies the ship and takes to sea with the intent of finding the French frigate *Cornélie*. Maturin has derived information on *Cornélie*'s status and likely position and with the assistance of a passing ship Aubrey locates the French frigate at the island of Nil Desperandum. A surprise attack on the larger French ship is attempted but fails and a lengthy nautical pursuit ensues, Aubrey drawing the French ship into another potential ambush site. The tables turn completely as *Surprise* appears with several consorts. *Surprise*, under Tom Pullings, chases down *Cornélie* and the French ship founders and sinks. Aubrey then resumes command of *Surprise* and, with Maturin, Nathaniel Martin, and Pullings, proceeds to New South Wales. On the voyage Maturin rescues two Melanesian girls from the fictional Sweeting's Island, they being the only survivors of an epidemic of smallpox.

At New South Wales Aubrey refits and resupplies slowly, irritated at the amount of local corruption and graft. Meanwhile Maturin enrages a local scalawag and successfully fights a duel. He learns that his friend and one-time loblolly-boy Padeen Colman is suffering imprisonment at the penal colony and contrives a somewhat elaborate plan to help him escape. During this period Martin meets his old friend John Paulton and enlists his assistance in Colman's escape. At the end of the novel *Surprise* completes her refitting and readies for sea while Maturin and Martin travel to a rendezvous spot and meet the absconding Colman. On the way Maturin sees a platypus and captures it with the intent of examining the exotic marsupial. The animal delivers a poisonous sting to Maturin who collapses. He is carried aboard by Colman and the extreme circumstances mollify Aubrey's anger at Maturin's bringing of a convict aboard. Maturin survives the poison and *Surprise* sails away.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

One hundred and fifty-seven British seamen are marooned on an unnamed island in the South China Sea. They are the survivors of the wreck of HMS Diane upon a submerged reef about a mile offshore. The men include Jack Aubrey, captain; Stephen Maturin, surgeon; Nathaniel Martin, surgeon's mate; and Mr. Welby, Captain of Marines. Diane's wreck was a drawn-out affair allowing for the salvage of many tools, some weapons, and various supplies. The castaway's camp is well-organized after a plan devised by the canny Welby. Although Aubrey considers Welby's defensive breastwork and tactical improvements to be more than necessary, he admires Welby's efficiency and devotion. Aubrey's chief concern has been the salvage of usable timber, nails, sailcloth, and line. With these salvaged materials, his skilled carpenter and other seamen have begun to build a schooner. They anticipate the schooner will be completed before their food stores are exhausted and plan to take to the seas in the schooner and reach Batavia—present-day Jakarta—which is some two hundred nautical miles distant. To supplement the somewhat meager food stocks, Maturin spends most of his time hunting two species of wild pig that live on the island, and some of the seamen fish. While not hunting, fishing, or working on the schooner the men play cricket for entertainment.

While hunting one day Maturin locates a vast cave full of swifts' nests—the soluble nests used in the cooking of birds' nest soup. On the day he discovers the birds' nest soup cave he also contracts a tropical fever and stumbles back into camp only to collapse completely. Maturin spends the next several days semi-delirious as the fever progresses and then breaks. He awakens to discover a beautiful Dyak woman named Kesegaran in the camp inspecting various things—Aubrey is away from camp at the schooner construction site. Kesegaran, who has landed in a small proa with a few other Dyaks, is keenly interested in ship-building tools, the camp's silver plate, the camp's armaments, and the number of men. She has gained favor with the common seamen by her beauty, her exposed bosom, and her propensity to strip entirely naked when hiking. Maturin fears she may have ulterior motives though she does agree to carry a message to Batavia, requesting resupply.

In Chapter 2 Maturin is much recovered and discusses with Aubrey the likelihood of the message having reached Batavia. They realize Kesegaran's ulterior motives when a vast war canoe lands on the beach and hundreds of piratical Dyaks disembark and begin to attack the British seamen. Very early in the assault Kesegaran is herself shot and killed, and the Dyaks are thereafter lead by a formidable captain who wears a green head cloth. Welby's stout camp defenses prove worthwhile and his active deployment and defense is decisive; after several hours of fierce attacks the Dyaks are repulsed. They retreat to their proa, burning the schooner and other supplies on the way and absconding with most of the camp's tools. Aubrey fires cannon to destroy the proa once it has put to sea; unfortunately, the stolen tools sink with the wreckage. The surviving Dyaks are caught in a rip current and driven onto shoals where all perish. The aftermath



of the attack is bleak—Aubrey is depressed; casualties are numerous; there is no hope of salvaging lumber or nails from the burned schooner, and food has become critical. Several days later Maturin travels to the birds' nest cave to gather nests and discovers some Chinese children gathering the nests—they have come from a Chinese Junk anchored on the far shore. One of the children has a minor injury that Maturin plays up and takes the child to the seamen's camp and sends a sibling to the Chinese Junk, which sails around the island to retrieve the injured child.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

As with any novel, the opening chapters are critical in establishing the texture of the narrative and the sense of setting. The current novel is the fourteenth novel in a series that stretches to twenty volumes. As such, most of the main characters are recurring characters who have been introduced in previous books and the narrative arc is a continuation of a story line originating in a previous book. Some of Chapters 1 and 2 establishes the situation as a recap, or gloss, of the previous book; similar material is presented extensively in Chapter 3. The novel is set c. 1813 and features primarily British sailors prosecuting the war with Napoleonic France; the setting is the South China Sea and, later, New South Wales penal colonies. Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin are the principle protagonists; they are later joined by others. The initial two chapters present a bleak picture for the castaways—not only are they marooned but an attack by piratical Dyaks, that though beaten off, leaves them without any prospect of helping themselves. They face the real danger of starvation. This paradigm is resolved when Maturin stumbles upon a Chinese junk. The boy's injury is apparently little more than a lightly sprained ankle and some scuffs, but Maturin treats it like a broken leg. This is obviously contrived to be ingratiation to Li Po, the junk's captain and the boy's father. The ruse works and the splinted and heavily bandaged boy is taken aboard along with the surviving sailors.

Other minor items of note in the opening chapters concern Maturin's illness, who is usually seemingly immune to all diseases; Aubrey's enjoyment of cricket, and Welby's foresight in laying out a strongly defensive camp structure. The discussion of the pigs killed by Maturin is humorous—Aubrey refers to one variety as an island gazelle, reclassifying the animal in such a way that it does not prohibit the religious dietary restrictions against pork of some of the sailors. The birds' nests in the cave are made entirely of the male swifts' salivary excretions. The nests are soluble in water and are made into a glutinous soup. Today they bring fantastic market prices, as they did in 1813, explaining why Li Po stops to harvest them and also explaining why (in Chapter 3) Wan Da's piratical extortion includes baskets of the nests alongside coins.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Much of Chapter 3 is devoted to a recap of the series' prior novel. Aubrey and Maturin had conveyed Edward Fox to the fictional island of Pulo Prabang where a treaty was arranged between the Sultan of Pulo Prabang and Great Britain. Aubrey had then conveyed Fox toward Batavia before Diane, their ship, ran aground on an uncharted and submerged reef and was lost. Fox survived the wreck but shortly thereafter departed for Batavia in the ship's boat. A sudden storm passed through the area and the open boat was never seen again—Fox being presumed lost at sea. Fox took the precaution of leaving a copy of the treaty with his clerk, Edwards, on the island. As noted, Fox had become increasingly irrational and haughty. Most of this recap has little to do with the current novel aside from positioning the men on the island as castaways.

