

Sharpe's Company: Richard Sharpe and the Siege of Badajoz, January to April 1812 Study Guide

Sharpe's Company: Richard Sharpe and the Siege of Badajoz, January to April 1812 by Bernard Cornwell

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Plot Summary

Richard Sharpe, Patrick Harper, and other riflemen participate in the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo and the siege of Badajoz as the British army secures a foothold in Spain. As the bloody campaign unfolds around them, Sharpe re-encounters Teresa Moran and learns that he is the father of her infant daughter Antonia. Teresa returns to Badajoz and relies upon Sharpe to protect her from the ravages sure to be inflicted by a victorious British army. Meanwhile Sharpe's old enemy Sergeant Hakeswill is determined to rape Teresa and murder Sharpe.

The British army fights against Napoleon's forces comprised primarily of French and Spanish forces. General Wellington desires to open the Portugal-Spain border by capturing two national roadways protected by fortified cities. The first assault is directed at Ciudad Rodrigo, and Captain Sharpe leads his men into combat. The fortress is taken with light losses and thus the northern of the two roads is captured. As the British forces redeploy for the assault on Badajoz, Sharpe learns that his promotion to captain has fallen through, leaving him a lieutenant, and causing his beloved company to be handed over to an upstart neophyte fresh from England. During this period Sharpe is reunited with Teresa, a one-time lover and aggressive guerrilla fighter. Teresa informs Sharpe that their last encounter in fact resulted in an infant daughter named Antonia. Antonia is ill and cannot be moved but lies securely in Badajoz. After a brief but happy reunion, Antonia returns to Badajoz to care for the infant. Days later, the British army invests the fortified city and the siege begins.

At roughly the same time, Sergeant Hakeswill is assigned to Sharpe's old company. Hakeswill is an old enemy of Sharpe and is completely amoral and evil. He swears to rape and murder Teresa, murder Antonia, and then murder Sharpe, all simply to demonstrate his hatred. Sharpe, his own influence much reduced by his drop in rank, struggles against Hakeswill's malevolent influence on the company. Hakeswill responds by framing Harper for theft, resulting in Harper being flogged and broken from sergeant to private. It is during this bleak period that the actual assault against Badajoz commences with great slaughter among the British forces. After several waves of assaulting troops are mowed down, the British attack begins to falter. At just this moment Sharpe rallies the men around him and leads an assault against a section of breached wall. The forlorn hope succeeds, as do other nearly suicidal attacks around the fortified city, and within a few hours the British have carried the day. Within the city chaos erupts as the British conquerors begin a debauchery of rape, pillage, and intoxication. Sharpe and Harper rush to Teresa's home to discover Hakeswill already there menacing Teresa and Antonia. The two men wrest control of the situation, largely because Hakeswill's mental condition is unstable; he then flees and all is well. The novel concludes with Sharpe marrying Teresa and Harper doting upon a pretty Spanish girl named Isabella.



Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 Summary

Richard Sharpe, Patrick Harper, and other riflemen participate in the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo and the siege of Badajoz as the British army secures a foothold in Spain. As the bloody campaign unfolds around them, Sharpe re-encounters Teresa Moran and learns that he is the father of her infant daughter Antonia. Teresa returns to Badajoz and relies upon Sharpe to protect her from the ravages sure to be inflicted by a victorious British army. Meanwhile Sharpe's old enemy Sergeant Hakeswill is determined to rape Teresa and murder Sharpe.

In Chapter 1, Sharpe participates in the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo and passes the time in Spain by recalling events from his immediate past. Sharpe is a large man, six feet tall, with dark hair and a face disfigured by scarring. A combat veteran of numerous campaigns, Sharpe is in excellent physical condition. He had been gazetted a Captain by Wellington at one point, but on his last trip to England he discovers that the gazette was not approved. A certain amount of lost paperwork and some irregularities had stalled his appointment, and thus he had returned from England unsure of his actual rank. Also while in England he had met a woman named Jane Gibbons and the two had developed a fledgling romance. Now, back in Spain, Sharpe ponders his future as either a captain or a lieutenant—he is not sure which. He meets his friend Major Michael Hogan and they talk over his recent experiences. They discuss the impending assault of Ciudad Rodrigo, and then Hogan mentions that he recently encountered Teresa, an old love of Sharpe. Sharpe has not seen Teresa in nearly two years, but they last parted on friendly, indeed sexually intimate, terms. Hogan notes that Teresa is still active in the guerrilla forces fighting against France.

In Chapter 2, Sharpe discusses the impending assault with Sergeant Patrick Harper, his close friend. Harper, an Irishman, is huge, 6' 4", and heavily muscled. They are both relieved that Sharpe's company will not participate directly in the first assault waves but will instead help prepare the way by throwing bags of hay into the ditch, to cushion the jumps of the soldiers actually performing the assault. Later, Sharpe and Colonel Lawford, the battalion commander, discuss the details of the plans. Lawford notes that even if Sharpe is merely a lieutenant he will still retain command of his company. Lawford and Sharpe are close friends from long association—Lawford is wealthy and aristocratic and leaves much battle planning to Sharpe; both men feel they complement each other. As night falls the assault begins, and Lawford sends Sharpe and his company forward, hauling hay bags toward the place in the ditch in front of a breach in the wall caused by lengthy cannon fire.

In Chapter 3, the assault begins. Sharpe's company throws hay bales into the ditch and then takes up a screening position, offering occasional rifle fire against the wall. The assault seems at first to proceed much too easily, and the first men of the so-called forlorn hope reach the base of the breach. Then the French defenders open fire with



two heavy cannon firing canister. The guns are situated near the ends of the breach and pour an overlapping and enfilading fire upon the attackers. Many British soldiers are mowed down, some retreat, and some others press forward with suicidal bravery. Sharpe sees these events and leads his men forward against one gun. They reach the gun, Sharpe heaves up out of the ditch and falls upon the gun crew. Meanwhile other soldiers have captured the second gun. The breach is carried and soon the entire city erupts in rioting. Sharpe and Harper, justifiably proud of their actions, begin to enter the city but are brought up short by the mangled body of Lawford. In Chapter 4, Sharpe summons assistance and with Harper they bind up Lawford's grievous wounds—Lawford has lost an arm, among other injuries. They carry him through the riotous city to a hospital. There, they learn that other friends have been killed or wounded. Leaving Lawford at the hospital, they wander back into the city which is being pillaged by the victorious British soldiers. Sharpe realizes that Lawford's injuries will require replacement, and the future therefore seems doubtful; without Lawford's trust, Sharpe as a lieutenant will not command his company.

Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 Analysis

Chapter 1 is preceded by two maps; a small inset shows the locations of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, on the Iberian Peninsula; the large map shows the fortifications of Badajoz and environs. Both maps are exceptionally useful. Chapter 1 also begins Part I of the novel, which transpires in January 1812 and concludes with Chapter 7.

The first chapters of the novel introduce Sharpe, the protagonist, and Harper, the secondary protagonist. They also introduce a host of minor characters of various importance. While Teresa is not actually present, she is discussed and her background is provided. The setting is established as the western frontier of Spain during a time of war—Napoleon's France threatens British survival and only Wellington's spectacular successes in the field can contain France's influence. Some Spanish citizens fight against France in a guerrilla war, but most are allied with their government in supporting the French—though that situation will soon change. Wellington desires to capture the two main roadways from Portugal into Spain, and both of the roads are guarded by fortified cities near the Spanish border—Ciudad Rodrigo in the north and Badajoz in the south. Of the two, Ciudad Rodrigo is much the smaller fortress. During Chapters 1 and 2, the siege and investment of Ciudad Rodrigo are considered; Chapter 3 details the assault; and Chapter 4 considers some of the aftereffects of the combat. The writing in Chapter 3 is particularly exciting and is illustrative of the type of writing that has made this series of novels so enduring.

As to be expected in a novel about warfare, many of the characters are wounded or killed. This adds to the gritty, realistic texture of the writing, and sets the stage for future events in the narrative. Lawford's injury is serious but not fatal, thanks to Sharpe's immediate intervention. The scene where Sharpe severs Lawford's ruined arm is graphic. The entry into Ciudad Rodrigo is also graphic, with scenes of debauchery including mass rape, pillage, and intoxication. However, the scenes in Ciudad Rodrigo pale in comparison to the ultimate chapter of the novel describing the debauchery in



Badajoz. Note that Wellington is based on a historic figure of the same name, and that Ciudad Rodrigo and the British siege are based on historic places and events. This close tie with history carries through to the siege of Badajoz and forms the basic timing and framework of the novel.



