

Sharpe's Enemy: Richard Sharpe and the Defense of Portugal, Christmas 1812 Study Guide

Sharpe's Enemy: Richard Sharpe and the Defense of Portugal, Christmas 1812 by Bernard Cornwell

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Plot Summary

It is Christmas, 1812, and the British Empire is at war with Napoleonic France. The British forces have invaded Spain through Portugal and against all predictions have gained a toehold on the continent. The French prepare to launch a surprise counterattack and major diversionary raid. Meanwhile, Richard Sharpe is promoted to major and placed in charge of various training details during the winter lull of fighting. Sharpe's command is saddled with a rocket artillery battalion—a new-fangled weapon that most soldiers predict will be an abject failure. Close by, a rag-tag army of deserters from various armies invades the small town of Andrados and holds the locals hostage. They also capture several society ladies who happened to be in town on a religious pilgrimage. Sharpe is ordered to secure their release. Along with Sergeant Patrick Harper, Sharpe travels to Andrados with ransom funds. In Andrados the funds are taken, but the society lady hostages are not released. Sharpe scouts the area and is disgusted to learn that his old nemesis, Obadiah Hakeswill, is one of the rag-tag army's commanders. Sharpe returns to base and delivers the news; he is thereafter ordered to take a force of men and capture Andrados by force.

Sharpe returns to Andrados with British soldiers, taking William Frederickson as a subordinate officer, and supported by the slow-moving rocket artillery. Sharpe and Harper sneak into the enemy's position and secure the hostages' safety while Frederickson attacks in force and captures an outlying building. The rocket artillery arrives along with Lord Farthingdale, an incompetent coward who considers himself a great military leader. Farthingdale assumes command and launches a disastrous assault on an enemy-held strongpoint. Sharpe intervenes and turns the British rout into a victory. The rag-tag army is thus defeated, but then the French appear in force. Farthingdale plans to simply retreat but is convinced by Sharpe to leave; command reverts to Sharpe. Over the next day and a half, Sharpe uses a variety of stratagems and brilliant tactics to hold off a much larger French attacking force until reinforcements arrive. The rocket artillery is used to much effect and Sharpe is victorious. However, during the combat the vile Hakeswill has eluded final capture and manages to murder Sharpe's beloved wife, the partisan leader Teresa. Finally brought to justice, Hakeswill is executed by firing squad while Sharpe coldly watches.



Prologue and Chapters 1 and 2

Prologue and Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

The prologue is set in the Spanish village of Andrados during December of 1812. Spain is at war with France—much of Spain is occupied by French troops; the remainder hosts an army of English soldiers pressing onward toward an invasion of France. Andrados is not significant militarily and is situated to the west of a steep and difficult mountain pass, guarded by a fortress and a sturdy convent, between which the only road leads out of the pass and through the town. On a prominence to the south of the town a crumbling watchtower stands high. The fortress has a huge amount of black powder due to a provisioning error. At the opening of the novel the town is being captured by a motley assortment of deserters of all nationalities, though mostly English, Spanish, and French. This ragtag army is led by a man who styles himself a General and is assisted by another man who styles himself a Colonel. At the opening of the novel some English soldiers have come to Andrados to accompany a woman known as Lady Farthingdale on a pilgrimage to the local convent. The English are taken by surprise and murdered by the local ragtag army. The town is then sacked and looted, most of the men killed, and most of the women raped. The Colonel intervenes to spare Lady Farthingdale from being raped, sensing she might be more valuable as a pristine hostage than a defiled corpse. The ragtag army secures the town and settles in to spend the long winter in the out-of-the-way but secure location.

The setting of Chapter 1 changes to the Spanish countryside near Castelo Branco, where English forces are encamped. Captain Richard Sharpe is summoned before Major General Nairn, a snide but efficient combat leader. Nairn praises Sharpe's past performances, cracks wise about army life, and then delivers the delightful news that Sharpe has been promoted to Major. Nairn then puts Sharpe in command of a local troop of rocket artillery—a new invention. The Prince Regent has sent the rocket artillery overseas as a pet project. Nairn feels the innovation to be foolishness and tells Sharpe as much, but the artillery troop must be given their chance in combat. Sharpe is to drill the troop, parade them, train them, and get them ready for any eventuality. In Chapter 2 Sharpe, accompanied by his loyal friend and dependable subordinate Sergeant Patrick Harper, takes command of the rocket troop and begins training exercises. Sharpe also becomes familiar with the rocket artillery, its potential, and its severe limitations. He rather quickly concludes rockets to be valueless at any range.

Prologue and Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The General of the ragtag army is a deserter from the French army who goes by the name Pot-au-Feu; the Colonel a deserter from the English army who, later in the novel, is revealed to be Obadiah Hakeswill, a long-time nemesis of the novel's protagonist, Richard Sharpe. Both Pot-au-Feu and Hakeswill were sergeants prior to deserting. In the novel, Hakeswill is the major antagonist, and the General is a relatively minor figure,



based on a historical counterpart as discussed in the novel's closing Historical Note. Due to complexity in the British army's rank and promotion scheme of the time, Sharpe simultaneously holds an army rank of Major but a regimental rank of Captain; the rank in force depends upon his assignment and the force structure at any given time. This is a historical curiosity that has little impact in this novel, wherein Sharpe is treated as a Major. Sharpe's assignment to the rocket artillery proves to be fortunate, though at first appears to be drudge work. The artillery is assigned a huge number of mules that later become significant. The rockets, Congreve's Rockets, were historically used but proved so inaccurate as to be of dubious worth. Most of Chapter 2 is devoted to a discussion of the rockets' performance on a training ground. Sharpe will later use the rockets to great effect, however. Nairn's attitude and dialogue is funny, compelling, and helps set the novel in the historical period. Sharpe's summons at the end of Chapter 2 marks a narrative turning point.



Chapters 3 through 8

Chapters 3 through 8 Summary

Sharpe is again summoned before Nairn. Nairn informs Sharpe of the capture of Andrados and the nature of Pot-au-Feu's forces, estimated at between 400 and 2,000 men. Sharpe is ordered to volunteer to travel to Andrados and scout the situation; in particular, he is—if possible—to recover Lady Farthingdale by exchanging a large sum of gold to secure her release. Sharpe makes his preparations and, accompanied by Harper, travels to Andrados. In Chapter 4, Sharpe and Harper enter Andrados with the gold. They find the approach apparently unguarded and enter the convent. There, they hear two men entering and they capture the men. It develops that the men are Colonel Dubreton and Sergeant Bigeard of the French army. Dubreton's wife is also a captive of Pot-au-Feu and he, too, has come bearing gold for her ransom. The four men take an immediate liking to each other and pledge assistance against their common enemy. Shortly thereafter the four men are surrounded by Pot-au-Feu's men and a stunned Sharpe recognizes Pot-au-Feu's right-hand man, the so-called colonel, to be his long-time nemesis Obadiah Hakeswill.