Li Po's junk carries the rescued seamen to Batavia, paying tribute to a pirate vessel on the way. Maturin knows one of the pirates and learns that the French delegation to Pulo Prabang will depart aboard the French frigate *Cornélie*. Maturin gives his associate bribes to cause the various authorities to be obstructionist to *Cornélie*'s refitting and resupply. Chiefly, he hopes to leave the French frigate without a ready supply of gunpowder. After arriving at Batavia, Maturin delivers the treaty to the Governor as Edwards has taken ill. Governor Raffles informs Maturin that his bank has gone bankrupt; Maturin is nearly destitute, financially. News of the *Cornélie*'s departure circulates rather widely and Aubrey expresses a desire to pursue and destroy the enemy vessel. Raffles states that a recently-captured Dutch-built ship had been sunk due to plague; however, it is has been recently raised and is nearly completely fit for sea. He gives the commission to Aubrey who christens the ship *HMS Nutmeg of Consolation*, the name being one of the honorifics used by the Sultan of Pulo Prabang. The ship is readied for sea with much haste.

In Chapter 4, refitting and resupply of *HMS Nutmeg of Consolation* continues and concludes. Aubrey chooses to arm the vessel with carronades in lieu of cannon, giving it a heavy punch up close but no accuracy at cannon range. While Aubrey sees to the ship Maturin spends his remaining money and engages in various machinations to deny the French ship resupply at various ports. Several new men join the crew to bring it up to full strength. Among them is William Grimshaw who becomes mate to Preserved Killick. Their witty banter is heard throughout the ship. Raffles' wife desires that Aubrey take aboard two young midshipmen who were left by their previous ship for various offenses. Aubrey agrees to take them on as hardship cases but refuses to rate them midshipmen, instead turning them before the mast. Their plight is desperate enough that they agree—they are Miller and Oakes. The chapter ends with Aubrey developing his pursuit and attack plans.



Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

The narrative takes a major turn in Chapter 3; now rescued, Aubrey and his men gain a ship from Governor Raffles and ready it to attack the much-larger and better armed French frigate known to be in the area. The pursuit and destruction of the French ship will consume the next several chapters of the novel. Aubrey's new ship is named after an unusual honorific that tickles his fancy. It had been, previously, a plague ship and as was customary at that time had been deliberately sunk and left underwater for a long period of time to eliminate the disease from within. After being raised, the ship was scraped down, fitted out, and commissioned. Because of its recent history the ship is exceptionally clean inside and smells good—Maturin compares its odor to a nutmeg, bringing its unusual name full circle. Much material in the Chapters 3 and 4 deals with Maturin's various attempts to deny the French ship adequate resupply. In the event, Maturin's intervention appears to have had little impact on the ship; when later engaged in combat, Cornélie has adequate gunpowder for a prolonged engagement.

Maturin's banking woes are discussed in a prior novel. For many years he had engaged a long-established and reputable banking firm but found their rigid inflexibility tiresome and irritating. Prior to leaving England he had engaged an attorney to draft an ironclad document transferring all his assets from the established bank to a newly-founded bank recommended by Aubrey. Although the transfer was not done prior to Maturin's departure, the attorney's documents would have caused it to occur shortly thereafter. The news that the newly-founded bank has utterly failed thus means that Maturin has lost all his fortune. He is primarily concerned about the impact on his wife, rather than himself. Maturin's banking woes are revisited later in the novel. Miller and Oakes, the new midshipmen, play a minor role in the current novel; in fact, Miller dies in combat. However, Oakes survives and takes on a seminal role in the subsequent novel in the series. Grimshaw's and Killick's banter provides comic relief and also allows for the narrative portrayal of much background information in a natural method that does not seem overly contrived or intrusive. Aubrey's basic plan is to take the French frigate at close range, approaching under a guise of neutrality, and then boarding in the smoke. While the plan promises success, it does hinge upon being able to get close to the French frigate. To this end, Aubrey concerns himself with navigational pursuit problems.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

HMS Nutmeg of Consolation continues to search for Cornélie and one day encounters the Dutch ship Alkmaar. The Alkmaar's captain provides information on Cornélie, noting that the French captain planned on watering at an island known as Nil Desperandum. Aubrey modifies his plans and proceeds to Nil Desperandum. As the days pass by Maturin spends much time brooding about being poor. He finds that poverty does not much alter his personal life but worries about the effects of poverty on his wife and marriage. As the ship draws close to Nil Desperandum Aubrey theorizes and contemplates the impending combat. He spends much time explaining his thoughts to Maturin and explaining his ideas to Pullings. The French ship has many heavy cannon, which are accurate at long range, while the British ship has fewer guns, and they are carronades—devastating at close range but notoriously inaccurate at longer ranges. For this reason, Aubrey must get very close to the French ship to have any chance of victory. The ship is modified to look sloppy and generally unkempt; Aubrey hopes the French will mistake the ship for a common Dutch merchant vessel and allow an unusually close approach. They finally close Nil Desperandum and as hoped the French ship is anchored in shallow water with several boatloads of crew ashore filling water casks. HMS Nutmeg of Consolation proceeds with a leisurely approach but the canny French captain sees through the careful disguise and opens fire with the long guns at medium range. Aubrey's bluff having failed, HMS Nutmeg of Consolation turns tail and runs from the French ship.

In Chapter 6, Cornélie gathers her men and boats, hoists anchor, and pursues the fleeing British ship. Aubrey intends to encourage the pursuit and plans a complex ambush. His ship is to run down the Salibabu Passage and turn into a hidden area shortly after nightfall. As Cornélie pursues, so Aubrey will range alongside and board her. The plan relies on a number of variables, such as wind, current, and tide, and the destination must be reached during the first hour or two of darkness. Aubrey thus causes his ship to sail poorly and slowly so Cornélie can keep up the pursuit. The ships exchange chase-gun fire and Cornélie takes hull damage and starts continuous pumping. At one point a French cannonball lodges between the rudder post and stern and prevents HMS Nutmeg of Consolation from steering. Lieutenant Richardson and Aubrey hang over the stern and pry out the cannonball, freeing the rudder. During the evening Aubrey finally gets a reliable sighting of the land and quickly concludes he has misjudged the tide—the ambush site will not be reached until the following morning by which time daylight will preclude any shenanigans. Aubrey now has no options left to close the French ship. As the chase continues Aubrey wonders about what to do; there appears to be no way to win against the larger ship, even though she continues to pump out much water.

Then in a fortuitous encounter, Surprise appears on the horizon. She is accompanied by Triton, an English privateer, and two American merchant prizes. Aubrey signals Pullings



to pursue *Cornélie*, the French ship having turned tail. *Surprise* draws away and exchanges gunfire as a heavy squall develops. *Cornélie*, still pumping madly, settles deeper in the water before foundering and sinking. *Surprise* takes aboard survivors, including Lieutenant Jean-Pierre Dumesnil, now commanding and an acquaintance of Aubrey, who surrenders.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The physical location of Nil Desperandum is not certain—it could be fictional. The name occasionally was used for several islands in the general locale. In the novel, it is a well-known watering place. Aubrey's plan is based on his ship's armament of carronades—good only at close range. He first hopes to draw alongside an unsuspecting enemy and engage them by surprise. The French captain is too smart for that, however, and a long running battle ensues. If Aubrey draws too far away the French will give up the pursuit; hence, he causes his ship to sail poorly without being too obvious. His secondary plan involves reaching a particular locale at a particular hour of darkness so he can veer off into hiding while out of sight of the French ship, then veering back on course and engaging the enemy at close range. However, he mistakes the tides and currents and cannot make the location during the night. He has little in the way of a third plan and wonders what to do; fortunately, Pullings appears and turns the tide of battle.