Chapters 5, 6, and 7

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 Summary

Sharpe worries about Lawford's survival and also worries about his own future. His rank is uncertain; at least with Lawford in command Sharpe would have retained command of his company even as a lieutenant. Lawford's injury will obviously remove him from command and his replacement will not retain a mere lieutenant in command of a company. Sharpe wanders around the town looking for a drink; on his aimless walking he passes several scenes of mass rape and pillage. He finds a drink and proceeds to drink heavily. While drinking a guerrilla rider approaches and Sharpe realizes the rider is none other than Teresa Moran, his lover from about two years previous. Teresa is dark-haired and stunningly beautiful. She dismisses her contingent of guerrilla fighters and joins Sharpe, claiming to have killed about one French soldier each month since they parted ways.

In Chapter 6, Sharpe and Teresa find a deserted house and eat dinner, then make small talk, and then have sexual intercourse. During sex Teresa inquires about Sharpe's back, heavily scarred from flogging. Sharpe recalls how years ago a certain Sergeant Hakeswill had framed him for a crime which resulted in flogging. Sharpe swears vengeance. After sex, Teresa asks Sharpe if she is "different" (p. 58) in performance or appearance—he says no. She then confesses that their last sexual relationship resulted in pregnancy and she is now the mother of Sharpe's child, a young and seriously ill infant daughter named Antonia. Sharpe receives the news happily. Teresa then says that the infant is at Teresa's wealthy uncle's house—in Badajoz.

In Chapter 7 the battalion marches south to Badajoz. Storms and heavy rain causes the road to churn into mud, slowing the army's progress. Teresa and Sharpe continue their relationship and discuss Antonia. The infant is too ill to travel, and thus Teresa plans to stay with her uncle's family and the infant at Badajoz during the impending siege. She looks to Sharpe to protect her after the presumed British victory. Meanwhile Sharpe ponders his future relationship with Jane Gibbons, the wealthy English woman he loves. Hogan visits Sharpe from time to time and they discuss the basic strategic and tactical situation. Hogan notes that while Ciudad Rodrigo was a difficult siege, Badajoz will prove to be many times worse. It is a massive fortification with a scale that dwarfs Ciudad Rodrigo. Two serious prior attempts had been made by the British to capture the fortified city—both ended in slaughter and failure. Hogan also notes that Wellington believes Badajoz must be captured quickly to open up the entire Spanish frontier before Napoleon can react adequately and counterattack.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 concludes Part I of the novel. These chapters serve as narrative transition; after the introductory siege and assault of Ciudad Rodrigo the plot moves on to the



siege of Badajoz. Sharpe's character is developed further—he is no longer only a soldier concerned with matters of rank, but he is now a father with responsibility to protect his infant and his lover. Ironically, they will be seeking shelter within the very city he will siege and assault. Sharpe's family situation greatly expands the narrative scope of the impending siege. Instead of simply facing a dangerous and bloody siege, Sharpe and his friends must now balance rapid success with the ability to quickly enter a strange city amidst chaos and riot, and secure the relative safety of at least one house and family.

Note the early mention of Sergeant Hakeswill in Chapter 6, a character that actually appears in Chapter 7 and shapes much of the remainder of the narrative. Sharpe recounts how he was framed by Hakeswill for a crime Hakeswill committed—a method of operation that Hakeswill will again practice in the current novel, including the flogging. Sharpe's back, heavily scarred from flogging, is commented upon again in Part II of the novel by Ensign William Matthews. Here, Teresa asks about the scarring during their sexual encounter which would suggest the flogging occurred since the last time the two characters were together. Here, that time period is suggested as about two years; later in the novel Sharpe will quantify it as about a year and half. Several events in these chapters illustrate that Teresa is widely viewed as exceptionally beautiful by nearly all men. Even so, Sharpe knows well how dangerous and ruthless she can be if provoked. The several mentions of Jane Gibbons seem more significant than it proves in the current novel; she becomes a significant character later in the series. The army's predilection for allowing wives, children, and whores to accompany the baggage train is also discussed somewhat during this chapter—it foreshadows Sharpe's eventual responsibilities of taking this ragtag assortment in hand.



Part II (Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11)

Part II (Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11) Summary

Chapter 8 begins with reinforcements arriving for the battalion. Ensign William Matthews, very young and very inexperienced, reports to Sharpe. After a brief conversation wherein Matthews mistakes Sharpe for a common soldier he presents his troopers. Sharpe is staggered when the column appears under the charge of Sergeant Hakeswill, the man upon whom he has sworn vengeance. The two enemies immediately recognize each other and Hakeswill attempts to assert himself. Sharpe is shaken and the encounter puts him off balance. He thinks that Hakeswill's appearance bodes poorly for the future. Soon after, Sharpe speaks with Captain Leroy, an American United Empire Loyalist, born in Boston, whose father fought on the British side during the American Revolutionary War. During that war Leroy fled to Canada and then Britain, and joined the military service in c. 1809. He has known Sharpe for several years and the two men share a mutual admiration. Leroy tells Sharpe that the battalion's new colonel will arrive shortly, and then points out one Captain Rymer, newly arrived. Sharpe immediately realizes that Rymer, young and inexperienced, will replace him and command his company.

In Chapter 9, Hakeswill, an Englishman, sits in a stable and ponders his life. He is tallish, strong, and pot-bellied, though his skin, eyes, and even hair seem yellowish due to past bouts with fever. He is absolutely amoral and has spent most of his life thieving, raping, and dreaming of murdering those who he dislikes, which is just about everyone. As a youth he was charged with sexual assault of a young girl; to preserve her honor he was charged with sheep stealing and hanged—but survived. Having survived execution, Hakeswill joined the army and has remained in active service his entire life. His progress in the military is due to his exacting attention to the superficial aspects of military service, but in reality he is a coward, evil, and entirely selfish. Hakeswill is disturbed when Teresa enters the stable to saddle her horse. He sees the beautiful woman and immediately decides to rape her and then murder her. Hakeswill corners Teresa with his bayonet and orders her to strip. Instead, she draws a hidden knife and slashes his face and wrist. He responds by grabbing a pitchfork but just then Sharpe and Harper enter the stable, looking for Teresa. Sharpe and Harper fall upon Hakeswill and beat him until the fight spills into the street. Hakeswill tumbles into a puddle of horse urine, Harper kicking him, as Sharpe looks up and sees the newly-arrived Lieutenant Colonel Windham. Windham arrives with a pack of foxhounds and orders Sharpe to report to him immediately.

In Chapter 10, Teresa departs for Badajoz while Sharpe reports to Windham. Windham proves an intelligent and fairly kindly officer, but he is overly interested in fox hunting and maintaining his status as a social elite. He displays a portrait of Mrs. Jessica Windham, his wife, in a silver filigreed frame, and lectures Sharpe about the virtues of marriage and knowing one's station in life. Windham then asks about the street scuffle and Sharpe claims that Teresa is his wife—she is not. Windham then delivers the bad



news—Rymer has purchased his Captaincy and will lead the company. Sharpe's gazette has been refused and he is thus only a lieutenant. His new assignment will be to look after the baggage train and the motley assortment of wives, children, and whores that tails the battalion. Sharpe then asks permission to lead the forlorn hope against Badajoz—Windham defers the decision.

In Chapter 11, the British forces construct a pontoon bridge over the River Guadiana. This is the last major obstacle between them and Badajoz. The river proves swift and dangerous, swollen by recent storms, but the engineers manage the crossing. Sharpe observes the cavalry cross and then herds the baggage train and the camp followers across. Hogan and Sharpe again talk; Hogan advises Sharpe to not volunteer for the forlorn hope. The assault will surely claim many officers' lives and vacancies will be plentiful. Thus, Sharpe can look forward to a promotion with a fair degree of certainty—should he survive.

Part II (Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11) Analysis

Part II of the novel transitions the action from the concluded successful siege of Ciudad Rodrigo to the siege of Badajoz. Most of the action consists of marching and readying for a fairly prolonged siege. Teresa and Sharpe enjoy each others' company before she departs for Badajoz to arrive before the city is invested. The introduction of Hakeswill completes the cast of major characters in the novel; given the narrative development it is obvious that the remainder of the novel will consider the siege itself and the enmity between Hakeswill and Sharpe. An allied development will be Sharpe's rank advancement, which takes place toward the end of the narrative. Note that in the British military service, commissions could be purchased for monetary payments to the government. Thus, Rymer's appearance as an inexperienced captain means simply that he comes from a moneyed family. Leroy and Sharpe consider the process, theoretically corrupted, that leads to Rymer's commission.

Hakeswill is the primary antagonist in the novel and a completely deplorable character; he steals, attempts rape, murders, threatens infanticide, attempts more murders, and always seeks to frame someone else for his crimes. Sharpe and Hakeswill have a long history together that is referred to in the current novel and fully developed in other novels in the series of novels. As a young man, Sharpe was framed by Hakeswill for one of Hakeswill's crimes and received a severe flogging; since that time Sharpe has hated Hakeswill and the antipathy has been returned—though in truth Hakeswill hates everyone. Hakeswill is entirely characterized in his appearance with Teresa—a beautiful woman appears and he immediately decides to rape and murder her; this sums up his character. Of course, Hakeswill's appearance is a major turning point in the novel, as is Sharpe's demotion to lieutenant and the appointment of another man to lead the company.