In Chapter 5 Pot-au-Feu and Hakeswill both attempt, rather coarsely and completely unsuccessfully, to recruit the four men into their army. The scene is quite grotesque with the despicable officers fondling and groping semi-nude women while they discuss terms with Sharpe and Dubreton. The evidence of murder, torture, and mass rape is throughout the convent. Sharpe watches a woman being tortured by being branded on her breasts with a red-hot iron. Meanwhile, Sharpe and Harper mentally note the convent's structure and other tactical points about the area. At the end of the putative negotiations, Pot-au-Feu confiscates all the ransom gold but refuses to release the hostage women. He does allow one to be brought out to attest to their semi-protected existence; she turns out to be Dubreton's wife, who quotes a snippet of poetry allowing Dubreton to infer she is being held in the convent, and he shares this information with Sharpe. The four men are then allowed to leave, and they go their separate ways.

In Chapter 6, Sharpe and Harper return to the English base and consult with their superior officers. A smug and condescending Farthingdale is unhappy that Sharpe has not secured Lady Farthingdale's release and is fairly vituperative of Sharpe's overall efforts. Nairn decides that the women must be rescued and appoints Sharpe to lead the attack. Sharpe uses his recent tactical observations to plan a staged rescue and attack. He will take a small group into the convent and secure the prisoners; a larger force will provide a follow-on attack to secure the convent and castle. Sharpe is notified that he will be assisted by local Spanish partisan forces though there is no liaison available. In Chapter 7, Sharpe assembles his assigned troops and reviews them. He meets Captain William Frederickson who leads one of the companies of mixed riflemen and soldiers. Frederickson is a professional and competent soldier who has suffered severely disfiguring facial wounds including the loss of an eye. Sharpe and Frederickson quickly gain each others' trust. In addition to Frederickson's riflemen, Sharpe will also take the



rocket battalion along, primarily because they have many mules that can carry the expedition's impedimenta.

In Chapter 8, Sharpe leads a small group through the pass and into the town's entrance. They reach the convent and sneak inside. There they witness much debauchery and sexual abuse of prisoners before locating Lady Farthingdale and the others. Sharpe's group attacks the few guards and through surprise secures the prisoners of interest. Sharpe quickly recognizes Lady Farthingdale as Josephina, or La Lacosta, a high-priced prostitute from Lisbon; she is obviously playing some game with Farthingdale. Soon after, the reinforcements begin to arrive.

Chapters 3 through 8 Analysis

Note Harper's familiarity with, and attraction to, birds and birding mentioned on page 52; this heavily foreshadows the use of live birds as camouflage later in the novel. The named appearance of Hakeswill has been heavily foreshadowed earlier in the novel by his unnatural devotion to mothers and his long neck and twitching head. Hakeswill and Sharpe have a long and violent history of hatred and loathing. Chapter 5 presents some background on Hakeswill, which is reiterated from previous novels in the series, but mostly the chapter is concerned with establishing the ragtag army and their leaders as truly despicable men—human vermin—who should be extinguished from the earth. They not only murder and rape but do it openly and exult in it. They are so submersed in their debauchery that even while they discuss terms with Sharpe they grope and fondle captive women openly. The only thing that has saved Lady Farthingdale and Dubreton's wives from such horrific treatment is their value as hostages; value that would putatively decrease were they violated like the local women. Elsewhere women are systematically tortured in sexually stylistic ways; men are simply murdered. Throughout the disturbing visit Sharpe and Harper take note of the defenses, aware that they will likely be returning soon. Sharpe and Dubreton's personal promise is fulfilled throughout the novel, and the men demonstrate the old-world honor that is said to have been prevalent at the time. The poem quoted, briefly, by Lady Farthingdale is unattributed but was written by Alexander Pope. As Pot-au-Feu does not know which of the handful of well-dressed women are significant hostages, Dubreton's wife does not wish to inadvertently identify herself. Her subterfuge is successful and ingenious; Pot-au-Feu and his men do not realize she has passed on vital tactical information. These chapters of the novel set up the rescue mission and French involvement that will consume the remainder of the narrative. The fact that Pot-au-Feu and Hakeswill allow the four men to leave is inconsistent with their characterization.

Sharpe's plan, detailed in Chapter 8, is fairly simply and relies heavily on the element of surprise. Fortunately it works as planned. The partisans discussed in Chapter 6 do indeed appear later in the novel with notable consequences for Sharpe's personal life. In the rescue, Sharpe finds the prisoners, then secures them with a small force that drives into the center of the convent. As a pell-mell counterattack begins Sharpe's larger forces begin to surround the convent as part of the attack. Much of Nairn's reasoning for attacking the area is discussed, but in brief it makes tactical and strategic sense to oust



the ragtag army. The Chapter 7 meeting between Sharpe and Frederickson begins a long-term friendship that spans additional novels in the series of novels. Both men are much alike in character, though Frederickson is well-educated and artistic in outlook. Chapter 8 details the execution of the early stages of the plans developed in Chapters 6 and 7 and marks a turning point in the novel; the remainder of the narrative focuses on combat action. The identity of Lady Farthingdale becomes a central point in the narrative, later providing Sharpe with a crucial mental advantage over Farthingdale. Sharpe's early but muted recognition of her as a fancy prostitute foreshadows later developments.



Chapters 9, 10, and 11

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 Summary

The battle continues around the convent as Frederickson advances with most of the fighting men. Though fierce, the battle is short and Frederickson's forces secure the convent. Sharpe busies himself with the disposition of many prisoners—he has them stripped naked or nearly naked and placed in holding cells. He is disheartened to discover that Hakeswill has escaped. Sharpe and Harper survey the convent with a focus on tactical defense. They note that much of the basement is an ossuary filled with human bones. One basement room has a hole hacked through the wall as an improvised loophole; a cannon points out the hole. Sharpe notes that it is Christmas Eve and some of the soldiers quietly celebrate. In Chapter 10, Sharpe continues to consolidate his forces at the convent. Although intelligence is spotty, Sharpe estimates he is heavily outnumbered and fortifies the convent for defense. Lady Farthingdale then approaches Sharpe who recognizes her as Josefina, or La Lacosta, a high-priced prostitute from Lisbon with whom he is acquainted. Josefina explains that Farthingdale is madly in love with her even though he knows her past. She plays the part of Lady Farthingdale even though they are not legally wed—Josefina being previously wed to someone else. Farthingdale presumes nobody knows of Josefina's past. As Sharpe continues to arrange his defenses the remainder of his combat troops arrives as does Lord Farthingdale.