Throughout the running exchange *Cornélie* is seen to be pumping water constantly, which foreshadows her eventual foundering; the ship simply fills up with water through the many holes shot through her hull. Short on crew—many lost to gunfire—she lacks the ability to pump faster than she draws. Jean-Pierre Dumesnil appears in a prior novel of the series, and his uncle has appeared in several prior novels. In the current novel he is a minor character.

Aubrey's miscalculation of the tidal current speed through the pursuit channel is a rare mistake in navigation; similarly, his momentary indecision about the pursuit once the secondary ambush proves untenable is atypical. The fortunate reunion with *Surprise* thus functions as a type of *Dea ex Machina* plot development. The reunion is somewhat foreshadowed by Maturin's and Aubrey's constant looking forward to the reunion; after all, the castaway situation which opens the novel arose through an earlier attempt to rendezvous with *Surprise*.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Aubrey hosts an elaborate dinner for the captains of the flotilla and the captured French officers. The captain of Triton is offended by protocol and makes the dinner party disagreeable, though as usual Maturin is oblivious to the social tension. A few hours later the fleet disperses, HMS Nutmeg of Consolation escorting Triton and the American prizes to a court of condemnation. Aubrey and Maturin remove to Surprise where Aubrey resumes command. Pullings declines the offer of captaining HMS Nutmeg of Consolation preferring to remain with Surprise as first lieutenant, or mate. When Surprise is alone Aubrey conducts a thorough inspection tour and is happy to meet many of his old shipmates in good health. Over the next several weeks Aubrey and Pullings enjoy each others' company, and Maturin and Martin exchange news, adventures, and specimens. Much of their discussion recaps Maturin's experiences in a prior novel of the series. Aubrey grows rather jealous of the amount of time Maturin spends with Martin. After sailing on HMS Nutmeg of Consolation Aubrey finds Surprise malodorous and orders a daily sweetening bath of the hold. Faced with Maturin's apparent poverty Aubrey offers to purchase Surprise—Maturin accepts the offer. Scurvy begins to develop among the crew and Surprise thus sets course for Sweeting's Island to take on board fruits, greens, and other anti-scorbutics.

In Chapter 8 Surprise proceeds to Sweeting's Island, anchors in a strangely silent bay, and some men go ashore. The landing party finds the town structures to be charnel-houses—hundreds and hundreds of native corpses are strewn about in the early stages of decomposition. Maturin quickly diagnoses an epidemic of smallpox and takes surprisingly modern steps to prevent the disease from contaminating Surprise. He and Martin, immune through previous sickness and survival, comb the island for fruits and greens. During their travels they recover two young girls who prove to be the only survivors of the entire island. The girls are taken aboard the ship; the crew wants to name them Thursday and Behemoth, but Maturin insists upon Sarah and Emily. Surprise departs the island and begins a lengthy transit to New South Wales. The two girls adapt surprisingly easily to life aboard, even taking some rats as pets. Many crewmen remark on the ship's rats' unusual calm demeanor and strange behavior. The mystery is solved when Maturin goes to the hold to recover another bag of coca leaves—the rats have gnawed into the chest and devoured many pounds of coca leaves over the past several weeks. The supply exhausted, the rats turn belligerent and vicious. Likewise, Maturin goes through a period of withdrawal and many crewmen remark on his irascibility. Surprise sails on and on and reaches Port Jackson. The crew discusses the history and customs of New South Wales, a vast penal colony. Maturin attends one dinner party and finds the guests offensively anti-Irish, anti-Catholic, and openly sadistic. He holds his tongue, mostly, but manages to offend a Captain Lowe. Lowe accosts him outside the dinner party and strikes Maturin. Maturin draws; a brief duel ensues, and Lowe is left bleeding. Maturin returns to Surprise and is greeted with wonder by the crew.



Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Chapters 7 and 8, longer than previous chapters in the novel, both present prolonged dinner gatherings—both of them prove contentious; the first to Aubrey, the second to Maturin. The detailed evenings are interesting but do little to advance the narrative plot. The first dinner takes place at sea, the second ashore. It is interesting to contrast the various social customs between the two otherwise similar events. Aubrey's tour of *Surprise* is meant primarily to boost morale—it has the desired effect. The narrative pairing of Aubrey and Pullings mirrors that of Maturin and Martin, though the rigid naval rank system prevents Aubrey from deriving the same personal benefit as Maturin in his rather more relaxed situation. Maturin and Martin continue their friendship through the end of the novel and beyond. Sweetening the *Surprise*'s hold involves opening a valve in the hull that allows seawater to fill the ship to a depth of a few feet. The water is then pumped out. After several weeks of this, the foul lower decks of the ship are effectively bathed clean. Scurvy is a disease resulting from a deficiency in Vitamin C, or ascorbic acid—derived from the Latin word *scorbutus*, hence Maturin's use of the phrase "anti-scorbutics" (p. 234) to describe foodstuffs containing Vitamin C. Scurvy was common among seamen of the period who were fed mainly dried biscuit and salted meat. By c. 1813, the time of the novel, scurvy was well understood. The two girls, Sarah and Emily, recur later in the novel and in later novels of the series, though they remain minor characters throughout. The fictional Sweeting's Island presents a sad scene of the influence of newly-introduced diseases—such as smallpox—on native populations. Similar results occurred throughout all colonized locales. The scene involving Maturin's drug *caché* being consumed by unusually-behaving rats is amusing; Maturin has abandoned his opium addiction for an alkaloid cocaine addiction. Once he no longer chews coca leaves Maturin is surprised to find he begins to sleep soundly.

The novel delivers a quite bleak and lengthy presentation of New South Wales, including a brief gloss of history and numerous portrayals of harsh treatment of prisoners. The prisoners were convicted of a variety of crimes in England and forcibly transported to Australia where they were used as expendable slaves to enrich the local officials. Their lives, as depicted in the novel, were harsh and usually short. The "Author's Note" at the beginning of the historical novel describes the sources used in the portrayal of life in New South Wales. When Maturin dresses for his fateful dinner party Killick attempts to send him off with a cane rather than a shabby sword. Maturin objects and insists on his sword, which foreshadows its use later that evening as Maturin cuts up Lowe. The narrative construction of Maturin's duel makes it quite obviously unavoidable.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Chapter 9 introduces the final significant character of the novel, John Paulton, a friend of Martin's. Paulton suffers from a variety of emotional neuroses, and Martin remarks that in England he had been known as "Anguish Paulton" (p. 284) because he is usually overwrought. Paulton is an unpublished novelist who came to New South Wales to work as an overseer on his cousin's estate—he had believed the solitude would allow him to finish his first novel, though it has not. Paulton provides much information and advice on local conditions. Because of Maturin's duel, the Port Jackson officials are set against Surprise and Aubrey finds refitting and resupply to be tediously daunting. The Surprise thus spends an inordinate amount of time in port. While at Port Jackson, Maturin attempts to relocate Sarah and Emily to an orphanage, but they run back to the ship and Maturin relents; they will sail off with Surprise and, hopefully, live in England some day. During the prolonged stay Maturin and Martin actively botanize and collect specimens and come to appreciate the country that at first they thought was so barren. Also while in Port Jackson Maturin receives a letter from his friend and confidant in England, Sir Joseph Blaine. The letter informs Maturin that the lawyer's orders he had caused to be written to transfer his accounts to the failed bank were not executed because Maturin had forgotten to properly sign them. Thus, by a stroke of absent-minded luck, Maturin is not a pauper but in fact remains quite wealthy. He finds the news pleasant.