During an assault, siege cannons batter a breach through the enemy fortifications. The first assaulting group, known as the forlorn hope, leads the assault through the breach. Generally, the forlorn hope is slaughtered to a man. Because of this, the forlorn hope is



manned only by volunteers and any survivor is automatically granted an increase in rank. Sharpe volunteers because he knows that if he survives he will be promoted to captain. This minor theme is carried to the end of the novel; though Sharpe does not officially lead any forlorn hope he ends up leading an extemporized forlorn hope during the closing moments of the assault on Badajoz. Chapter 8 begins Part II of the novel, which transpires between February and March, 1812 and concludes with Chapter 11.



Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16

Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 Summary

Badajoz is a massively fortified city astride the southern roadway leading from Portugal to Spain. The city is surrounded by massive walls, all of which bear artillery. The walls are reinforced by a ditch with ravelins and a glacis. The northern side of the city is protected by the River Guadiana and the Rivillas Stream. The city has a massive castle, or citadel, on the northern corner, and the southern walls sport eight huge bastions, each packed with artillery and loopholes. Six minor external fortresses are placed around the city at strategic points. The glacis to the west is heavily mined. The Rivillas Stream has been dammed so that it floods a huge expanse on the east of the city, forming a barrier. The city's center features a huge cathedral, and Teresa's family lives in a house next to the cathedral. The British camp is established about one mile southeast of the city. Sharpe and Harper look at the city and realize that any British attack must occur between the flooded plain and the mined areas, meaning it will be from the southern approach, channeled, dense, and predictable—leading probably to massive casualties. The British forces begin the arduous task of digging parallels and approaches toward the city. Constant rain and thick mud make the task all the more difficult. Sharpe is charged with guarding the battalion baggage, but one day he goes forward to watch the digging. While there, the French mount a surprise sortie from the city.

In Chapter 13, Rymer panics—his men are unarmed and the French are attacking. Sharpe takes over and orders his men back. Meanwhile armed British forces close on the French and a general battle ensues. Sharpe then leads the light company, armed with shovels, into the fray. The French don't offer much resistance—instead they try to destroy the earthworks and then steal or destroy shovels, picks, and transportation. When the British attack mounts the French retreat. Sharpe returns to the baggage train only to discover that in his absence someone has rifled many packs and stolen several valuable items. In Chapter 14, Windham is furious when he discovers the portrait of his wife in a silver frame has been stolen. When Windham learns that Sharpe's nondescript pack has also been rifled—a telescope is missing—the obvious conclusion is that the thief must be a member of the light company. Rymer parades the company and packs are searched. Sharpe suspects Hakeswill but knows the man is too canny to be caught easily. Instead, all are flabbergasted when Harper's pack is opened and Windham's silver frame is discovered—the portrait, however, has been removed. Windham concludes Harper is the thief, even though Sharpe vigorously objects.

In Chapter 15, Windham sentences Harper to be flogged and also breaks his rank to private; Sharpe objects but is ignored. Sharpe and Harper spend several hours in conversation, contemplating their respective futures, and worrying about Teresa's safety in the upcoming battle. Sharpe confides he is considering marriage and Harper supports the idea, stating that he finds marriage honorable, even for a soldier. Both men know Harper has been framed by Hakeswill and both men swear vengeance. They realize the



irony of Hakeswill having first framed Sharpe for a crime resulting in flogging, and then repeating the process on Harper. Whereas Sharpe received hundreds of lashes, Harper will receive only a few score. In Chapter 16 Harper is flogged. He bears it well, spitting out the gag and smiling after the first few lashes. The assembled men are restless and disgusted at the process, as they all know Harper is innocent and value his friendship. The mood is so black that even Windham realizes he has made a critical mistake. To somewhat atone, he flips Harper a gold coin and commends his fortitude. Harper accepts the coin and then retires to seek medical attention.

Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 Analysis

Chapter 12 begins Part III of the novel, which transpires between March 17 and March 29, 1812 (that is, Saint Patrick's Day and Easter Sunday) and concludes with Chapter 20.

Badajoz, the dominant setting of the novel, appears on the maps included with the front-matter of the book. The defenses are extensive, considerable, and formidable. Some of the outlying fortresses are discussed in the narrative, and several of the named bastions are the site of much fighting. The useful map in the front-matter of the book is nearly indispensable to understanding most of the tactical action over the ensuing chapters. Additionally, the construction of the fortifications themselves is described in some detail through these chapters. Hard stone walls are not a good defense against emplaced siege cannon. For this reason Badajoz has numerous additional defenses based on scientific designs. The primary defense is the ditch, simply a huge excavation that proves difficult to cross. The ditch around Badajoz is at least twenty feet deep and lined with stone. Defensive artillery is situated to enfilade fire into the ditch. The walls and ditch are in turn protected by a glacis, a large sloping pile of earth, sometimes lined with stone, which slopes upwards as it approaches the ditch. The glacis augments the ditch and diverts cannon fire harmlessly upwards. Ravelins, stone and earth structures within the ditch, are designed as barriers to break up and divert any mass of assaulting men. The gaps between the ravelin and ditch walls are often blocked with dangerous or burning debris. Thus, running the glacis, dropping into the ditch, traversing the ditch, avoiding the ravelins, and scaling the far wall of the ditch takes much time and exposes the attackers to constant enfilading and interlocking fields of fire. During the assault on Badajoz, the British artillery units attack the wall defense by discharging huge siege cannon, which throw twenty-four pound iron projectiles. The siege cannon are cited in protected locations and converge fire onto single points along the defenses such that repeated firing batters through the walls, opening a breach. The breach then becomes the site of the main infantry assault. While appearing simple in plan, the execution of the sieges at Badajoz proves to be a bloody business. Much of the early siege activity consists of digging parallel ditches to the city fortifications. Once these ditches are sufficiently deep, they provide protection from fire from the fortress. From the parallel ditches, approach ditches are extended in zigzag lines toward the fortifications; the zigzag approaches prevent direct fire down the approaches from the fortifications. The various approaches and parallels are illustrated on the front-matter map. The French



sortie described in Chapter 13 is designed to slow down the work on the parallels and approaches.

Windham seriously misjudges his battalion's mood when he orders Harper's flogging. The men know and respect Harper, and know he is not a thief. They view the flogging as a serious mistake and morale suffers. Windham senses this during the flogging and essentially apologizes to Harper by offering the gold coin. Harper demonstrates his generous and forgiving nature by accepting the coin, letting the matter drop. Harper rightfully blames Hakeswill for the flogging. The discussion of marriage between Sharpe and Harper is engaging.



Chapters 17, 18, 19, and 20

Chapters 17, 18, 19, and 20 Summary

The weather clears and the British troops resume digging. As the tactical situation is studied, the British determine that the flooded plain must be drained to open up the eastern approach to Badajoz. The French have built a strong dam across the Rivillas Stream; the dam is guarded by an outlying fortress. As the digging proceeds various siege cannon are emplaced and concentrated fire begins against two of the bastions. They prove remarkably sturdy. A British assault captures one outlying fortress and converts the area into a platform for more siege cannon. Sharpe, detailed as an aide-de-camp to Windham, watches the combat from afar.

In Chapter 18, the British mount an attack against the dam across the Rivillas Stream. Sharpe's old company is selected for the assault. Prior to the attack, Hakeswill confiscates Harper's seven-barreled gun because it is not a regulation weapon. Hogan informs Sharpe of the plan, and Sharpe states the plan is too complex—his opinion proves correct. In the attack a large diversionary force attacks the protecting fortress while Sharpe's old company places demolition charges at the base of the dam. Windham watches from afar and realizes that the demolition activity has been botched. The assault on the fortress falters and still the demolition charges have not been detonated. Windham dispatches Sharpe to check on the demolition progress. Sharpe quickly finds his company; the men are waiting for direction from Rymer who proves indecisive. Sharpe takes command and then personally fuses the demolition charge. As he retreats, he is shot from behind and struck in the leg. Harper sees Sharpe go down and realizes that he has been shot by the seven-barreled gun—by Hakeswill. The demolition charge detonates but proves insufficient, and the dam is not destroyed. The mission is a failure.

In Chapter 19 Harper locates medical assistance for Sharpe, and the surgeon draws the ball from Sharpe's leg. Sharpe sees the ball and instantly realizes it was of the caliber shot from the seven-barreled gun and not from a French or British regulation gun: Hakeswill tried to kill him. After surgery Sharpe is ambulatory and reports to Windham. While Windham realizes Sharpe acted to save the mission, nevertheless the mission failed and Rymer's authority must not be undermined. Windham handles the situation gracefully, but Sharpe is detached from the battalion and assigned to Hogan's command. In Chapter 20, Rymer, influenced by Hakeswill, blames the mission's failure on the slower reloading rate of the riflemen's weapons—a ridiculous claim but nevertheless the scapegoat. Rymer orders Hakeswill to confiscate the Baker rifles and distinctive green coats of the riflemen, and to fold them into the ranks. As Hakeswill insults and belittles the riflemen, Sharpe departs for his new position. Sharpe intervenes, salvages the rifles and green coats, and publicly humiliates Hakeswill.