In Chapter 11, Farthingdale takes command of the local forces and immediately begins making poor decisions. Pot-au-Feu's forces remain in Adrados village which puzzles Sharpe. As Christmas day breaks Farthingdale marshals his forces to attack the castle across the road from the convent. Sharpe watches the initial preparations and feels something is terribly amiss—the defenders of the castle not only do not appear distressed but in fact preempt the British attack with an attack of their own. Sharpe urges caution and restraint, but Farthingdale ignores him and launches a massed counter attack. The enemy withdraws into the castle and Farthingdale orders the British to pursue. As the British forces scramble over the castle's ruined outer walls a series of massive mines erupt, killing 37 British soldiers and seriously wounding 48 more. Farthingdale receives a minor head wound and, having fallen into Pot-au-Feu's trap, retires from the field leaving his men leaderless. Sharpe watches the British attack crumbling and realizes the situation is desperate.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 Analysis

The early tactical situation at the convent is fully described on p. 138; Sharpe is obviously heavily outnumbered at this point. Even after the Fusiliers arrive the British are outnumbered. The ossuary in the convent is a significant setting for later events in the novel. Sharpe's disposition of prisoners—as nearly naked—is meant to restrain them from escaping into the wintry countryside. The odd situation between Josefina and



Farthingdale will be exploited by Sharpe later in the novel. Farthingdale's presumed expertise in combat derives from his having written a book on soldiering, and he has no real experience as becomes painfully obvious during his stint as combat leader. The British situation, already tenuous, is made desperate by the loss of an entire company of men to the mines. The novel's earlier statements about the plentiful powder supply at the village are now evident—the mines would otherwise not have been possible. There is still enough powder left for Sharpe to later turn the tables. Farthingdale's unforgivable mistake is to leave the field of battle due to a minor wound; he doesn't even hand over command to a subordinate. Pot-au-Feu's continued presence in the town foreshadows the eventual arrival of a French army, approaching along the rag-tag army's possible route of escape.



Chapters 12 through 17

Chapters 12 through 17 Summary

Fearing the British assault is about to completely collapse Sharpe and Harper lead a counter attack on the castle, mustering the retreating forces. The action is quite hot and deadly but Sharpe and Harper and a few others reach the castle, penetrate into its gatehouse, and then rush up the main gatehouse tower. They fight to the top of the main tower and capture it, securing the castle's gatehouse. The combat is fierce and continual, but the British eventually prove victorious even as Pot-au-Fea commits his primary forces. In Chapter 13, The British capture the castle and make Pot-au-Fea a prisoner with many of his men; however many of them escape through a newly-dug hole in the foundation. Hakeswill also escapes. The main rocket artillery finally appears drawn up the steep mountain road by mules and horses. Sharpe is careful to immediately conceal the men, the weapons, and the horses inside the convent. Then, in a stunning turn of events, a group of French lancers is spotted reconnoitering the far side of the town.

In Chapter 14 the French forces appear in force. Dubreton comes forward and salutes Sharpe; Dubreton's wife is handed over and Pot-au-Fea is given to the French. Farthingdale, his head bandaged, appears and assumes command. He appears completely oblivious to the changing tactical and strategic situation and is more interested in speaking flawless French than wondering why the French army has appeared in force. Farthingdale is obviously incompetent as a military leader and even the French realize this. In Chapter 15 the French and British forces continue to apprise each others' strength from afar. Hakeswill is recovered by the French forces and is handed over to the British. Sharpe has him placed in the castle dungeon. Farthingdale continues to act like an imbecile, and while Sharpe starts to prepare static defenses Farthingdale considers retreating. Sharpe and Harper think of tactics and strategy and realize the French forces mean to invade Spain. In Chapter 16 the British leaders attend a Christmas dinner cooked by Pot-au-Fea and hosted by the French leaders. Sharpe is introduced to a Major Pierre Ducos who is offensive and insubordinate. The French, particularly Ducos, are full of bombast and disdain for the British forces, particularly emphasizing their small numbers. The food is excellent and extensive and much of the dinner talk focuses on Farthingdale's book; it is obvious that those present do not think much of it. Toward the end of the dinner Sharpe is surprised by Teresa, known locally as La Aguja, a leader of partisans who is also his wife. In Chapter 17 Sharpe and Teresa move to a private area and make small talk, catching up on their respective lives since their last meeting several months ago. Much of the talk focuses on their daughter, who is living with relatives. Teresa notes that extensive French forces continue to move toward Andrados, and the situation is obviously critical. Meanwhile the dinner continues as Farthingdale becomes increasingly cowed by the French officers. Sharpe returns as the dinner ends and becomes engaged in a barely-constrained argument with Ducos; Ducos refuses Sharpe's demand for honor. Farthingdale rebukes Sharpe publicly for participating in the exchange as the British leaders return to their positions.



Chapters 12 through 17 Analysis

Sharpe personally enters combat. His counter-attack rallies the men and snatches victory from the jaws of defeat. While Sharpe is often out of his element in the etiquette of command he is clearly a superb combat leader. The technical discussion of castle construction and defensive methods is compelling, as are the multiple scenes of combat. When the dust finally settles, the British have defeated Pot-au-Fea's forces and have seemingly completed their mission—the arrival of the French is a major turning point in the narrative.

The rocket artillery finally arrives and Sharpe takes great pains to hide the weapons, men, and horses as he realizes there is immense tactical value to surprise and acts accordingly. This is significant later in the novel. The gentlemanly exchange of Dubreton's wife and Pot-au-Fea marks a different historical period of conflict, to say the least. The Chapters 14, 15, and 16 contrast between Farthingdale and Sharpe is remarkable. Farthingdale is wealthy, educated, and titled, yet he is also militarily ignorant and is so haughty that he fails to recognize his own limitations. Sharpe is not wealthy, not educated, and not titled, though he knows the ins and outs of combat and knows how to lead soldiers. Farthingdale makes several mistakes, some catastrophic, while Sharpe works behind the scenes to keep the attack together. When the French—the primary enemy—appear in force Farthingdale appears to take little notice while Sharpe realizes that something significant is developing. Teresa, Sharpe's wife, balances Josefina within the narrative. Farthingdale's beloved is not only not his wife, but is in fact a whore looking out for her own interests while Teresa is devoted to a nationalistic cause and is what she presents herself as—a leader of partisans. Earlier in the novel, Nairn suggested that partisan support would be a significant factor in the combat—this proved incorrect as the partisans appear only after the capture of the area. However, they do contribute somewhat to the ensuing battles with the French. The remainder of the novel deals entirely with Sharpe's defense of the area against a major French incursion; thus, Chapter 17 can be seen as the major structural turning point of the narrative.