One of Maturin's main activities in Port Jackson is the tracking down of numerous acquaintances—nearly all former shipmates—who are now living as convicts in the sprawling penal settlement. By paying bribes to clerks indicated by Paulton, Maturin finds many of them and arranges their transfer to easier working conditions. Maturin also locates Padeen Colman, for whose situation he feels particularly responsible. He visits Colman in a hospital where he is recuperating from being lashed as punishment. Colman is emaciated and depressed. Maturin's visit and promise of help cheers Colman. Maturin then pays bribes to have Colman's situation improved and to have him transferred to Paulton's cousin's estate at Woolloo-Woolloo. Maturin plans to take Colman aboard Surprise by stealth and thus rescue him from imprisonment. Paulton helps Maturin arrange for Colman's transfer to Paulton's cousin's estate where the rescue will be performed. In exchange for Paulton's help, Maturin endows Paulton with sufficient funds to self-publish his novel and also gives him money to travel back to England.

In Chapter 10 time passes as Aubrey works to supply the ship and Maturin and Martin take a long overland botanizing journey. They collect specimens and learn to love the countryside. They spend more time with Paulton. Maturin is particularly enthused about the boomerang and buys one to show to Aubrey. Meanwhile the port authorities attempt to search Surprise for stowaways—this angers Aubrey and is certainly improper. On one occasion Oakes takes a boat to the ship and has a brief standoff with the port



authorities whom he forbids to board. Finally, Surprise is ready to depart. Maturin believes he has previously agreed with Aubrey that Colman's rescue is to be carried out. At a late moment Maturin realizes Aubrey has not agreed to carry away any absconders—in fact, Aubrey has given his word of honor to the Governor that Surprise will carry no absconders. Maturin waffles in indecision but takes a ship's boat on a long day voyage to Woolloo-Woolloo where he intends to meet Colman. They land early so Maturin and Martin begin to observe local fauna. They spot a platypus—their first—and Maturin captures it. In the process of netting it, the platypus stings Maturin with poison and he collapses into delirium. Colman appears, takes Maturin to the boat, and they all return to Surprise at a prearranged rendezvous. In the excitement, Aubrey allows Colman to board and Surprise sails away with Colman and a recovering Maturin.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

One lengthy discussion about novels and novelists (refer to e.g. p. 301) between Paulton, Martin, and Maturin, provides a humorous meta-fictional comment on the current novel's ending—or lack thereof. Paulton's novel is said to be three-quarters finished and lacking an ending. Maturin argues that an unfinished novel is superior to a nicely-wrapped-up novel. Maturin's plan to rescue Colman evolves slowly and is presented in much detail. In brief, he arranges for Colman to be transferred to a remote locale where he can be picked up by Surprise. In a prior novel Maturin had been heavily addicted to laudanum; his over-use had inadvertently led to Padeen Colman's addiction. When Colman went ashore in England he had attempted to rob an apothecary to obtain laudanum—the arrest led to his conviction and death sentence which was commuted to transportation after Aubrey's involvement. Maturin has since then blamed himself for Colman's situation. Note that Maturin's accidental poisoning in effect frees him from the responsibility of violating Aubrey's promise to the Governor—Maturin was delirious when Colman boarded, thus how could he be held responsible? It is noteworthy, too, that Colman is actually the second absconder to board Surprise—Oakes' angry refusal to allow the port authorities to search his longboat (refer to page 341) is because he is bringing a young woman aboard Surprise—the couple becomes the central plot element of the following novel in the series. The narrative concludes with Maturin recuperating from his poisoning, Aubrey happy to leave Australia, and Surprise standing out to sea.



Characters

Jack Aubrey

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

Aubrey wears his graying blonde hair in a long queue and dresses as a traditional ship's captain. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent; his weight fluctuates wildly and he often suffers from digestive ailments. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds. Aubrey is usually quite useless on land though on military occasions he proves useful enough, as illustrated in his successful defense of the castaway island settlement.

Aubrey begins the current novel as a respectable post-captain in the Royal Navy with many years of service to his credit. His lucky ability to capture prizes at sea has secured him financially and his lovely wife Sophie holds down the family estate and raises their three children. Aubrey is in the prime of life and, barring catastrophe, has a long and prosperous future ahead.

Stephen Maturin

Maturin is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area of medicine, and he is also a natural scientist of some repute—for example, van Buren has read Maturin's work. He is an unchallenged master in his element of medicine and biological science, and his medical opinions are surprisingly modern and always correct. Although possessed of great financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct. Maturin, in addition to being a physician and scientist, is a pro bono agent for the secret intelligence network of England. From time to time, Maturin's relationship with the intelligence service is complicated, especially as he has become entangled and identified in the past.



Maturin is a small, squat man who in many respects is the antithesis of Aubrey. He is much given to introspection, subtle interpretations, and Byzantine analysis of the current situation. He is nearly entirely mental, with little interest in physical activities—though capable enough in combat when the time comes, as demonstrated in his duel with Captain Lowe. 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, if not gifted, musician. In the past Maturin has been strongly addicted to laudanum, a situation that is referred to in several early passages in the novel. His addiction unwittingly caused a similar addiction for Padeen Colman, whose addiction eventually led to transportation—a paradigm much considered in the closing chapters of the book.

Tom Pullings

Tom Pullings is a post-captain in the Royal Navy but lacks an appointment; he comes from a poor background and has no political influence and thus his prospects for a command are not good. He is married and supports several relatives and he thus augments his on-shore half-pay by serving with Aubrey aboard *Surprise*, a private man-of-war. Pullings acts as captain of *Surprise* when Aubrey is elsewhere and as first lieutenant when Aubrey returns. Pullings is well-liked by the crew and Aubrey comments that under Pullings' command *Surprise* is a happy ship. Pullings' stint at captaining the letter of marque is quite successful, which certainly improves his financial lot in life. Pullings' reliability allows Aubrey much discretion in handling the ship and is a constant comfort to both Aubrey and Maturin. Maturin comments on Pullings' face, which has been disfigured by combat wounds. Pullings is always dependable and is an always memorable minor character.

Nathaniel Martin

Nathaniel Martin is a man of the cloth and devoted to religion, though seamen are notoriously unsympathetic to a parson aboard their ship for superstitious reasons. Thus, Maturin has engaged Martin's assistance as an assistant surgeon and not as a preacher. Even so, Aubrey and Maturin both defer to Martin's views on religious matters. Martin's situation ashore is financially desperate, and he gladly works aboard. Throughout the novel, Martin serves with reliable distinction even though he is very unhandy with nautical things and phrases. Martin is very educated, speaks several languages, and knows volumes about religion. He is naturally inquisitive and, like Maturin, a competent naturalist, artist, and musician. Within the narrative, Martin functions primarily as a student of Maturin, and some of the more risible sections of the novel deal with Maturin's nautical instruction to Martin. In other scenes, Aubrey becomes jealous of the amount of time Maturin and Martin spend together. Martin is blind in one eye and has a propensity for being bitten by various wild animals.