Chapters 17, 18, 19, and 20 Analysis

These chapters conclude the investiture of Badajoz. The parallels and approaches are dug, an outlying fortress is captured, and numerous siege cannon are emplaced. Destructive fire is concentrated against two bastions and an attempt is made to destroy a dam and drain a flooded field. During this section of the novel time often progresses quickly, and several weeks may pass in a single paragraph. Sharpe watches the assault on Picurina, the outlying fortress, with detached interest. It seems as if his combat role has ended. The assault on the dam gives Sharpe an opportunity to do what he does best—lead men into combat. Rymer's task in the attack is relatively simple: his men are to place and detonate an explosive charge. Rymer proves indecisive in battle and his men end up strung out along a long line and some of the demolition charge is lost or abandoned. The demolitions expert bungles the fuse and the entire operation is about to collapse. The delay insures that the fortress assault, a diversion, is needlessly costly and ultimately worthless. Sharpe takes command to save the mission. Even as he begins to return fire Rymer orders him to hold fire; obviously Rymer has no grasp of the situation. Sharpe personally sets the fuse and as such completes the mission—the charge proves too small, however. A major development concerns Hakeswill's attempt on Sharpe's life during the battle. The sound of the discharge and the impact pattern allow Harper to realize that Sharpe was shot with his seven-barreled gun; the extracted ball lets Sharpe draw the same conclusion. Chapter 20 concludes Part III of the novel with Sharpe carrying away his riflemen's rifles and green coats. His public humiliation of Hakeswill further exacerbates the tension between the men, but by this point it is quite obvious that their relationship will end in violence.



Chapters 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27

Chapters 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 Summary

The French begin to march on Ciudad Rodrigo and Wellington realizes he must take Badajoz immediately—a prolonged siege is out of the question. Wellington calls a council of war and makes detailed plans. Sharpe has been working under Hogan as a scout, and he is summoned to pass judgment on the existing breaches. Sharpe declares the breaches sufficient for assault by storming. Sharpe then asks for permission to lead the forlorn hope, but Wellington refuses him. In chapter 22, word of the imminent attack spreads through the army. Hakeswill spends his extensive free time fantasizing about raping Teresa, murdering Sharpe, and stealing whatever he can get his hands on. He begins to habitually stare into his shako, and then starts to speak to it, crooning in a quiet voice. The men of the company believe he has gone insane.

In Chapter 23 the British learn of a weak spot in the curtain wall and delay the assault for one day while the siege cannon focus on the weak spot and open up a gaping, third breach. The assault then begins. Sharpe, having scouted the glacis and ditch, is assigned to guide forward units into their assault position. He leads in the forlorn hope and watches the men cross the ditch and scale the far wall. Then a massive mine explodes and the entire forlorn hope is killed to a man. Sharpe leads in the next units, trip after trip, and the mass assault at the breaches begins. In Chapter 24 the assault continues. The French defensive interlocking fire is murderous and wave after wave of attacking British soldiers are mowed down. The massive casualties cause the first assault wave to falter. Sharpe watches in awestruck horror as hundreds of British soldiers are slaughtered. He is then summoned to his old company—Rymer is dead and the men desire Sharpe to take command. As Sharpe rallies his men the overall assault falters so much that Wellington decides he must commit his final reserves to the breach. Sharpe leads his men to the new, central breach which has not been attempted. There, they wait for the reserves to assault the breaches on either side of them.

Chapters 25 and 26 comprise action taking place simultaneously elsewhere in the assault. Captain Robert Knowles leads his company into combat. Captain Knowles has known Sharpe for several years and once served under Sharpe as a lieutenant. Knowles bases his conduct in large part upon how he believes Sharpe would react in any situation. Knowles leads an attack that is intended to be diversionary only—his men carry scaling ladders are to assault the citadel itself, an impossibly high tower of sheer rock that has not been damaged in any way. Wellington launches two such suicidal attacks, hoping only that they will pin down French defenders. Knowles, however, intends to actually attempt the assault. He leads his men to the wall and launches a first attempt to scale the ladders. The men are repulsed and the ladders are destroyed by grapeshot. In Chapter 26 Knowles makes a second attempt. He is the first man up the ladders and gains the top, hacking a spot on the wall with his saber. His men follow him up and the wall is secured. Other soldiers climb the ladders and the impossible task is



done. Elsewhere, the other scaling party is also successful. Thus, the two diversionary attacks succeed while the main attack bogs down under withering French fire.

Chapter 27 presents the successful storming of the breach. Sharpe and his men assemble in the ditch—it is packed with the dead, the dying, and cowards. He leads his few men as a forlorn hope against the untested breach. As they charge through French fire the cowering men in the ditch are inspired and join in the assault. Soon chanting cries of "Sharpe! Sharpe! Sharp!" (p. 250) fill the air. Sharpe clears the breach and his men swarm into Badajoz behind him. Simultaneously, the reserve assault wave penetrates the breaches on either side of Sharpe's company, and Badajoz is taken. Sharpe and Harper stare at each other through the haze and slaughter of war. They have survived.

Chapters 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 Analysis

Chapter 21 begins Part IV of the novel, which transpires between April 4 and April 6, 1812 and concludes with Chapter 29 and the Epilogue. While Wellington would prefer to take Badajoz at leisure, French forces advancing on Ciudad Rodrigo force his hand. Time is of the essence and Badajoz must be stormed immediately. The narrative places Sharpe in the role of chief scout for Hogan's intelligence service and thus by a neat trick of writing Sharpe consults directly with the great general Wellington. The fictional portrayal of the historic man is intriguing. Wellington is fond of Sharpe and thus declines his offer to lead the forlorn hope. The Chapter 22 portrayal of Hakeswill foreshadows the concluding action of the novel and is also a chilling reminder of the dehumanizing power of armed conflict. Hakeswill is amoral and criminally insane, but quite competent as a soldier and capable as a sergeant.

Reference to the historical note proves that the two assaults on the breaches at the two bastions were successful and the two scaling parties were—miraculously—successful. Knowles' action is derived from a historical account. The middle breach was made but not used during the historic assault, which gives the author the ability to insert Sharpe's fictional assault into the thick of the fictional portrayal of the historic assault without unduly influencing the outcome. This tight weaving of history and fiction is particularly enjoyable. The scenes of battle and slaughter are horrific and presented in graphic detail. The ditch full of dead and cowering men is particularly memorable. The construction of the scene makes masterful work of the sense of place and setting; understanding the situation requires understanding the fortification layout and the process of battle and siege during the time period considered. In all, Chapters 25 through 27 offer a profound insight into the nature of violence and military combat. The heat of battle is nicely juxtaposed with Wellington's distant appraisal of the tactical situation and his difficult but correct decision to commit the reserves to a potentially lost cause—a resounding example of the great military leader's nearly infallible genius and judgment.



Chapters 28, 29, and Epilogue

Chapters 28, 29, and Epilogue Summary

While Sharpe leads the company into the breach, Hakeswill lies quietly in the ditch. He has carefully piled corpses around and on top of him so he is protected. When a British officer sees him and encourages him to rise, Hakeswill murders the man and adds him to his shield of corpses. After Sharpe clears the breach, Hakeswill sneaks into the city in safety and immediately begins searching for Teresa's house amid the rioting and chaos of the British soldiers looting and raping of Badajoz. Meanwhile, Knowles has led his assault through the citadel. He then searches for Teresa's house, intending to protect her until Sharpe arrives. Knowles finds Teresa's house and enters as Hakeswill watches from the shadows. Hakeswill then enters the house by scaling to the second story. He discovers Antonia sleeping in a crib and picks her up just as Knowles and Teresa enter the room. Hakeswill draws a pistol and kills Knowles, then holds his bayonet at Antonia's throat and tells Teresa to strip.