Chapters 18 through 23

Chapters 18 through 23 Summary

Sharpe estimates the French forces fairly accurately as about 8,000 men and knows his own forces number about 600 combat effectives supported by rocket artillery. Farthingdale appears rather late in the day and at a council of war announces his intention to retreat from Andrados because he is convinced that the French mean no harm and that the best possible course of action is to run away. Further, Farthingdale announces that he has promised the French he will immediately withdraw. Sharpe is stunned by this news and insists on a private conversation with Farthingdale. Privately, Sharpe states that Farthingdale's plan to retreat is madness; Sharpe tells Farthingdale that he knows all about Lady Farthingdale's previous lifestyle, and asks Farthingdale to personally withdraw immediately, leaving Sharpe in command. Farthingdale is irate but after a moment considers and then publicly announces that his minor head wound is troubling him, and he and Josefina withdraw from the area, leaving Sharpe in command. Sharpe's first command is to send Harper outside to collect as many live birds as he can capture. Sharpe then sets to establishing a first defense of the convent and castle.

Chapter 19 begins at early dawn on the day after Christmas. Sharpe arranges for the tail end of a mock withdrawal to be visible to the French. The British fortifications appear deserted and the birds that Harper has captured during the night are let go at appropriate times to make the convent and castle appear totally devoid of humans. The French forces interrupt their contingency planning of attack and simply advance toward the castle where the bulk of Sharpe's forces are located. In Chapter 20 the French advance is met with a determined British resistance which takes the French by surprise. The French forces suffer much loss at the castle walls and then fall back. Later, a smaller French force reconnoiters the watch tower where Frederickson is in command; they, too, are repulsed with much loss of life. The initial French advance is stymied but the element of surprise has been given up.

In Chapter 21 the French agree to a truce so they can recover their wounded and dead from the field. Sharpe accepts the truce but demands a longer period of time than the French offered. Sharpe's only hope is to delay the French for forty-eight hours, since Sharpe cannot stop them. Meanwhile, the French begin serious preparations for assaulting the British. The French estimate the British forces as comprised of thirty partisans, sixty riflemen, and one hundred infantry at the watchtower; thirty riflemen and three hundred infantry at the castle; and thirty riflemen and one hundred infantry at the convent. The French believe the British have no artillery save a few guns remaining from the original Spanish garrison. The French commander sweeps aside all intricate plans in favor of an attack en masse, said to be much favored by Napoleon. In Chapter 22 the massive French column, composed of thousands of men, advances on the castle. Sharpe is in command of the castle and prepares his defenses, including an oddball trench at the front in which he plans to deploy his rocket artillery.



In Chapter 23 the French column advances. The French skirmishers engage the British picquets and the British forces nearly yield; the French skirmishers withdraw as the column advances, however. The French have assumed the British have no artillery and the French soldiers thus present a tightly-packed body of men. Frederickson's riflemen shoot into the column from the watchtower with accurate fire, but the column is too massive to disintegrate from the enfilading fire. Sharpe has deployed his rocket artillery in front of the castle's main defenses, however. The picquets and raketees seek shelter in the oddball ditch and Sharpe orders the rockets discharged parallel to the ground at point-blank range—the French are less than fifty yards away when the rockets ignite. The massed rockets tear through the French column and explode with devastating effect. The column is halted, destroyed, and repulsed with massive loss of life. The French retreat again; Sharpe's 650 men have repulsed 8,000 French soldiers, inflicting something like 10% casualties in the single massive artillery discharge.

Chapters 18 through 23 Analysis

Chapter 18 establishes a new tactical situation in the novel and mates it to a grave strategic situation for the British forces in Spain. The French forces plan to use the little-defended pass through Andrados to invade Spain as a diversionary campaign. The diversion is intended to draw British forces to the area and pin them down while the main French invasion occurs elsewhere. Of course the strategic situation is unknown to the British, but Sharpe is not fooled as he knows the French will not commit major forces without a specific goal. Farthingdale proves entirely worthless and plans to tuck tail and run rather than face the French. Sharpe resorts to a rather distasteful personal attack on Farthingdale's wife to convince Farthingdale to relinquish command; it's blackmail but Sharpe finds himself in an untenable position and resorts to it. Farthingdale's personal withdrawal leaves Sharpe in command. Chapter 19 details Sharpe's preparations for defense. The initial French advance and bloody repulse are detailed in Chapter 20, which includes some compelling descriptions of combat tactics as well as describing the overall situation. Chapter 21 is interesting inasmuch as much of the material is presented from the French point of view. Like Farthingdale, Ducos is not a military man but nevertheless fancies himself as such—his input convinces the French commanders to use a typical Napoleonic tactic—the massive column—against the British fortifications. Sharpe anticipates this precise attack formation and plans against it. Chapter 22 describes the initial approach of the French column and the command and control Sharpe exercises over his men to restrain them from fleeing from the fearsome spectacle.

Chapter 23 presents Sharpe's masterful employment of his newfangled rocket artillery. He knows the rockets are woefully inadequate past about 50 yards and thus waits until the French are within this range. The massed rockets carry explosive shells and fragment after plowing through ranks of French soldiers. The slaughter is incredible and the writing is particularly graphic. Sharpe inflicts about 10% casualties on the French column while suffering only incidental losses. Nairn's earlier prediction that the rockets would be useless is incorrect—though only because of the tactical situation in which they are employed. Note how the artillery captain desires to discharge the rockets at a

much greater range. Farthingdale's blunder is paralleled by Ducos' blunder. The repulse of the French column marks a turning point in the narrative. From this point forward the French accept they will not be able to quickly capture the pass and begin to modify their strategic planning as well as developing a comprehensive tactical plan of attack.



Chapters 24 through 30 and Epilogue

Chapters 24 through 30 and Epilogue Summary

The French call for a four-hour truce to gather the wounded and dead. Sharpe believes there are about 500 French dead. After the truce the French bring up their artillery as Sharpe plans his next moves. The French concentrate their artillery on the convent, intending to reduce and capture it and use it as a base to assault the castle. Sharpe has foreseen this probability and after the convent takes some fire the defending British forces abandon it and rush to the castle. Sharpe learns that Harper, at the convent, has not arrived at the castle. While most of the men are saddened Sharpe appears unaffected. Meanwhile, Hakeswill plans his own escape from the castle dungeon. In Chapter 25, Sharpe continues to make preparations for the French attack on the castle, and in the dungeon Hakeswill begins agitating the other prisoners into an escape attempt. In Chapter 26, the French capture the convent and begin to fortify it. They bring up almost all their siege artillery and emplace it in the convent, training the guns on the nearby castle. After several hours the French have hauled in much powder and many guns and are ready to open fire on the castle. Then Harper awakens, buried deep in the convent's ossuary under a pile of bones. He clammers out and lights multiple fuses before running away from the convent and gaining the safety of the castle. The many fuses lead to massive charges of powder that explode, destroying the convent entirely, wrecking nearly all of the French artillery, and killing about 100 French soldiers—Sharpe is again victorious through a surprise trap. The day after Christmas draws to a close. On the next morning a second determined French attack begins. The attack is well-planned and is a coordinated effort between cavalry and infantry elements. The attackers approach in dispersed order. Sharpe watches the developing attack and realizes he will fail to delay the French much longer—the situation appears hopeless.