Miller and Oakes

Miller and Oakes are two young midshipmen that have been cast ashore from the service—presumably for failing to appear at the appointed departure time. The governor's wife is concerned for the health of the two young men and requests Aubrey take them aboard. Miller and Oakes present themselves to Aubrey who agrees to take them as foremast-jacks but not as midshipmen. The two young men's desperate situation is made clear by their ready acceptance of the offer. After they deport themselves well through several weeks of heavy weather Aubrey promotes them both to the midshipmen's berth. Miller is killed during combat, but Oakes survives and arrives at Port Jackson with the rest of the ship. Oakes is primarily significant as a character because he plays a major role in the novel following the current novel in the series. Otherwise, both men are minor characters typical of the type of officer aboard Aubrey's various commands—competent but largely undistinguished.

John Paulton

Paulton is a long-term friend of Martin. Paulton is a would-be novelist who has travelled to Australia to work as an overseer on his penurious cousin's estate at Woolloo-Woolloo. Paulton there manages to complete about three-fourths of a novel but then comes up dry for a suitable ending. Martin and Maturin visit Paulton; Maturin finds him overwrought and Martin mentions that he is a notoriously anguished young man, with poor eyesight and a lack of interest in the natural world. Paulton knows how the system works in Australia, however, and puts Maturin in contact with the right people to bribe to secure the transfer of Padeen Colman. In order to further advance Colman's absconding, Maturin endows Paulton to publish his novel and gives him sufficient funds to also travel back to England. In one of the more humorous meta-fictional passages of the novel, Maturin and Martin explain to Paulton that novels lacking an obvious conclusion—such as the current novel—are usually preferable to those that feature a robust conclusion (refer to e.g. page 301). Paulton is a fairly pathetic and entirely humorous portrayal of a novelist, though he remains essentially a minor character.

Padeen Colman

Padeen Colman is a powerfully-built Irishman who has, in past cruises, served as Maturin's loblolly-boy and entirely-dependable servant. During Maturin's strong addiction to laudanum, Colman also became addicted. Then, when ashore in England, Colman robbed an apothecary in an attempt to secure laudanum. The bungled robbery ended in arrest, conviction, and sentence of death—commuted to transportation through Aubrey's political intervention. Colman has spent many months in Australian penal colonies by the time Maturin locates him languishing in a hospital, having lost much weight. Maturin, feeling personally responsible for Colman's plight—and also genuinely liking the fellow Irishman—arranges for Colman to be transferred to Paulton's care and then for him to abscond aboard *Surprise*. This is carried out in direct contradiction to Aubrey's guarantee that *Surprise* would carry away no absconders (in fact, she carries



away two). Colman speaks very little English and also suffers from what is described as a serious dysphony—apparently a serious stutter—which makes him a quite private person. Colman occurs in several novels of the series, usually in a fairly minor role.

Captain Lowe

Captain Lowe is an officer based at Port Jackson; he hates convicts, Catholics, and Irishmen—for ill defined reasons. He is also very angered by a recent rebuff from one of Maturin's friends in England. He is portrayed as a savage and sadistic man, entirely absorbed in his own petty world of hard-scrabble profit through exploitation of convict labor. During one dinner party Lowe meets Maturin and the two men instantly dislike each other. Lowe perceives some insult in Maturin's demeanor, and after the party Lowe waits outside for Maturin, insults him, and then strikes him. Maturin draws his sword and rapidly incapacitates Lowe, who then begs pardon to save his life. Lowe is a minor character but is the embodiment of a type of scrub unfortunately common, and commonly in minor authority, throughout the Australian penal colonies of the time.

Awkward Davies, Barret Bonden, and Preserved Killick

The three men indicated are all long-time followers of Aubrey and have served with him in numerous prior commands. They are all fairly wealthy from prizes captured under Aubrey's command, both as a naval officer and as a privateer. They are examples of the types of minor characters that comprise Aubrey's crew. Awkward Davies is a hulking man with little skill and less dexterity, but much devoted to Aubrey. In fact, Davies feels a sort of proprietary ownership in Aubrey; Maturin believes Davies is gradually going insane or perhaps senile. Preserved Killick is Aubrey's steward and has been a faithful servant for many years and on many occasions. Killick is keenly aware that his personal fortunes are inextricably linked to Aubrey's success and ensures that Aubrey is always presented in the most favorable circumstances attainable. Beyond professional interest, however, Killick is a loyal friend and defender of Aubrey and goes to great lengths to provide hot coffee, good food, plentiful drink, fresh fruit, clean clothing, and other amenities under often-difficult circumstances. Killick often serves as a sort of comic relief within the narrative; his presumptuous and rude lines delivered in a whiny nasal tone set Aubrey's teeth on edge. Barrett Bonden is Aubrey's coxswain. He is the most dependable character in Aubrey's crew. The reliable Bonden always demonstrates complete tact, honesty, and devotion. Davies' pay, that of a typical able seaman in the Royal Navy, is said to be £1 5s 6d per month (approximately US \$1,600 per month)—Killick and Bonden presumably earn slightly more.

Kesegaran and Green Head Cloth

Kesegaran is a Dyak, or at least is called as such by the surviving crew of Diane. She is a dark-skinned, black-haired, seagoing woman from the local area who arrives in a



canoe with a few others. Kesegaran is greatly interested in the shipwrecked camp and contrives to see it from several vantage points; she is even permitted to enter the camp and take a concise inventory of arms, powder stores, and disposition. She accomplishes this through a great lapse in judgment of the sailors because Aubrey and Pullings are temporarily away and Maturin is suffering from a severe illness. The men are distracted by Kesegaran's exposed bosom and her propensity to strip off her form-fitting clothes entirely when mobility is needed to traverse a geographical obstacle. After surveying the camp's wealth she departs, promising to carry a note to Batavia. Instead, she returns a few days with a few hundred other Dyaks led by an unnamed chief who wears a green head cloth. The forces quickly attack the surviving crew, killing several, and robbing shipbuilding tools and other articles. During the initial attack, Kesegaran is herself killed, leaving Green Head Cloth to lead the attack. He proves aggressive and inventive but ultimately unequal to the task. A desperate combat ensues, the Dyaks are driven off and the survivors attempt escape in their largest war canoe. Aubrey destroys the vessel with a well-placed cannon shot from the shore and the few remaining Dyaks are driven across shoals in the surf and perish.



Objects/Places

Surprise

Surprise is a private man-of-war, owned by Stephen Maturin and then Jack Aubrey and captained by Tom Pullings and then Aubrey. She was French-built and has previously been known as L'Unité, Retaliation, and Retribution. Her figure-head is a gilded woman with an ample bosom and a look of surprise on her face. She displaces about six hundred tons, has a crew of about two hundred men, and carries a main armament of twelve-pounder long guns. Her crew is composed of unusually able seamen including Awkward Davies and numerous other named individuals.