In Chapter 29, Sharpe and Harper search for Teresa's house. As they search they witness the madness of the rioting British troops. Drunken men assault frightened women, rape is common, and theft and vandalism rampant. They walk through a cathedral and find that instead of a place of refuge it has become a place of mass rape. A frightened, young, beautiful Spanish woman attaches herself to Harper for protection. The group of three locates Teresa's house and enters. Sharpe and Harper enter the infant's room as Teresa begins to disrobe. A tense moment ensues as Hakeswill threatens to murder Antonia. Harper sees Hakeswill's discarded shako on the floor and picks it up. Familiar with Hakeswill's madness, Harper gazes into the hat and sees the portrait of Windham's wife fastened inside of it. Making a wild guess, Harper assumes the portrait is what Hakeswill has been crooning at these past many weeks. Harper threatens to gouge out the portrait's eyes if Hakeswill does not put down the baby. Hakeswill trembles in fear and demands that Harper not hurt his Mammy. After a bizarre but tense moment Hakeswill puts the infant on the ground and lunges for his shako. Sharpe, Teresa, and Harper all attempt to kill Hakeswill with a combination of firearms, knives, and vicious kicks—yet he evades them all through a comedy of errors, leaps out the window, and runs away unharmed—his dear mammy abandoned on the floor.

In the Epilogue, Sharpe and Teresa are married. The young Spanish woman, Isabella, becomes devoted to Harper. Sharpe is promoted to captain for his valiant action at the breach. Windham restores Harper's rank of sergeant for his valiant action at the breach. Sharpe returns the portrait to Windham, and Windham offers a formal apology to Harper. Elsewhere, the insane Hakeswill skulks away to retrieve his buried treasure.



Chapters 28, 29, and Epilogue Analysis

The Epilogue is followed by a brief authorial Historical Note that links many of the places, events, and even some people in the novel to historical places, events, and people. The remainder of the novel deals with the closing action, Sharpe's assault on the central breach being the climax of the action. The primary tension is created when the protagonists and the antagonist converge upon the vulnerable infant at Teresa's home. The resolute Knowles survives a suicidal assault only to be foully murdered by Hakeswill; yet Knowles' death buys precious seconds during which Sharpe and Harper arrive. The situation appears untenable, but the crafty Harper looks for a unique solution and finds it in Hakeswill's mental aberration and bizarre attachment to the portrait of Windham's wife. Hakeswill yields to his madness for a brief instant during which Antonia is saved.

Much of the writing consists of a brutal and graphic description of the mass rape and pillaging that transpires in Badajoz after the British assault. The Historical Note points out that the outrage was historical and far more vicious than typical for the time. The novel seeks to explore possible reasons behind the violent outburst and does so with some success. Nevertheless many of the passages are difficult to read and inappropriate for younger readers. The narrative concludes with an Epilogue that in many respects is a "happily ever after" type of ending. The British are successful; Sharpe and Harper regain their rank; Sharpe and Teresa are married; Harper and Isabella will soon be married, and Hakeswill is banished. The fact that another novel follows in the sequence of novels indicates that Sharpe's happiness will be short lived.



Characters

Richard Sharpe

Richard Sharpe is the principle protagonist of the novel and is present in most—but not all—of the scenes in the narrative. Sharpe is described as a large man, six feet tall, with dark hair and a face disfigured by scarring. A combat veteran of numerous campaigns, Sharpe is in excellent physical condition, possesses superior tactical and strategic reasoning, and rarely makes substantial battlefield mistakes. Outside the sphere of infantry warfare, Sharpe is fairly normal in most respects. Sharpe spends many of his quiet moments fretting about the health of Teresa, his usually distant wife, and Antonia, their sickly infant daughter. On occasion, Sharpe also thinks of a woman friend, Jane Gibbons, who lives in England—Jane becomes a significant character in subsequent novels of the series. Throughout the military phases of the novel Sharpe demonstrates flawless command instincts, decisive leadership, and a solid grasp of the tactical situation. Possessed of an exceptional intuition regarding his opponent's tactics, Sharpe is always one step ahead in matters military. Sharpe also takes advantages of extant situations and is more of a pragmatist than an idealist.

Sharpe is the son of a prostitute, conceived during her course of business by an unknown father. Raised as a self-proclaimed guttersnipe, Sharpe joined the army at an early age and rose through the ranks due solely through merit. In conjunction with his military service Sharpe has traveled widely. At the time of the novel's open, Sharpe's nominal regimental rank is Captain; the rank has been gazetted but not approved and during the early portion of the novel the gazette is declined, leaving Sharpe a lieutenant. The loss of command of his erstwhile company is a severe blow to Sharpe's ego and leads him to various nearly suicidal attempts to regain his rank of Captain.

Sergeant Patrick Harper

Sergeant Patrick Harper is a long-time friend and fellow soldier of Sharpe; the two men have fought together in many previous campaigns. Harper is described as a huge man, 6' 4", and heavily muscled. He is Irish and his battle cry is usually "God Save Ireland"; nevertheless he is a loyal, if conflicted, British subject. During the novel, Sharpe's and Harper's military status fluctuates with the tides of war; however, Harper is entirely dedicated to Sharpe and contrives to accompany Sharpe regardless of official unit assignments. Harper is possessed of great bravery. Harper owns a curious firearm described as a "seven-barreled gun," which is discharged through a single trigger-pull, acting like a miniature artillery piece. Slow to load and cumbersome, the weapon is wielded with much precision by Harper and is devastating in close quarters. Harper frequently uses the gun and always with much effect.

During the novel Harper is framed for theft and as a consequence is flogged and has his rank stripped, returned to being a private. Harper takes this all in stride and immediately



after the flogging his commanding officer admits the judgment was erroneous. Later, Harper is able to clear his name by properly attributing the theft to Hakeswill, and he is reinstated as a sergeant. At the end of the novel Harper meets and befriends Isabella, a young, pretty Spanish woman from Badajoz who becomes a significant character in later novels in the series.

Teresa Moran

Teresa Moran is a guerrilla fighter of some repute, known widely as La Aguja, or "the needle," a nickname she acquired from Sharpe. Prior to the novel's opening, Teresa has led an active life as a guerrilla soldier and leader. About two years before the opening of the novel Teresa and Sharpe had a sexual relationship that resulted in her pregnancy—Sharpe being unaware. Teresa finally settled in Badajoz at her wealthy uncle's estate and delivered the child, a girl named Antonia. Antonia is sickly and Teresa thus confines herself to Badajoz. When she hears Sharpe is approaching in the British siege train, Teresa ventures out and is reunited with her former lover. Their passions still run high and they engage in frequent sex and talk over several days. Teresa demonstrates her fighting prowess and iron nerve during an attempted rape by Hakeswill—Teresa slashes his face and wrist before escaping. Later, Teresa returns to Badajoz and cares for her infant daughter during the siege. Hakeswill seeks her out at her uncle's home and murders Knowles, who offers protection, before threatening to murder Antonia. Harper arrives in time to fool the unbalanced Hakeswill into fleeing. After the siege completes, Sharpe and Teresa are married. Teresa is described as dark-skinned with black hair and is said to be exceptionally beautiful. She demonstrates a minor streak of vanity by gently but repeatedly questioning Sharpe if he can discern any post-natal difference in her appearance or sexual performance; Sharpe cannot.

Sergeant Obadiah Hakeswill

Sergeant Hakeswill is an Englishman though his place of origin is not pinpointed. He is described as tallish, strong, and pot-bellied, though his skin, eyes, and even hair seem yellowish due to fever. He is absolutely amoral and spends most of his time thieving, raping, and dreaming of murdering those who he dislikes, which is just about everyone. As a youth he was charged with sexual assault of a young girl; to preserve her honor he was charged with sheep stealing and hanged but survived. Having survived execution, Hakeswill joined the army and has remained in active service his entire life. He makes progress in the military because of his exacting attention to the superficial aspects of military service, but in reality he is a coward, evil, and entirely selfish. Hakeswill is the primary antagonist in the novel and is a completely deplorable character; he steals, attempts rape, murders, threatens infanticide, attempts more murders, and always seeks to frame someone else for his crimes. Sharpe and Hakeswill have a long history together that is referred to in the current novel and fully developed in other novels of the series of novels. As a young man, Sharpe was framed by Hakeswill for one of Hakeswill's crimes and received a severe flogging; since that time Sharpe has hated Hakeswill and the antipathy has been returned, though in truth Hakeswill hates



everyone. Hakeswill has an enviable history of surviving numerous certain-death situations, and the superstitious men believe he cannot be killed. Indeed, he flees from Sharpe, Harper, and Teresa in the novel's closing scene, avoiding gunfire, saber thrusts, and a fall from a height seemingly without injury. Hakeswill also believes he cannot be killed. Throughout the novel Hakeswill's mental condition continues to deteriorate until he ends up constantly crooning to a picture he keeps in his hat, believing it to be his mother.

Major Michael Hogan

Major Hogan is an officer with the Royal Engineers. Poor and Irish, Hogan's military advancement has been quite slow even though he is fully competent. Little biographical data about Hogan are offered, though it is likely he served in India. Sharpe and Hogan first meet in the Peninsular War and quickly become close and enduring friends. During the current novel Hogan acts in an informal intelligence role and therefore knows much more about the strategic and planning situation than Sharpe—at times Hogan offers some pieces of information. When Sharpe's position with the company becomes tenuous, Hogan takes Sharpe under his command for a few weeks to alleviate the political stresses of the situation. Proud of his Irish heritage, Hogan is not overly-devoted to it. He is a recurrent but often minor character in many novels of the series.