Chapter 28 alters the primary chronology and returns to events occurring three days earlier. British forces had intercepted French plans to invade Spain and a large British counter force is organized and sent to Andrados to hold the pass and repulse the French before the break out. Returning to Sharpe's present, the narrative details the developing French attack. The British use the remaining rockets as hand-thrown bombs, tossing them over the castle walls onto the attacking French. The French pack tightly into the castle courtyard and are massacred by the thrown rockets. The British then counterattack and sweep the French out of the courtyard. It is a temporary respite, though, as the French regroup and begin the second wave of the assault. Sharpe fears the end has come, but then the massive army of British reinforcements arrives and enters combat. Quickly enough the entire French force is staggered and then repulsed. In Chapter 29 Hakeswill tricks his English guards and manages to murder them and escape with a few other desperate men. In Chapter 30 a victorious Sharpe surveys the battlefield and is horrified to discover Teresa's corpse. He learns from witnesses that Hakeswill murdered her; a few minutes later the French appear under a flag of truce—they have captured Hakeswill, and Dubreton has returned the vile prisoner to Sharpe for justice. The British also learn that the French have admitted defeat—their strategic plan



ruined, the tactical situation has no significance, and they will retreat. The Epilogue spans several weeks. Teresa is buried; Wellington personally interviews Sharpe and praises his command decisions, and Farthingdale distances himself from Josefina. At the conclusion of the novel Hakeswill and a few other condemned prisoners are executed by firing squad as Sharpe watches.

Chapters 24 through 30 and Epilogue Analysis

Chapters 24 through 30 deal nearly exclusively with Sharpe's defense of the convent, castle, and watch tower. The action focuses heavily on the castle which Sharpe commands. He sends Frederickson to command the watchtower, and Frederickson does so with gusto and insight. Sharpe uses surprise and his rocket artillery to slaughter the French and stymie their initial attack. He uses surprise and subterfuge to slaughter the French and stymie their artillery barrage by having Harper remain in the abandoned convent and detonate a massive mine after the French move in their artillery. He uses sound basic tactics to slaughter the French and stymie their second assault by concentrating them into the courtyard and then raining bombs onto them. But this ends Sharpe's options who is then effectively awaiting defeat when his unplanned-for supporting forces arrive. Chapter 28 functions as a type of *deus ex machina* inasmuch as unexpected help appears and resolves the conflict in Sharpe's favor. Note that most of the final chapters are devoted to descriptions of combat and tactics, and the writing is particularly tense and engaging.

A secondary theme running throughout the concluding chapters is Hakeswill's capture, escape, recapture, and execution. In both instances the French capture him; he seems impervious to British attempts at justice. Hakeswill has a long and negative history with Sharpe, as detailed in other novels in the series, and his eventual execution quite obviously pleases Sharpe. As a final outrage Hakeswill murders Teresa—an act Hakeswill has long threatened. Sharpe thus finds personal tragedy amidst professional success.

Structurally, Chapter 25 marks a notable transition in the novel toward very short chapters. This culminates in Chapter 29, at barely four pages, and Chapter 30, at five pages. The Epilogue is similarly short but this is typical of novels of this type. The text concludes with a historical note of three pages that considers the historical basis of the novel and distinguishes between the historical elements (not many) and the fictive elements (the bulk of the novel).



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 some of his quiet moments wondering about the health of Teresa, his usually-distant wife, and Antonia, their infant daughter. 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 military matters. 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, initially serving with Obadiah Hakeswill, and rose through the ranks due solely to merit. In conjunction with his military service Sharpe has traveled widely. At the time of the novel's open, Sharpe is promoted to army rank of Major, though he retains the regimental rank of Captain; after his promotion he functions as a Major because he does not serve with his regiment.

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 remained in active service for many years before deserting, as described in a previous novel of the series. He made 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 personal antagonist in the novel and is a completely deplorable character; he steals, rapes, murders, and tortures many victims. 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 had an enviable history of surviving numerous certain death situations, and the superstitious



man believes he is un-killable to the very end. Hakeswill is known to be unusually devoted to his absentee mother—his devotion is something of a psychological condition. Much of the novel's secondary theme deals with the escape, capture, re-escape, re-capture, and execution of Hakeswill.

Sergeant Patrick Harper

Sergeant Patrick Harper is Sharpe's long-time friend and fellow soldier, and 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 Harper is entirely dedicated to Sharpe. Harper is possessed of great bravery and owns a curious firearm described as a "seven-barreled gun"; it 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. Aside from obvious combat prowess, Harper is otherwise resourceful. This is demonstrated in his capture of several live birds as well as his hiding and detonating the mine in the convent.

Sir Augustus Farthingdale

Farthingdale is a foppish lord and thus outranks Sharpe. Farthingdale fancies himself a leader of men and a military genius, basing his self-opinion largely upon a book about military strategy that he has written and published. The book enjoys wide circulation but most veterans view it with a highly critical eye. Farthingdale is depicted as utterly deplorable—he abuses subordinates but is obsequious to the enemy. In his first military attack he makes catastrophic mistakes in tactics that cost many British lives and abandons command after receiving a slight wound. After Sharpe has salvaged the situation Farthingdale reappears to claim victory. Aside from rank incompetence and probably cowardice, Farthingdale is personally repulsive and abrasive. He relinquishes command to Sharpe to save his own social reputation and then largely abandons his putative wife with whom he is so smitten.

Lady Farthingdale, Josefina, or La Lacosta

Josefina is a complex character with a difficult history. She is introduced in the novel as Lady Farthingdale and represented as a society woman of high birth and noble marriage. In fact, she was a high-priced prostitute who caught the eye, and then heart, of Lord Farthingdale who imagines he can parade her as a proper lady without anyone being the wiser. Sharpe, Harper, and obviously several others immediately recognize her as the famous La Lacosta, whore of Lisbon. Josefina has traveled to Andrados on a religious pilgrimage and is there captured by Pot-au-Feu's ragtag army. This spurs Farthingdale to prod the local military leaders to mount a rescue and Sharpe is put in charge of the mission. Sharpe recognizes Josefina early in the narrative but does not



disclose the information to Farthingdale until such becomes a necessary move during a process of blackmail. Josefina, thus exposed, loses Farthingdale's confidence and also access to his money, which is her primary concern.