HMS Nutmeg of Consolation

Nutmeg of Consolation is a Dutch-built ship taken into the service of the Royal Navy by Governor Raffles of Batavia. Formerly known as Gelijkheid, the twenty-gun vessel was condemned due to plague and sunk. After remaining submerged for several weeks the ship was raised, fumigated, and entirely refit. Raffles delivers the ship to Aubrey's command who uses her to engage the French frigate Cornélie. The ship's rather peculiar name is taken from a list of honorifics used by the Sultan of Pulo Prabang, an acquaintance of Aubrey's from a previous novel in the series. Maturin notes that the ship's unusual state of cleanliness makes her sweet-smelling, much like nutmeg.

Cornélie

Cornélie is a French frigate returning to Europe from an unsuccessful mission to Pulo Prabang. Her departure is much-delayed by refitting and difficulties in resupply—difficulties caused in large part by Maturin's bribes to port officials. Aubrey finds Cornélie and engages her with the Nutmeg of Consolation. Cornélie, much larger and captained by Aubrey's friend the canny Jean-Pierre Dumesnil, originally her 1st lieutenant, nearly carries the day, but then Surprise arrives. In the escape attempt Cornélie founders and sinks.

Shipwreck Island

"Shipwreck" Island is an unnamed and fictional island near a submerged reef in the South China Sea. It is said to be two hundred miles from Batavia. After the wreck of the Diane—described in a previous novel—the survivors lived on Shipwreck Island for several weeks while a small vessel is constructed. The novel opens on Shipwreck Island, which is fairly well described.



Li Po's Chinese Junk

During the Dyak attack on Shipwreck Island the surviving crewmen of Diane lose most of their shipbuilding tools and all of their lumber and nails, leaving them marooned and in a desperate situation. Fortunately, a Chinese Junk commanded by Li Po arrives on the island to harvest birds' nests—used to make soup—and Li Po carries Aubrey, Maturin, Martin, and the other survivors to Batavia. Aubrey and Pullings, in particular, are very intrigued by the Junk's construction and operation.

Coca Leaves

Maturin frequently chews coca leaves and maintains a massive stash of the stimulant in a strongbox. Unfortunately, the rats chew through the planking of the strongbox and devour the coca leaves over the course of several weeks. During this period the rats grow unusually complaisant, but after the drug is exhausted they become violent. Maturin realizes his loss when he goes to refill his smaller container used for daily use. He goes through a period of anguished withdrawal when others comment on his irritability.

Transportation

Transportation, or penal transportation, is the deporting of convicted criminals to a penal colony. England transported prisoners to Australian penal colonies from 1788 to 1868. Port Jackson and Woolloo-Woolloo are two of the locations described in the novel where transported convicts could end up. The life of a transported convict was generally that of a slave and much of the novel deals with the abuses of the system.

New South Wales

Captain James Cook discovered the southeastern coast of Australia in 1770. He recommended it as a suitable location for settlement. The English government used it as a penal colony and colonized the area by forced transportation with the original settlers arriving in 1788. The penal colonies in New South Wales have a rich but disturbing history, and many events in the novel are predicated upon historical occurrences.

Paulton's Novel

John Paulton, Martin's friend, considers himself a novelist and has completed about three-fourths of a first novel. A brief portion of the novel is presented in the narrative, and it appears to deal with a lovelorn and introspective young man. The opening paragraphs quoted are not promising. Maturin, for his own ends, endows Paulton with sufficient funds to publish the novel and return to England. At Maturin's request, Paulton



presumably dedicates the novel to the late Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier, the prominent French biologist and chemist.

The Platypus

The platypus is a semi-aquatic and very curious monotreme mammal native to eastern Australia. Maturin and Martin are both very excited at the prospect of seeing a platypus which, at the time, was known in England only by a few dried specimens. The naturalists miss several opportunities to see a platypus because they do not realize the locals are speaking of them when they refer to "water moles." At the end of the novel Maturin and Martin see a pair of the animals, and Maturin nets one—a male—that subsequently poisons him with its spur. Maturin survives.



Themes

Friendships

One of the dominant and recurrent themes of the novel is that of friendships. The most obvious example is that of Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, who have been particular friends for many, many years, and have shared various types of experiences together. They form an intimate pair with complementary skills and shared goals. Indeed, the close friendship between Aubrey and Maturin is the backbone of the narrative that runs through the twenty volumes in the series of novels. The current novel features numerous other friendships, however, that support and develop the theme of friendship. Maturin and Nathaniel Martin are close friends and share much common interest in natural philosophy, science, and medicine. As Aubrey has little formal education and demonstrates little interest in animals—apart from whether or not they can be eaten—Maturin finds Martin's interest and education compelling.

Throughout the novel Martin and Aubrey demonstrate an amusing jealousy of Maturin's time and interests as these two friendships compete for Maturin's attention. For his own part, Aubrey finds in Tom Pullings a reliable and bluff friend, though their friendship is somewhat constrained by the nature of the rigid militaristic structure in which they serve. Maturin's friendship with Padeen Colman develops into a major plot device at the end of the novel, and it is mirrored by Martin's friendship with John Paulton. Both Colman and Paulton are controlled by circumstances until Maturin and Martin appear on the scene. Maturin's wealth serves, in both cases, to assist them to escape their unfortunate circumstances. Maturin's friendship with Sir Joseph Banks rubs Captain Lowe the wrong way and, at least partially, results in the duel between Maturin and Lowe. Indeed, the novel is replete with various types of friendships and their comparison and development forms a major theme in the narrative.

Crack on Like Smoke and Oakum

During the middle portion of the novel, Jack Aubrey in HMS Nutmeg of Consolation pursues the French frigate *Cornélie* in an attempt to force an encounter. After several days of sailing, Aubrey discovers the current to be much stronger than anticipated and realizes that his initial calculations have been all wrong—the French ship is much further ahead than expected. He decides the proper response "is to crack on like smoke and oakum, to make all sneer again" (p. 127). Oakum, used in the caulking of the ship's joints, is a type of fiber derived from picking apart old rope—hence the phrase apparently intends to compare the ship's desired speed to a flying wisp of fiber or smoke driven in the wind; and the sneer presumably is reserved for the French frigate's slower speed. The phrase recurs in other novels of the series and is typical of Aubrey's nautical turn of phrase—frequently risible solecisms. The subsequent chase involves a huge amount of nautical endeavor, which is presented to Maturin as something amazing—he is nonplussed, mostly because he doesn't know what he's looking at when the



various sail combinations are evolved and presented. While the sailors aboard are fascinated by the presented sailing problem and spend many long hours cracking on, Maturin and Martin retire to their private spot on the mizzen masthead and bewail the great accomplishment of the sailors. While the pursuit is, eventually, successful, all Maturin and Martin perceive is the rapidly passing archipelago. They thus miss many world-class opportunities of botanizing and specimen collection. Indeed, Maturin's constant loss of opportunities because of nautical realities is a recurring and humorous theme in the series of novels. In the present novel, there are several examples of the need to crack on like smoke and oakum, even if the need is not apparent to all.

Nautical Adventure

The novel's principle setting is the high seas during a time of war; Napoleon Bonaparte's military adventures threaten the British Empire and only a strong naval response keeps the French aggression at bay and ensures the survival of the empire. As a post-captain of the Royal Navy, Jack Aubrey's sworn and obvious duty is to engage, destroy, and hinder the French at every opportunity. He carries out this duty first with H.M.S. The Nutmeg of Consolation and later with Surprise, engaging and destroying the French frigate Cornélie successfully. Aubrey's particular friend Stephen Maturin also stands in opposition to the French, finding their governmental system tyrannical and offensive. He participates as an intelligence officer—a spy—in the defense of England.