Captain Robert Knowles

Captain Knowles has known Sharpe for several years and once served under Sharpe as a lieutenant. Knowles bases his conduct in large part upon how he believes Sharpe would react in any situation and obviously values Sharpe's opinions highly. During the novel Knowles acts as Sharpe's friend and promises Sharpe that he will seek to protect Teresa as best he can. During the assault of Badojoz Knowles undertakes a nearly-suicidal attack with scaling ladders meant to be only a diversionary action. Instead, Knowles gains the castle walls and leads his men to victory. He then rushes to Teresa's house where he is admitted and murdered by Hakeswill as he attempts to protect Teresa and Antonia. According to the author's historical note, Knowles' assault on the citadel at Badajoz is based on the historical actions of one Lieutenant Colonel Ridge. Knowles is a minor but memorable character, and he lives his life with bravery and honor.

Captain Thomas Leroy

Captain Leroy is an American United Empire Loyalist, born in Boston, whose father fought on the British side during the American Revolutionary War. Leroy lived in Canada and then Britain and joined the military service in c. 1809. He has known Sharpe for several years and the two men share a mutual admiration. Leroy recurs in the novel at several points and always offers Sharpe a supportive attitude and words of advice; Leroy does not take himself too seriously and is much beloved by his men. During the



assault on Badajoz Sharpe sees Leroy struck down and assumes he is dead; however, Sharpe later learns Leroy has survived but with grievous injuries. At the end of the novel Sharpe and Teresa live in Leroy's tent while Leroy convalesces at the hospital. Leroy reappears in later novels of the series. He is a fairly minor character.

Captain Rymer

Captain Rymer is a newly-appointed to lead Sharpe's company. Rymer comes from a wealthy family and has purchased his commission; he has no combat experience. He proves typical of someone thrust into the role—overly sensitive to matters of rank, indecisive under fire, and while not cowardly not brave either. He relies heavily on Hakeswill to maintain discipline, which obviously does not go over well with the men of the company. Rymer does lead the company on an attack to sabotage a bridge but fails to commit sufficient force and fails to act decisively. Sharpe takes command to complete the mission. In order to give Rymer time to gain authority over his men, Sharpe is then transferred to Hogan's unit. In Sharpe's absence, Rymer is led by Hakeswill to blame the failure of the mission on the rifle equipment, so Sharpe's few remaining riflemen are dressed in red and issued muskets. Rymer dies during the assault on the breach at Badajoz. Although a fairly minor character, Rymer stands in stark contrast to Sharpe—Sharpe is everything Rymer is not, but should be.

Sir William Lawford

Lawford, a minor aristocrat, is half-Scottish and grew up in Portsmouth. He appears at the novel's opening where he is Sharpe's commanding officer. Lawford and Sharpe value each other's judgment and are close friends. They have served together before and have even spent a time imprisoned together; during their incarceration Lawford taught Sharpe to read and write. During the assault of Ciudad Rodrigo, Lawford is seriously wounded and loses an arm. Sharpe and Harper rescue him and Sharpe is thereafter thrown into a funk, deploring the waste of war and reflecting on the unfairness of death and maiming. Lawford returns to England where he begins a lengthy convalescence.

Daniel Hagman

Rifleman Hagman is a minor but memorable character in the novel. He is one of the original riflemen in Sharp's company, participates in all of the fighting in the novel, and survives the assault on Badajoz; in essence, he is symbolic of the many faceless men in the British army. Hagman is a former poacher and is widely admitted to be the best shot in the company. For example, during the final assault on the breach Sharpe gives his rifle—at that point the only rifle on the field—to Hagman, because he is the one who can put it to best use. Hagman proves loyal to Sharpe.



Objects/Places

Carcass

A carcass is a form of incendiary missile weapon intended to be not only dangerous but also to illuminate an area. During the assault on Badajoz the French employ numerous carcasses to throw back the English as well as giving illumination for the French musketeers. Typically, a carcass would be fired from cannon, but in the novel the term is used for any large flaming mass thrown at, or rolled toward, the British.

Canister

Canister is a type of ammunition used in field and naval guns instead of the more-traditional cannonball. Canister is composed of a thin metal or wire wrapping that holds together numerous smaller projectiles, usually lead balls similar to a musket ball. When fired, an internal charge detonates and causes the wrapping to disintegrate and the multiple balls begin to spread apart rapidly. Against hardened targets, canister is not effective. Against infantry, canister is far more deadly than roundshot. The French use canister shot against the English troops during the assault on breaches at Badajoz.

Harper's Seven-barreled Gun

Patrick Harper carries and uses a so-called seven-barreled gun. The weapon is exceptionally effective at close range. A fictional representation of the historic Nock's Volley Gun, the weapon discharges seven .5 inch balls simultaneously—something akin to a gigantic shotgun. The weapon is heavy, cumbersome, and delivers fearsome recoil. It is much beloved of Harper. Historically, volley guns were withdrawn from service prior to the time of the novel; the gun is Harper's personal property, which causes Hakeswill to confiscate it briefly.

Bayonet

A bayonet is a blade or spike that is designed to be attached to the end of a rifle or musket, converting the weapon into a type of spear. Some British troops, including the riflemen, used a long, fully-bladed sword bayonet while others used the more-common spike bayonet. In any event, bayonets are fearsome weapons used during close-quarters combat as they make a fired, single-shot musket into a deadly weapon.

Small Arms

Several types of small arms are discussed in the novel; indeed, the novel's accurate portrayal of small arms and their use is one of its most-enjoyable elements. During the



historic period discussed in the narrative, small arms were nearly all smoothbore, muzzle-loading, single-shot weapons capable of receiving a bayonet. Most of the small arms described in the book are probably ignited by a flintlock. Some troops, such as Sharpe's rifles, are armed with rifled weapons, giving them great accuracy and the capability of effective fire at great distances—all at the expense of slower loading. A few individuals in the novel carry single-shot, muzzle-loading, flintlock pistols.

Ciudad Rodrigo

Ciudad Rodrigo is a heavily defended fortress astride the northern roadway leading from Portugal to Spain. The fortress is the setting for the opening chapters of the novel, when the British forces siege and capture the location from the French and Spanish defenders. Although a difficult attack, Ciudad Rodrigo proves little more than preparatory training for the assault on Badajoz. Ciudad Rodrigo appears on the inset map included with the front-matter of the book.

Badajoz

Badajoz is a fortified city astride the southern roadway leading from Portugal to Spain. The fortress is the setting for the closing chapters of the novel, when the British forces siege and capture the location from the French and Spanish defenders. Badajoz appears on the maps included with the front-matter of the book. The defenses are considerable and formidable, and the capture of the fortified city causes many thousands of casualties. The novel offers the correct pronunciation of the place as "Badahoth," though at least one English soldier refers to it as "Baddy-joss."

Ditch, Glacis, and Ravelin

As illustrated in the novel, hard stone walls were not a good defense against emplaced siege cannon. For this reason fortifications at the time had numerous additional defenses based on scientific designs. The primary defense was the ditch, simply a huge excavation that proved difficult to cross. In the book the ditch around Badajoz is said to be at least twenty feet deep and lined with stone. Defensive artillery was cited to enfilade fire into the ditch. The walls and ditch were in turn protected by a glacis, a large sloping pile of earth, sometimes lined with stone, which sloped upwards as it approached the ditch. The glacis augmented the ditch and diverted cannon fire harmlessly upwards. Ravelins were typically stone and earth structures within the ditch that were designed as barriers to break up and divert any mass of assaulting men. During his assault on the breach at Badajoz, Sharpe traverses the glacis, drops into the ditch, scales and runs across the ravelin, drops back into the ditch, and finally reaches the base of the wall proper.



Siege Cannon and the Breach

During the assaults on Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, the British artillery units ready by discharging huge siege cannon, which throw twenty-four pound iron projectiles. The siege cannons are situated in protected locations and converge their fire onto single points along the defenses such that repeated firing batters through the walls, opening a breach. The breach then becomes the site of the main assault, and the British infantry pour through the breach in the wall to capture the fortress. While appearing simple on plan, the execution of the sieges in the novel proves to be a bloody business.

Hakeswill's Mammy

Lieutenant Colonel Windham has a small painting of his wife that he proudly displays, and Sharpe thinks the woman's receding chin and Puritanical expression are particularly distasteful. Hakeswill steals the painting and its silver frame and puts the frame into Harper's pack so Harper is blamed for the theft. Hakeswill, mentally unbalanced, feels the portrait must be of his mother, hides it in his shako, and begins to croon to it. As his mental state deteriorates Hakeswill apparently comes to believe the portrait is in actuality his mother. Late in the novel Harper seizes on Hakeswill's aberrant mental condition to convince him to not murder Sharpe's baby daughter.