Dubreton

Dubreton is a French major whose wife is captured and held hostage by Pot-au-Feu's ragtag army. Dubreton meets Sharpe during an early rescue attempt and the two men, though enemies, form an instant friendship. Dubreton is described as a particularly large and strong man and a veteran of many campaigns. He appears to be a competent leader of men and is entirely honorable throughout the novel but lacks Sharpe's decisive insight into tactics. While Dubreton is the French counterpart of Sharpe, Dubreton's right-hand man, Sergeant Bigeard, is the French counterpart of Patrick Harper, Sharpe's right-hand man. The French pair makes an interesting contrast to the British pair. Dubreton is grateful to Sharpe for rescuing his wife—the two men even cooperate in the early stages of the rescue—but later Dubreton assumes, wrongly, that the French will overwhelm the British.

Major-General Nairn

Nairn is the commander of British forces in the area surrounding Frenada. Nairn is normally subordinate to Wellington, but Wellington is absent during the novel. Nairn develops an easy rapport with Sharpe and the two men rapidly come to admire each other. Nairn's dry sense of humor, no-nonsense style, and success-over-substance approach to warfare make him similar to Sharpe. During the novel, Nairn delivers Sharpe's promotion to major, orders Sharpe to train the rocket battalion, orders Sharpe to proceed to Andrados, and to then personally leads the large relief force. Nairn recurs in later novels of the series.

Pot-au-Feu

Pot-au-Feu refers to himself as a marshal and leads several hundred men banded into a rag-tag army. Pot-au-Feu leads his army to Andrados and captures that city; he plans to spend the winter there and then move on. A deserter from the French army, Pot-au-Feu's army is itself composed of deserters from the French, British, Spanish, and Portuguese armies. Pot-au-Feu's right-hand man is Obadiah Hakeswill. By professional training, Pot-au-Feu is a cook—and in the novel he does cook Christmas dinner for the French and British officers. Pot-au-Feu literally translates as "pot on the fire," a reference to the man's prior occupation. In the book, Pot-au-Feu appears fairly benign and often nearly bumbling—the historical note makes it clear that the historic Pot-au-Feu was a bloodthirsty tyrant. In the narrative, Pot-au-Feu is usually represented by Hakeswill.



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—and also as Sharpe's lover. Together they have a child, a girl named Antonia. In a prior novel of the series, Obadiah Hakeswill assaulted and attempted to rape Teresa and attempted to murder Antonia. After these events Sharpe and Teresa marry and then go their separate ways while pursuing their professional obligations. Teresa's appearance in the current novel surprises Sharpe. Teresa is described as dark-skinned with black hair and is said to be exceptionally beautiful. At the conclusion of the novel, Teresa is murdered by Hakeswill.

William Frederickson

Captain William Frederickson is a company commander of a mixed group of riflemen and musket-armed infantry. He is well-liked—indeed, admired—by the men serving in his company who have given him the ironic nickname of Sweet William. He is missing his left eye, most of his right ear, and several of his front teeth. He wears a moldy patch and a few poorly-fitting false teeth, altogether having what is described as a villainous appearance. In combat Frederickson removes his false teeth and eye-patch for an appearance that alone causes many an enemy to falter. Sharpe and Frederickson meet when Frederickson is placed under Sharpe's command just prior to the initial assault on Andrados. Throughout the military phases of the novel, Frederickson executes his duty with diligence and performs flawlessly as a company commander. Frederickson's individual combat prowess probably is surpassed only by Patrick Harper. Frederickson is educated, fluent in at least English and French, and is an accomplished artist. He is adept at thinking on his feet and quickly sees the essential points of any argument. In the novel he demonstrates a keen memory and a love of architecture.



Objects/Places

The Pass of God

The Pass of God is the name given to a mountain pass that forms the primary setting of the novel. The pass sits on the transition point of a high plain leading into central Spain and a steep and rugged decline leading to Grenada and environs. The pass has been militarily significant in times past—during the current conflict it is judged insufficiently developed for major military movement. The French plan to seize the pass during a diversionary attack into Portugal. Fortunately for the British army, Sharpe happens to be there and mounts a stiff defense.

The Convent

A sturdy convent is built on the north side of the road leading through the Pass of God. The convent was built to enclose a location of rock said to have been stepped upon by a heavenly messenger. In the novel, the convent functions mostly as a basic strongpoint. Early on, it is the scene of mass murder and rape; later Sharpe rescues prisoners from the convent and then captures it; still later the French capture the convent without realizing Sharpe and Harper have set a massive booby trap. During the fighting the convent is gradually reduced until Sharpe's booby trap destroys it entirely.

The Castle

A massive but ancient castle stands on the south side of the road leading through the Pass of God. The castle was built to secure the pass as a pathway of invasion. In the novel the castle is captured by Sharpe and then repeatedly assaulted by the French forces. Sharpe uses a variety of methods to defend the castle from attack, including a highly unorthodox use of rocket artillery as hand-thrown bombs. The castle is much damaged by the various combat, but at the conclusion of the novel still stands relatively intact. Defensive elements of the castle are much-described in the latter portions of the narrative.

The Watchtower

A large watchtower is built on a prominence to the south of Andrados and to the east of the castle. The watchtower yields a fine view of the plains running away to the east, and for this reason Frederickson, stationed in the watchtower, is able to see the French attack marshaling long before Sharpe, stationed in the castle, is able to see it. During the assault the watchtower is not seriously attacked but does sustain constant canister fire from French field guns.



Pot-au-Feu's Army

Pot-au-Feu's Army is composed of deserters of all nationalities, but principally French, Spanish, British, and Portuguese. The rag-tag army apparently is arranged along a semi-military chain of command but a person's "rank" appears to be based upon their tendency to violence rather than any merit. The historical note following the novel discusses the historical group that serves as the novel's inspiration.

Congreve's Rockets

Congreve's rockets, developed by William Congreve, were a type of rocket-propelled explosive shell. They were, historically, used during the Napoleonic wars with mixed outcomes. Their use during the War of 1812 inspired the fifth line of the first verse of the United States National Anthem, "The Star-spangled Banner." As the novel suggests, they were capable of great destruction at close range but were notoriously inaccurate and difficult to successfully employ.

Rifles and Muskets

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 the riflemen in Frederickson's company, 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, pistols.