The novel relates sea voyages in the year c. 1813; although the voyages are fictional they contain many historical elements that often are based on historical accounts. All aspects of the novel are related to sea adventure; much of the action takes place at sea and even the action which takes place on land generally relates to the sea. For example, the Surprise's prolonged stay in Port Jackson is necessitated by the large amount of refitting work and resupply necessary. The strength and popular appeal of the novel is undoubtedly due to the nature of high seas adventure and the conversational way in which it is presented. Although full of accurate descriptions of lengthy nautical maneuvers and frequent technical descriptions of nautical equipment, the text is presented in an accessible and friendly manner which allows the reader to descend to deck-level, as it were, and enjoy the excitement of days long gone.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person, limited, point of view. The narrator is reliable, entirely effaced, and unnamed. Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, the main characters, are the protagonists and central figures in all of the scenes in the novel. The narrator divulges some internal thoughts of the two protagonists but usually not of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are infrequent and are used for characterization rather than plot development. Occasional personal reflections allow for some first-person introspection without destroying the cadence of the overall narrative structure. Occasionally a character will write a personal letter home which allows a form of lengthy monologue without disrupting the natural flow of the novel.

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 internal agonizing about his putative poverty as intelligible but not destructive of personality. The narrative also allows portrayal of characters' life situations as difficult but not pathetic. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. As both characters are roughly equal in significance, the third-person point of view also allows their textual representations to be roughly equivalent. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all the novels of the series; it is accessible and successful.

Setting

The novel features two primary types of settings. The first and most significant is aboard ships, usually *Surprise* or *HMS Nutmeg of Consolation*. *Surprise* is owned by Maturin and Aubrey in turn, and captained by Pullings and then Aubrey, and crewed by a highly proficient but rag-tag assortment of seamen. The *Nutmeg of Consolation* is a Dutch-built Royal Navy vessel; the comparison of the two environments—private man-of-war vs. commissioned man-of-war—is interesting. One of the novel's achievements is the presentation of shipboard life as something intriguing and even desirable while simultaneously presenting a realistic view of the hardships endured.

The second setting presented in the novel is diffuse and consists of numerous ports, cities, and islands. Early in the novel the primary port city is Batavia, now Jakarta, Java. Later, Port Jackson and its locale are further developed enough that Maturin wanders the surrounding area, and many characters make various observations about the treatment of prisoners there. Other locations are the shipwreck island, Nil Desperandum, and Sweeting's Island. In general, these settings are transient, poorly



described, and thought of—at least by Aubrey—as locations to fight, refit, or re-supply. While the action aboard ship is dominated by Aubrey, the action ashore is usually dominated by Maturin. This division of the narrative by locale allows each man to figure prominently within his best environment.

Language and Meaning

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

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

Structure

The 372-page historical novel is divided into ten enumerated chapters of roughly equal length, though the chapters at the end tend to be longer than those at the beginning. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. References to previous events occur with some frequency and characters occasionally think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are easily identified. 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 fourteenth 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 a prior novel. Similarly, events happening prior to the scope of the current novel are often referenced. This structure may prove somewhat difficult for readers unfamiliar with the prior novels. Nevertheless, basic character glosses and event recaps are provided; indeed the first chapters of the novel feature much material of this nature.



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



Quotes

"A hundred and fifty-seven castaways on a desert island in the South China Sea, the survivors of the wreck of HMS Diane, which had struck upon an uncharted rock and had there been shattered by a great typhoon some days later: a hundred and fifty-seven men, but as they sat there round the edge of a flat bare piece of ground between high-water mark and the beginning of the forest they sounded like the full complement of a ship of the line, for this was Sunday afternoon, and the starboard watch, headed by Captain Aubrey, was engaged in a cricket-match against the Marines, under their commanding officer, Mr Welby." (p. 9)

"'Another misery of human life,' remarked Stephen to the morning darkness, 'is having a contubernal that snores like ten.'

I was not snoring,' said Jack. 'I was wide awake. What is a contubernal?'

'You are a contubernal.'

'And you are another. I was wide awake; and I was thinking about Sunday. If Raffles' stores come in, we shall rig church by way of thanksgiving, eat a full ration of plum-duff, and observe the rest of the day as a holiday. Then on Monday we shall set to...'

'What was that noise? Not thunder, Heaven preserve?'

'It was only Chips and the bosun stealing away without a sound: they and their party mean to lay out the work early and start the tar-kettle a-going well in advance, and Joe Gower is taking his fishgig in the hope of some of those well-tasting stingrays that lie in the shallows by night. You will smell the smoke and the tar presently, if you pay attention.'" (p. 36)

"When the Diane ran on to her uncharted reef she was carrying the British envoy to the Sultan of Pulo Prabang back to Batavia, the first stage in his journey home: Mr Fox had been successful in negotiating a treaty of friendship with the Sultan in spite of active French competition and since he was extremely eager to carry it to London he and most of his suite set out in the frigate's pinnace with an officer and crew to sail the remaining two hundred miles in what appeared to be favourable weather. At the same time he left a fully authenticated, signed and sealed duplicate with his private secretary, David Edwards, both as a reasonable precaution and as a means of getting rid of him: Mr Fox had taken against the young man and did not wish for his company during the long voyage from Batavia to England." (p. 63)

"Little that happened in Batavia remained unknown for long in Pulo Prabang, and shortly after the Nutmeg had been brought into service as a post ship with all the formality that circumstances allowed, a message came from van Buren, congratulating Stephen on his survival, giving news about a young, highly gifted and affectionate orang-utang, 'I am particularly desired to tell you that the ship sails on the seventeenth; quite how well provided my informant could not undertake to say, but he hopes that your wishes have been at least in part fulfilled.'

The seventeenth, and the Nutmeg barely had her lower masts in: her beautifully dry, clean, sweet-smelling holds, scraped to the fresh wood by innumerable coolies and



dried, all hatches off, all gun-ports open, in the last fiery parching blasts of the previous monsoon (not a cockroach, not a flea, not a louse, let alone rats, mice or ancient ballast soaked in filth) were so empty that she rode absurdly high, her bright copper showing broad from stem to stern." (p. 93)

"The day declined, and the breeze with it; by the time the watch was mustered the Nutmeg was wafting along over a smooth, soup-warm sea with little more than steerage-way. Nearly all hands were taking the somewhat fresher air on deck, and although it was too hot and clammy for dancing, there was singing on the forecastle. There was singing between decks too, in the midshipmen's berth, where the three new young gentlemen were plying scissors, needle and thread to make their infinitely coveted uniforms fit." (p. 125)

"The Nutmeg stood on, with her captain alone on his quarterdeck, apart from a single man at the wheel and Hooper by the lee-rail, looking like a ship's boy. Richardson stood high on the yard, looking down into the clear water ahead, dark blue for the deep water of the channel, light for the shoals on either side. A score of seamen stood about on the forecastle, their hands in their pockets, or lounged on the gangway, even leaning on the rail. All the rest of the ship's company were out of sight under the forecastle, under the gangways, on the half-deck and in the cabin. All the gun-crews were at their stations, and those who could make out anything through the cracks of their port-lids or through holes in the canvas strips, told their friends what they saw in a low voice, with striking accuracy. The boarders had their weapons at hand, cutlasses, pistols, boarding-axes, pikes; slow-match smoked in tubs beside the carronades—Jack would never trust to the flint-lock alone; and now the atmosphere was grave." (p. 156)

"...Stephen, raising his voice above the stern-chaser overhead, suddenly asked, 'Would this be a sloop, at all?'