Themes

Combat

The book's early and dominant theme is combat. The opening chapters present the setting of the military theater and develop the rationale for the ensuing combat activity. The British Empire assaults Ciudad Rodrigo to gain control of a vital roadway into Spain. England prosecutes the war effort with hopes of complete conquest in Spain and then France. Sharpe and Harper are part of the forces led by Lawford, and though they do not take place in the direct assault, they join the reinforcements. Chapters 2 and 3, in particular, are extensively devoted to narratives of combat between British and French and Spanish forces.

Although Sharpe's personal background is lightly developed, it is not the dominant theme of the novel. Likewise, the overarching political situation is described but only insofar as to present the rationale behind British military actions—that is to say, no discussion of the greater strategic situation is offered, and political intrigues are not particularly considered. Even after Part I in the aftermath of large-scale combat influences, most narrative developments and the theme of combat is carried on as the assault of Badajoz develops. The early theme of combat is supported by a rich and descriptive narrative that lends excitement to the military action presented. Part IV returns to combat as the British perform the actual assault across the walls and through the breaches at Badajoz.

Honor

Sharpe is much concerned with honorably discharging his duties and acting appropriately in all situations. He is not overly-given to flamboyant notions of honor but instead relies upon a commonsense interpretation of honor that is appreciated by his men but often misunderstood by his superior officers. Sharpe's notions of honor are supported by other characters in the book—Colonel Windham, for example, is essentially an honorable man. The theme is supported in contrast by examples of men entirely lacking in honor—men such as Hakeswill. Early portions of the novel deal with purely military honor; for example, Sharpe, Harper, and others carry out their duties during an assault. The middle portions of the novel are concerned with personal honor and good conduct. Harper is impugned by Hakeswill, and Sharpe loses his rank. On the other hand, neophytes such as Rymer are placed in command and amoral scum such as Hakeswill profit by a reign of terror. Teresa's actions support the developing theme, as she puts her guerrilla activities largely on hold to raise her sickly infant child, putting her family duty before her personal glory; her uncle does the same. The end of the novel sees the cowardly and paranoid Hakeswill fleeing from the wreckage of his many crimes; in contrast, Sharpe and Harper move to reclaim their honor and rank.



Love and Devotion

Sharpe is presented in the early novel as a devoted lover and later husband—a portrayal humorously at odds with the man's previous career detailed in previous novels. Even so, in the heady spirits of new fatherhood and marriage, Sharpe finds his thoughts often drifting to his wife Teresa even as death surrounds him. The theme of love and devotion is developed in other ways throughout the novel, however. Patrick Harper meets and befriends a young Spanish woman named Isabella, and many of the soldiers in the company have wives or sweethearts who accompany the unit. Another example is Colonel Windham, who proudly displays a portrait of his shrewish wife, and his forthright presentation of the state of marriage as desirable. Beside romantic love, the novel presents other types of devotion. Many of the Spanish citizens of Badajoz fight alongside their French allies even though the cause is doomed; other Spanish citizens become guerrillas to resist the French. Hakeswill is wholly given over to personal greed, ambition, and Sharpe's destruction—a type of negative devotion. Romantic love, strong friendships, and devotion to duty all play a significant role in the novel and serve to heighten the stresses and emotions of combat. Indeed, the central pivot of the latter portions of the novel concerns Sharpe's romantic involvement with Teresa and Hakeswill's determination to destroy it. This romantic relationship causes much of the novel's concluding action, results in Knowles' death, and Sharpe's heroically frantic actions at the third breach. The relationship not only hinges the narrative but is also a major turning point for all characters involved. It contrasts markedly with the behavior of the crazed British victors who mass rape the female inhabitants of Badajoz.

Style

Point of View

The novel is presented in the third-person, omniscient viewpoint, traditional for fiction and particularly suited to the narrative structure presented. Richard Sharpe, the primary protagonist of the novel, is present in most scenes of the novel but occasionally the scene varies so that alternative viewpoints can be presented. The most-prevalent of these concerns Hakeswill and his nefarious plans. The narrator divulges internal thoughts and attitudes of the protagonist, and some of the other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are frequent but generally are used for characterization rather than plot development.

The third-person point of view allows Sharpe to be presented in a highly-sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Sharpe's brooding introspection as personal concern rather than a failing. The narrative also allows portrayal of Sharpe's life situations as difficult but not pathetic. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all the novels of the series and is accessible and successful.

Setting

The novel is set in western Spain, and the opening material dates the events quite precisely January, 1812. The novel concludes in late March, 1812. The novel's chronology spans a period of time of three months surrounding the early British incursions into Spain. The Napoleonic wars have ravaged Europe for years, and the British Empire has survived only because of its superior naval forces. Recently under Wellington, however, the British have invaded Spain and subjugated a foothold in the Iberian Peninsula.

The early chapters of the novel are devoted to the assault on Ciudad Rodrigo in northern Spain while later chapters focus on the assault on Badajoz in southern Spain. Both fortresses sit astride major roadways from Portugal to Spain and are thus strategically significant. Both fortresses are heavily defended, but Ciudad Rodrigo is far easier to capture. Both locales are developed as settings, though Badajoz receives far more detailed attention. Within these two general locales no specific setting is fully developed. For example, Teresa's uncle's house is said to have two orange trees in the front yard but aside from that is simply a house.



Language and Meaning

The novel is presented in standard British English, using British spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Such is familiar enough to any American reader that the differences between American and British English should pose no special obstacle to comprehension. In general the writing is accessible to high-school level readers. Sentence and paragraph construction are typical and present a fairly even texture throughout. The language of the novel is generally informal and very readable and captures the exciting essence of close-quarters combat without placing undue stress on grammatical construction. Language occasionally wanders into the technical aspects of early nineteenth century infantry combat; defenses are described in technical terms; small arms are described in methods assuming passing familiarity, and field cannon are discussed in technical terms, but such descriptions are not central to the narrative and form an exceptionally enjoyable aspect of the book's realistic and historic texture. Indeed, were such passages absent, the book's tone of authenticity would suffer markedly.

Meaning within the book is derived through traditional means, and subtle interpretation of nearly the entire narrative is not required. The characters presented are largely simple men who hold concrete notions of things such as duty, honor, and valor. For example, when men are afraid they cower or run away; brave men act with great distinction and valor and are highly valued for it. There is little posturing and men portray themselves honestly—excepting, of course, Hakeswill.

Structure

The novel is the third-written in a series of novels extending to twenty-one novels and three published short stories; chronologically, the novel occurs thirteenth in the series. The 280-page novel is divided into twenty-nine enumerated chapters, an epilogue, and a historical note. Chapters are grouped in various Parts, or major divisions. While the epilogue is a component of the fictive narrative, the historical note is an authorial explanation, or apology, of certain events described. The novel is written using standard British spelling and punctuation which may not be immediately familiar to American readers but such should pose no special problems to reading. The novel is constructed in a typical and accessible fashion that aids materially with understanding the narrative plot and elements. Each enumerated chapter generally is presented in chronological order. Of course, characters occasionally remember the past or speculate about the future but these events are obvious and clarified. Thus the construction follows a chronological presentation. Scenes occasionally shift between characters and locales, and occasionally scenes occur roughly simultaneously; for example, near-simultaneous experiences during the siege of Badajoz are presented in alternating chapters focusing on the events surrounding Sharpe (Chapter 27), the events surrounding Hakeswill (Chapter 28), and the events surrounding Teresa before Sharpe arrives (Chapter 29). The construction makes such shifts obvious and presents no special obstacle to comprehension.



Quotes

"A pale horse seen a mile away at sunrise means the night is over. Sentries can relax, battalions stand down, because the moment for a surprise attack has passed. But not on this day. A grey horse would hardly have been visible at a hundred paces, let alone a mile, and the dawn was shredded with dirty cannon smoke that melded with the snow-clouds. Only one living thing moved in the grey space between the British and French lines; a small, dark bird that hopped busily in the snow. Captain Richard Sharpe, huddled in his greatcoat, watched the bird and willed it to fly away. Move, you bastard! Fly! He hated the superstition in himself. He had spotted the tiny bird and, quite suddenly and unbidden, the thought had come to him that unless the bird took wing within thirty seconds, then the day would end in disaster." (p. 11)

"There was a scream from inside the town, shots as men blew open the doors of houses, and over it all the sound of triumphant voices. After the fight, the reward. Harper reached the body first, plucked the cloak to one side, and bent over the bloodied chest. 'He's alive, sir.'

It seemed to Sharpe like a parody of life. The explosion had sheared Lawford's left arm almost clean from his body, crushed the ribs and flicked them open so they protruded through the remnants of skin and flesh. The blood was flowing beneath the once immaculate uniform. Harper began tearing the cloak into strips, his mouth a tight line of anger and sorrow. Sharpe looked towards the breach where men still clambered towards the houses. 'Bandsmen!'