Artillery

Various types of artillery—excepting Congreve's rockets—are mentioned in the novel, including a few small antiquated Spanish pieces used by Sharpe. For the most part, however, the French use artillery in the assault on the castle. The French use both direct-fire field pieces and high-trajectory howitzers in the attack. The primary use of their direct-fire artillery consists of canister shot fired against the watchtower and environs to suppress the riflemen's sharpshooting. Sharpe contrives to destroy most of the French heavy artillery by a stratagem.

Mines

The novel presents two major uses of mines, both to great effect. In the first use, Pot-au-Feu's army heavily mines a rubble-strewn approach to the castle. Lord Farthingdale orders a massed frontal assault on the castle, and when the rubble is thick with rushing

British soldiers the mine is detonated killing dozens of men and shattering the assault. In the second use, Sharpe and Harper heavily mine the convent, and after the French capture the convent and move most of their heavy artillery into the building the mine is detonated, destroying the building and killing about 100 French artillerymen.

Live Birds

While preparing for the French attack, Sharpe orders Harper to capture as many live birds as possible. Harper secures about a half-dozen live birds. Sharpe then uses the live birds, releasing one at a time during the morning, to strengthen the illusion that the British have withdrawn from the convent and castle. The successful use of live birds as part of a deception illustrates how well Sharpe understands the military mind of the French.



Themes

Combat

Most of the novel is devoted to combat. The early sections of the novel show Sharpe being promoted for his successful prosecution of combat and show Sharpe training green recruits in artillery firing practice. The middle section of the novel describes Sharpe executing a ransom mission, a rescue mission, and leading an assault on a complex fortified strong point. Surrounding Sharpe's actions is a general backdrop of military combat involving nearly every other character in the novel. After the British defeat the rag-tag army of Pot-au-Feu, the novel moves into the second major phase of combat when the massive French forces arrive on the scene. The entire second half of the novel deals with the resulting French assault and the British forces' successful defense of the castle. Sharpe uses a variety of combat methods to achieve success. On one occasion he uses a highly-coordinated escalating assault to rescue prisoners and then capture the convent. On another occasion he uses a brutal frontal assault to capture the castle's gatehouse. During the French assaults Sharpe uses traditional defensive methods coupled with a variety of ingenious deployments to constantly surprise the French forces and keep them off-balance. Even Sharpe's personal life with Teresa, the partisan commander, is inextricably linked to combat. The novel concludes when Nairn arrives and the French withdraw. Combat is the dominant theme of the novel.

Friendship

The close personal friendship between Sharpe and Patrick Harper runs throughout the novel and forms one of the most-enduring narrative elements in the entire series of novels. Sharpe always taps Harper's abilities to achieve success. While Sharpe devises complex strategies, it often falls to Harper to execute those strategies. Thus the novel's early chapters show Sharpe and Harper experimenting with rocketry together and both men clearly valuing the other's opinion. Later, Sharpe takes Harper as his sole companion on a rescue mission and again Harper accompanies Sharpe during the attack into the convent. Harper captures live birds for Sharpe; Harper sets the massive convent mine for Sharpe, and Harper detonates the mine for Sharpe. Throughout the novel the two men are always present to support each other and their friendship is unflinching. The theme of friendship is echoed by others in the novel as well—Sharpe and Nairn develop a quick rapport; Dubreton and Bigeard are virtually doppelgängers of Sharpe and Harper; Sharpe and Teresa enjoy a complex relationship of equal parts lover, friend, and military equals. These positive friendships are contrasted to the essentially tyrannical relationship between Pot-au-Feu and his men, and especially between Hakeswill and his subordinates. Friendship forms an interesting, subtle, and complex theme in the novel.



Hatred

The novel presents a recurring theme of hatred; indeed, the novel's title suggests, somewhat misleadingly, the primary topic of the novel will consist of the enmity between Sharpe and Hakeswill. While these two men's recurrent and negative relationship is much discussed in several novels in the series, within the current novel it takes a back-seat to Sharpe's determined defense of the Pass of God. Sharpe is able to put aside his personal enmity because he is committed to performing his job with honor. Hakeswill seems far less able to set aside his hatred for Sharpe and, as a military leader of men, is less successful for this inability. Sharpe clearly hates Hakeswill but does not allow that hatred to overcome him. This is markedly contrasted by Hakeswill himself who is entirely a product of hatred—he hates Sharpe, he hates Harper, he hates Teresa; in fact, he hates everyone. Hakeswill's capering announcements that he cannot be killed appears equal parts bravado and pathos because Hakeswill even hates himself. Aside from Hakeswill's hatred, the novel also develops this theme by brutal and frank portrayal of Pot-au-Feu's behavior and the behavior of his men. Also presented is the institutionalized hatred between the French and the English, and that between the French and the partisans. Obviously for a novel set in a period of brutal war and occupation, it is not surprising to note that hatred is a dominant theme.



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 concern Dubreton, Ducos, and the other French officers as they develop their assault strategy, as well as the introductory material that considers events prior to the novel's primary timeline. The narrator divulges internal thoughts and attitudes of the protagonist and some other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are fairly 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 failure to prevent the British assault over the mined rubble field as a limitation of military command rather than as a personal failing to assert authority over Farthingdale. 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 prologue of the novel is set in Spain during December, 1812. The epilogue is set in Spain during early 1813. The novel's main chronology spans a period of time of only three days. 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 successfully invaded French-occupied Spain and successfully gained a foothold. The French army is still formidable and the British invasion is tenuous. With the coming of winter, conventional wisdom holds that most major military operations cease due to weather. The French, however, plan to use the Christmas season to launch a major incursion into British-held territory. Part of their strategic attack involves a major diversionary attack through the little-used Pass of God. Meanwhile, a rag-tag army of deserters has selected the town near the pass as their over-winter base. Sharpe and a few hundred British soldiers are sent to the town of Andrados to clear out the rag-tag army and thus happen to be there when the French arrive.

The major setting of the novel, the environs of Andrados, is well-described in the novel and a schematic map is also provided. Nearly all the action focuses on the convent and



the castle, which face each other across a narrow roadway running through the Pass of God. The village proper is not much discussed, though a secondary setting is the high watchtower. The setting is not developed overmuch, though its construction is described insofar as it applies to military operations.

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 they 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 the prologue and epilogue capture 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 customs and practices 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 through nearly the entire narrative is not required. The main characters presented are largely simple men who hold concrete notions of things such as duty, honor, and valor; the villains are thoroughly despicable and fairly one-dimensional—Ducos being an obvious exception to this. The French opponents are presented as honorable but unimaginative; Pot-au-Feu's men are presented as despicable scum without any military discipline.