They had heard some pretty strange things from the Doctor, but none so far beyond all probability, so very far, that for a while there was complete silence.

'Do you mean the Nutmeg, Doctor?' asked Jack at last.

'Certainly. The Nutmeg. God bless her.'

'Bless her by all means. But she could not conceivably be a sloop while I have her, you know. Was she under a commander she would be a sloop; but I have the honour to be on the post-captain's list, and that makes her as much a ship as any three-decker in the service. What put such a wild fancy into your head?'" (pp. 174-175)

"'I am very sorry about the stench, sir: I had not noticed any. But then it is a little close and hot, with the wind so far abaft the beam.'

'Mr Oakes, Mr Reade,' called Jack.

'Sir?' they said, pulling off their hats.

'Do you know where the sweetening-cock is?'

They looked a little blank, and Oakes said hesitantly, 'In the hold, sir.'" (p. 218)



"'Jemmy Ducks, you are a family man, I believe?' At the Captain's wholly unusual ingratiating tone and smile Jemmy Ducks' eyes narrowed and his face took on a reserved, suspicious expression; but after some hesitation he admitted that he had seven or eight of the little buggers over to Flicker, south by east of Shelmerston.

'Are any of them girls?'

'Three, sir. No, I tell a lie. Four.'

'Then I dare say you are used to their ways?'

'Well you may say so, sir. Howling and screeching, teething and croup, thrust, red-gum, measles and the belly-ache, and poor old Thurlow walking up and down rocking them in his arms all night and wondering dare he toss 'em out of window... Chamber-pots, pap-boats, swaddling clouts drying in the kitchen... That's why I signed on for a long, long voyage, sir.'

'In that case I am sorry to inflict this task upon you. Look at the paunch in the shade of the starboard gangway: those are two children brought back from the island. They are asleep. A party is going to look for any other survivors, but in the meantime they are to be washed all over with warm water and soap as soon as they wake up, and when they are dry the loblolly-boy will rub them over with an ointment the doctor is preparing.'

'Lousy as well as poxed and filthy, sir?'

'Of course. And I dare say he will have the hair off too. When that is done you will feed them in a seamanlike manner and stow them where the lambs were: you may ask Chips or the bosun for anything you need. Carry on, Jemmy Ducks.'

'Aye aye, sir.'

'And if it lasts, you shall have a mate, watch and watch.'

'Thank you kindly, sir: just like by land. Well, they say no man can escape his fate.'

'And if there are no survivors, you shall have two shillings a month hardship money.'" (pp. 248-249)

"Stephen looked at him attentively. The man was in a choking rage but he was perfect steady on his feet; he was not drunk. 'Will you answer for that, sir?' he asked.

'There's my answer,' said the big man, with a blow that knocked Stephen's wig from his head.

Stephen leapt back, whipped out his sword and cried, 'Draw, man, draw, or I shall stick you like a hog.'

Lowe unsheathed his sabre: little good did it do him. In two hissing passes his right thigh was ploughed up. At the third Stephen's sword was through his shoulder. And at the issue of a confused struggle at close quarters he was flat on his back, Stephen's foot on his chest, Stephen's sword-point at his throat and the cold voice saying above him, 'Ask my pardon or you are a dead man. Ask my pardon, I say, or you are a dead man, a dead man.'

'I ask your pardon,' said Lowe, and his eyes filled with blood.'" (p. 281)

"'As for an end,' said Martin, 'are endings really so very important? Sterne did quite well without one; and often an unfinished picture is all the more interesting for the bare canvas, I remember Bourville's definition of a novel as a work in which life flows in



abundance, swirling without a pause: or as you might say without an end, an organized end. And there is at least one Mozart quartet that stops without the slightest ceremony: most satisfying when you get used to it.'

Stephen said, 'There is another Frenchman whose name escapes me but who is even more to the point: *La bêtise c'est de vouloir conclure*. The conventional ending, with virtue rewarded and loose ends tied up is often sadly chilling; and its platitude and falsity tend to infect what has gone before, however excellent. Many books would be far better without their last chapter: or at least with no more than a brief, cool, unemotional statement of the outcome.'" (p. 301)

"'I cannot understand the principle at all,' said Stephen. 'I should very much like to show it to Captain Aubrey, who is so very well versed in the mathematics and dynamics of sailing. Landlord, pray ask him whether he is willing to part with the instrument.

'Not on your fucking life,' said the Aboriginal, snatching the boomerang and clasping it to his bosom.

'He says he does not choose to dispose of it, your honour,' said the landlord. 'But never fret. I have a dozen behind the bar that I sell to ingenious travelers for half a guinea. Choose any one that takes your fancy, sit, and Bennelong will throw it to prove it comes back, a true homing pigeon, as we say. Won't you?' This much louder, in the black man's ear.

'Won't I what?'

'Throw it for the gentleman.'

'Give um dram.'

'Sir, he says he will be happy to throw it for you; and hopes you will encourage him with a tot of rum.'" (pp. 353-354)

Topics for Discussion

While stranded on the shipwreck island, Maturin provides food for the crew by hunting two types of wild game—both types of pigs. Aubrey consistently refers to one of the pigs as an island gazelle. Why does he take this peculiar step?

The shipwreck island is visited by two Dyaks who seem very interested in Aubrey's silver and belongings which are displayed by Killick. Killick is pleased at their keen interest, but Maturin is nonplussed. What does Maturin fear might happen after the Dyak's have seen Aubrey's fortune in silver?

After returning to Batavia Maturin pays out several bribes in an attempt to prevent the government at Pulo Prabang from selling cannon powder to the French ship *Cornélie*. Aubrey finds this activity rather underhanded and refuses to take them into consideration during his strategic and tactical planning. Why does Aubrey consider Maturin's tactics to be less than honorable?

Surprise calls upon the fictional Sweeting's Island and discovers the native population has been nearly wiped out by smallpox—the only survivors are two infant girls. Do you think such epidemic diseases might have been common on isolated islands during the period of global colonization considered in the novel? Discuss.

Flogging was rather common in the Royal Navy (some historians disagree with this assessment), though rare in Aubrey's commands. A typical naval flogging would consist of perhaps twelve strokes of the lash. At the Australian penal colonies floggings would consist of many hundred strokes of the lash. Based on the discussion in the novel, why would the navy limit flogging to a relative few lashes?

Many of the convicts transported to Australia repeatedly attempted escape even though they knew true escape to be virtually impossible—for example, in one scene Maturin and Martin stumble upon a convict's corpse in the wilderness. What aspects of their treatment caused most convicts to desire escape to such a degree?

On one evening in New South Wales Maturin and Captain Lowe engage in a duel. The narrative is carefully constructed in such a way that the encounter, for Maturin, is unavoidable. Discuss the methods of construction and plot development used to allow Maturin to rough up his adversary without committing an offense to his hosts' hospitality.

The book presents the penal colonies of Australia as being ruled by a few sadistic tyrants lording over masses of hapless convicts, using terror and torture as control mechanisms, and profiting greatly from such large-scale exploitation. Do you think this is an accurate portrayal of Australian colonization during c. 1813? Why or why not?

Do you consider the book to be a complete novel? Why or why not?