The bands had played during the assault. He remembered hearing the music and now, idiotically, he could suddenly identify the tune he had heard. 'The Downfall of Paris. By now the bandsmen should be doing their other job, of caring for the wounded, but he could see none. 'Bandsmen!'" (p. 41)

"They found a house that had been used by French gunners. There was food in the kitchen, hard bread and cold tongue, and Sharpe lit a fire and watched Teresa as she stabbed the loaf with her bayonet and ripped the blade downwards. He laughed.

She glared at him. 'What's funny?'

'I don't see you as a housewife.'

She pointed the blade at him. 'Listen, Englishman, I can keep a house, but not for a man who laughs at me.' She shrugged. 'What happens when the war ends?'" (p. 56)

"Sharpe saw Teresa walk through the courtyard, carrying her saddle, but she did not see him. He turned away and stared over the rooftops of Elvas, pink in the sunlight, and saw that a cloudbank, riding the north wind, had bisected the landscape with its shadow. Spain lay in shadow and Badajoz was a dark citadel far away. He swore again, foully and at length, as if the curses might fight for him against the ill fortune. He knew it was fanciful, stupid even, but it seemed as if the fortress that barred the eastern road, its walls high over the Guadiana, was at the centre of the evil, spreading a baleful fate over



all who came near. Hakeswill, Rymer, Teresa going, all things changing, and what else, he wondered, would go wrong before they lanced the evil in Badajoz?" (p. 83)

"Collett obligingly left and Windham leaned back. 'I'm sorry, Sharpe.'

'Yes, sir. And the gazette?'

'Refused.' So there it was. The firing squad pulled their triggers and Lieutenant Richard Sharpe gave a mocking, sardonic laugh that made Windham frown. A Lieutenant again!

'So what am I to do, sir?' Sharpe let the bitterness edge his voice. 'Am I to report to Captain Rymer?'

'No, Mr Sharpe, you are not. Captain Rymer would find your presence an embarrassment, I'm sure you can understand that. He must be given time to settle in. I'll keep you busy.'" (p. 103)

"If Rymer had seen the incident he said nothing, instead he nodded civilly. 'Nasty day.' Sharpe felt his usual paralysis in the face of small talk. He gestured at the men in the trench. 'Digging keeps you warm.' He suddenly realized that it sounded as if he were telling Rymer to pick up a spade and he scabbled in his head for a sentence to correct the impression. 'One of the advantages of being in the ranks, eh?' He could hardly bring himself to call Rymer 'sir'. Rymer did not seem to notice.

'They hate digging.'

'Wouldn't you?'

Captain Rymer had never thought about it. Birth into the Rymers of Waltham Cross did not encourage a man to think about manual labour. He was a good-looking man, fair-haired, about twenty-five years old, and desperately nervous with Sharpe." (p. 127)

"'If she wasn't there.' Harper's Ulster accent was slow, as if he was treading very carefully. 'You'd be tempted to buggen of. Is that right? Up to the hills? To fight with the Partisans?'

'I don't know.'

'You do. Do you think no one else has thought of it?' Harper meant himself. 'You're not a fair weather soldier only.'

'We'll get desertions today.'

'Aye, if Hakeswill isn't buried soon.' No one had deserted from the Battalion for months. Other battalions were losing men, a handful each day who slipped across to Badajoz. There was traffic the other way, too, including, so Hogan had told Sharpe, a French Engineer Sergeant who brought with him the plans of the defenses. The plans held few surprises, except confirmation that the western glacis was thickly mined." (p. 149)

"'What do you think?' Hogan sounded worried.

'It's too complicated.' Sharpe shrugged. 'Fifty men could do it. You don't need a whole battalion.'

Hogan nodded, but whether the nod meant agreement was impossible to tell. He looked up at the thick clouds. 'At least the weather's on our side.'

'If it doesn't rain.'



'It won't rain.' Hogan made the statement as if he controlled the weather. 'But it will be dark.' He looked over the parapet at the fort which protected the dam. 'You're right. It's too complicated, but the Colonel insists. I wish you were going.'" (p. 169)

"Hakeswill cackled. 'You bloody fairies. You're not bloody soldiers. Stand still!' The twelve Riflemen stood still. Each would have gladly killed the Sergeant, but not here, not in the supply dump that was open to the gaze of the whole camp. The murder would have to be done at night, in secret, but somehow Hakeswill seemed always to be awake, or alert to the smallest sound. Perhaps he was right, he could not be killed. Hakeswill walked slowly down the rank. Each man was stripped to his shirt, the green jackets lying on the ground in front of them. He stopped by Hagman, the old poacher, and pushed at the jacket with his foot. 'What's this, then?' His toe was pointing at the black stripe sewn on the sleeve.

'Senior Rifleman's badge, Sergeant.'

'Senior Rifleman's badge, Sergeant.' Hakeswill imitated Hagman. The yellow face twitched. 'Bloody decrepit, you are!' He pushed the sleeve into the mud. 'Senior bloody Rifleman! From now on you're a bloody soldier.' He cackled, letting his foetid breath wash over Hagman's face. The Rifleman did not move or react; to do so was to invite punishment. Hakeswill twitched and moved on." (p. 194)

"A few moments later a second rumour arrived, as strong as the first which had announced the assault, and this rumour, flashing through the camp, brought relief and frustration. Everything was postponed. They had all been given another twenty-four hours to live.

'Where are we going?' someone shouted.

They laughed, forgetting Hakeswill's baleful presence. 'Badajoz! Tomorrow.'" (p. 219)

"'This way! This way!' They were going right, away from the San Pedro bastion, clawing a path on the hill's steep side until they had turned a corner and would receive some shelter from the grapeshot. The first attack had been horribly repulsed, but the Third Division would try again. They could hear the fury at the main breach, far away, and see on the sheeted floodwaters the dim reflections of the fires that were consuming the Light and Fourth Divisions. Knowles could feel a madness in the air, beating its dark wings against a city, bringing a night of insane death and crazy effort. 'Light Company! Light Company!'" (p. 242)

"A man went into a breach for one thing only, pride, and Sharpe had been there. He had stood at the top of a breach, fear defeated, and gone down into a horror that tarnished victory as blood tarnished a sword. He lay awake and thought of streets running with wine, silver, madness and blood.

He had hoped for so much; for a Captaincy, for revenge on a clerk, for a company, for a woman he loved and a child he had never seen, and the hopes had been won at Badajoz. He lay in Leroy's tent, its owner in hospital with a terrible wound, the night was



quiet, dark, silent for the first time in weeks, and a great victory had been won. The gates of Spain had been burst open. He looked at his woman, beautiful in the firelight that seeped through the canvas, and he marveled that he was married. Then he looked at the child, dark hair and snub nosed, that slept between them and the love welled up, incomprehensible, uncontrollable. He kissed his daughter, Antonia, and in the flamelight she seemed terribly small and vulnerable. Yet she was alive, and his, his only relative by blood. She was his, to be protected as he must protect all those other souls who liked him, were proud of him, and proud to be in his ranks—Sharpe's Company." (p. 275)

Topics for Discussion

Sharpe attempts to volunteer for the forlorn hope—the first wave of attackers in the assault—because he hopes to regain his rank as captain. Faced with the very real prospect of death or maiming, do you think you would volunteer for the forlorn hope in a similar situation?

Throughout the early portions of the novel Sharpe is personally devastated by his loss of rank and considers his own life secondary to regaining his prior rank. Do you think Sharpe is overly concerned with his own pride? Why or why not?

Both Hogan and Harper are Irish. Harper is vocally pro-Irish while Hogan is more retiring, but both men are loyal to Ireland. Of the two, which would you consider to be more truly Irish? Why?

Throughout the latter portion of the novel, Hakeswill is portrayed as increasingly unstable until Chapter 29 where he breaks down completely. Do you feel that Hakeswill's mental disintegration is portrayed realistically? How?

When Lawford loses his arm and receives other serious injuries, Sharpe is simultaneously concerned for Lawford's survival but is also concerned for his own professional career. Although petty personal concerns may seem out of place during times of crisis, they are common. Have you ever been in a difficult situation for someone else but found your thoughts focusing on how the situation will impact you directly? Discuss.

Do you think that Sharpe could be happy and efficient as a retired father and husband? Why or why not?

The novel states that during the period considered, officers who lead—and survived—a forlorn hope assault through a breach were automatically granted a rank advancement. Do you think that such a practice was essentially fair and good? Why or why not?

Knowles and others lead a suicidal assault intended to be diversionary only, yet they were successful. Given their success, was Sharpe's assault through the central breach essentially meaningless? Why or why not?

The Historical Note notes that the British outrages perpetrated upon Badajoz were exceptionally violent. The novel attempts to explain why this may have been the case. Do you think the novel does a creditable job of exploring why the typical British soldier reacted with such violent abandon upon entering the city?