Structure

The 351-page novel is divided into a prologue, thirty, numbered chapters, an epilogue, and a historical note. The prologue is set in Spain during December, 1812; the Epilogue is set in Spain during early January 1813. The novel covers about one month of time, though the bulk of the action occurs over the course of three days. The novel is the fifth-written in a series of novels extending to twenty-one novels and three published short stories; chronologically, the novel occurs fifteenth in the series. The novel includes a concise historical note, 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, excepting the first portion Chapter 28. 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. The construction makes such shifts obvious and presents to special obstacle to comprehension.



Quotes

"The village had escaped the war. It lay in that part of Spain east of the northern Portuguese border and, though it was close to the frontier, few soldiers had passed through its single street." (p. 9)

"Bells suddenly clanged from the church, jangling the still air, frightening birds into hurried flight. Nairn flinched at the sound and crossed to the window. 'Get rid of Gilliland, then we can all have a quiet Christmas!' Nairn rubbed his hands together. "Except for those bloody bells, Major, there's nothing, thank the Good Lord, that is disturbing His Majesty's Army in Portugal and Spain.'" (p. 30)

"Dubreton slung the carbine on his shoulder. He might be a Colonel, but he looked as if he could use the weapon with skill and familiarity. He looked at Harper. 'Do you speak French, Sergeant?'

'Me, sir? No, sir. Gaelic, English and Spanish, sir.' Harper seemed to find nothing odd in meeting two enemy in the Convent." (p. 60)

"Nairn growled to himself, made marks on his paper. 'You could get there without mules?'

'Of course, sir. But what if the French do come?'

'They're not there to fight us, are they? They're there to capture this Pot-au-Feu!'

'Aye, aye, aye.' Nairn was disgruntled." (p. 90)

"Three men in a room, armed, guarding a door. This had to be a guardroom. He reached past the pinned, bleeding figure, and tried the handle to the door. It was locked. Behind him he could hear shouts, the banging of muskets, but he ignored it. He pressed the catch, twisted, and the rifle came free of the bayonet that still nailed the dead man to the door, and then he had space to stand in front of the door, raise his heel, and smash it forward. The door shuddered." (p. 120)

"The Colonel's face was furious. 'There are naked men in there, Sharpe!'

Sharpe almost smiled. 'Prisoners, sir.' He had ordered a work-party of deserters to continue the hard slog of boring loopholes in the huge walls.

'Why the hell are they naked?'

'They disgraced their uniforms, sir.'

'Good God, Sharpe! You let me wife see this?'

Sharpe bit back a retort that Josefina had probably seen more naked men than Sir Augustus ever had, instead he gave a mild answer. 'I'll see that they're covered, sir.'" (p. 150)

"...Major Ford's dead too, sir.'

'Jesus!'



Brooker shrugged. 'In the back, sir. Shot.'

'Unpopular?'

Brooker nodded miserably. 'Very, sir.'

'It happens.' It did, too, though no one liked to admit it. Sharpe had once heard a Captain, knowing his unpopularity, appeal to his men before battle to let the enemy kill him. They had granted him his wish." (p. 181)

"'There's more, Major.' Ducos waited for the orderly to give Sharpe his wine. 'Have you seen your wife in the last few weeks?'

'I'm sure you know the answer to that.'

Ducos smiled, taking it as a compliment. 'I hear La Aguja is in Casatejada, and in no danger from us, I assure you.'

'She rarely is.'

The insult went past Ducos as if it had never been uttered. The spectacles flashed circles of candle-light at Sharpe. 'Are you surprised I know so much about you, Sharpe?'" (p. 210)

"Sharpe glanced at Josefina and there was shock on her face, disbelief too that Sharpe could have used the knowledge, but Sharpe's debts to La Lacosta were long paid. He walked through the room, ignoring the puzzled looks of the assembled officers, and held the door open for Sir Augustus." (p. 240)

"The General looked left, at the high tower. 'How long to take that?'

'How many Battalions, sir?' Dubreton asked.

'Two.'

Dubreton looked at the thorns, at the steepness of the hill, and he imagined the soldiers climbing into the Rifle fire.

'Two hours, sir.'

'As little as that?'

'We'll offer them medals.'" (p. 270)

"...Sharpe unfolded it. 'Partisans to north, east and south. Password tonight? Do I get a fight or not?' This time it was signed 'Captain William Frederickson, 5th Batt', 60th, retired.' Sharpe smiled, borrowed a pencil from Brooker, and rested paper on the broken ledge of the arrow slit. 'Password tonight; patience. Countersign; virtue. Expect your fight at dawn. During night no patrols of mine will go east of stream. Good hunting. Richard Sharpe.' He gave it to the Rifleman, watched him go, then gave the password to Brooker. 'And you'd better warn the sentries about Partisans. Some may want to come in in the night.'" (p. 300)

"'Fire!' The Fusilier volley drove an avenue of musket fire into the courtyard.

'Fire!' The second rank pushed past the first.

'Fire!' The third was at the front, two more behind it, while the ranks that had fired

reloaded and came up behind.
'Fire!' The archway was safe." (p. 330)

Topics for Discussion

Although the rocket artillery is capable of delivering a near-simultaneous and massive blow, it is notoriously inaccurate. Discuss how some of the other weapons in the novel have both good features and limitations. Why would the military leaders of the time accept weapons with such limitations? How does Sharpe ameliorate the rockets' inaccuracy?

Dubreton is presented as a competent military leader, and his superior officers are obviously men of great experience. Yet they are all swayed by Ducos' insistence for an en masse frontal assault on the castle. Why do you think Ducos has such unofficial influence over the men?

Farthingdale has written a widely-read book on military tactics yet he appears incapable of effectively leading men in combat. Sharpe is mostly uneducated yet is a superb combat leader. Compare and contrast Farthingdale and Sharpe—what makes one man effective while another man is not?

The British military initially views Pot-au-Feu's occupation of Andrados as an unfortunate nuisance. Fortunately Sharpe happens to be there when the French arrive. Later, one of Harper's live birds is released by accident, but the French commanding officer happens to be watching when the bird flies away, and it convinces him the castle is abandoned. What other fortuitous accidents occur in the novel? Do you think that warfare in general is won by more-or-less accidental events? Discuss.

The French enjoy more than a ten-to-one numerical superiority over the British, and the French forces appear to be composed of disciplined veterans. Yet the French cannot capture the fortress. Discuss the defensive methods used by Sharpe to stymie the French assaults. What common elements can you find behind all of Sharpe's actions?

The novel presents many brutal scenes of combat. How do you think warfare today differs from warfare during the Napoleonic wars?

The British forces are supported by partisan groups, including the group led by Teresa. In the actual stages of combat, the partisans usually pull back, preferring instead to harass the French flanks with desultory enfilading fire. Yet Sharpe is greatly relieved by partisan assistance. How do the partisans contribute to the overall victory of the British?