

Sharpe's Prey: Richard Sharpe and the Expedition to Copenhagen, 1807 Study Guide

Sharpe's Prey: Richard Sharpe and the Expedition to Copenhagen, 1807 by Bernard Cornwell

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Plot Summary

Sharpe's Prey is a novel in a series that tells the stories of the daring adventures of British Army soldier Richard Sharpe. This novel covers a time soon after Sharpe is promoted to lieutenant. Sharpe is struggling to find his place in his new rank and he is contemplating leaving the army when he is tasked with a covert mission to Copenhagen in the summer of 1807.

The novel opens as two men are fencing at an exclusive London club. One of the men is Captain Willsen, perhaps the finest swordsman in England. After the match Willsen meets Captain John Lavisser who invites him to dinner for the purpose of discussing their upcoming mission to Denmark. Along the way to dinner, Lavisser leads Willsen down a narrow alley where a man in Lavisser's employ kills Willsen.

The first appearance of the main character, Richard Sharpe, shows him in a foul mood and trying to sell his army commission. When he is unable to sell his commission, his anger increases and he seeks an outlet. He returns to the neighborhood in London where he grew up in a workhouse for orphans. Though he plans only to steal money from a man who once exploited all of the children at the workhouse, Sharpe loses control of his rage and kills the man. As Sharpe flees and contemplates a future life of crime he takes momentary refuge in a tavern popular with military officers. There he is offered the chance to go on a covert mission to Denmark. Sharpe readily accepts the offer because it gives him a way to get far away from his crime.

Shortly before departure Sharpe is introduced to Lavisser and informed that he will be the replacement for Willsen. Sharpe has no idea that Lavisser killed Willsen, but soon after their arrival in Denmark, Lavisser's treachery becomes evident. Sharpe escapes Lavisser's first attempt on his life, and knows that he now must somehow arrest Lavisser and return a large amount of gold to the British treasury. Sharpe's first course of action is to make contact with a man working for the British, Ole Skovgaard.

While for years Skovgaard has been supplying the British with intelligence on the movement of the French military, he is not at all enthusiastic to meet Sharpe. Skovgaard is furious, like most Danes, that the British fleet is approaching Denmark for the purpose of invasion, bombardment of Copenhagen, and capture of the Danish fleet. Skovgaard refuses Sharpe's initial offer of help and even detains Sharpe and intends to hand him over to Lavisser. Sharpe manages to escape and saves Skovgaard from torture by French agents. He then protects Skovgaard for several days. During this time he meets Skovgaard's daughter and begins a romantic relationship.

Once the British Army forces land in Denmark, Sharpe rejoins them. When Sharpe tells those in command what he has learned on his mission, they send Sharpe back into Copenhagen. He has three tasks. He must protect Skovgaard, kill Lavisser, and recapture the British gold.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Sharpe's Prey tells the story of Richard Sharpe, a newly promoted British army officer that has spent many years of service in the enlisted ranks. The story begins while Sharpe is stationed in England and growing dissatisfied with army life and grieving the loss of a woman and child. Just as Sharpe is contemplating leaving the army and venturing into a life of crime, he is tasked with going to Denmark on a secret mission.

Captain Henry Willsen fences a taller man. Willsen seems to be losing at first, but he regains his posture and defeats his opponent. The two men have been practicing in a club where the wealthy can learn fencing and pistol shooting. Willsen has the reputation as the finest swordsman in the country. He cannot support his family on his army pay alone, so he also teaches fencing and pistol shooting.

After the match, a young neatly dressed captain compliments Willsen. The captain speaks Danish, and this lets Willsen know that the young captain is John Lavisser. Willsen says he was not expecting to meet Lavisser until Saturday. Lavisser replies that since they will be going to Copenhagen together that they ought to get to know each other. Lavisser also asks if Willsen is curious about their mission in Copenhagen, and Willsen replies that his only concern is getting Lavisser in and out of Copenhagen safely.

Lavisser invites Willsen to dinner and Willsen accepts. As they walk outside the club on the London streets they discuss the situation in Denmark. Both men are part Danish, and they want to ensure that their mission does nothing to harm Denmark. Lavisser suggests that before dinner they should meet with a Danish official.

Lavisser suggest they take the servants' entrance in case any French agents are watching. Lavisser leads the way into a narrow alley. A man attacks Willsen from behind and stabs him. Willsen tries to reach for his sword, but Lavisser knocks it away, and says that Willsen would be an embarrassment in Copenhagen. The man who stabbed Willsen then slashes his throat. Lavisser compliments the man, Barker, and tells him to make the murder look like a robbery took place.

The narrator mentions that the date is late July 1807.

Two army agents, Mr. Brown and Mr. Belling explain to Lieutenant Richard Sharpe that he cannot sell his commission because it was given to him instead of having been purchased by him. Though they commend Sharpe on having been granted a field commission, they say that it cannot be sold. Sharpe is angry. He received the commission for saving the life of Sir Arthur Wellesley, but he has since grown disillusioned with the army and wants to sell his commission and start a new life. When



Sharpe leaves their offices, the men discuss the rumor that Sharpe lived with a wealthy woman and impregnated her.

As Sharpe walks he thinks about what brought him to his present circumstance. He had received his commission in India, and upon his return to England he was placed in a Rifle Regiment. He liked it at first, but then Grace left, and then he was assigned quartermaster duties while the rest of the regiment went away to fight.

Sharpe pays a boatman and says he wants to go to Wapping Steps. The boatman warns Sharpe that he is entering a high crime area, but it is an area that Sharpe knows well. Sharpe stops a boy on the street and asks if he knows Maggie Joyce. The boy says she has moved. Sharpe also asks who the master of the workhouse is, and the boy answers that it is Jem Hocking.

Sharpe had hoped to hear that Hocking was still in charge of the workhouse. Sharpe goes to the foundling home where he once lived. He arrives at dinnertime and asks to see the master. When Hocking arrives, Sharpe gives a fake name. Sharpe says he would like to discuss business and Hocking invites Sharpe to join him at a tavern.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The narration comes from a third-person perspective. The narrator seems more distant when speaking about characters other than Sharpe, but when speaking from the perspective of Sharpe the narrator seems to have full omniscience. This full access to Sharpe's thoughts does begin until midway through the chapter.

Willson displays a subtle but noticeable dislike for Lavisser. It seems that all of Lavisser's attempts at ingratiating himself are lost on the more stoic Willson. Both men are of Danish descent, and both men serve in the British military. At this point it is unclear why Lavisser arranged the murder of Willson.

Sharpe's anger at first the army agents and then just anger in general seems to be building to a dangerous point. He is a skilled fighter who seeks some outlet for his building rage. He seems to have a long list of grievances, and he searches for a target in order to vent his rage. In going back to Wapping, Sharpe goes all the way back to childhood grievances.

In a vivid manner of describing the impoverished conditions of the area, the narrator states that Sharpe observed some British officers in India who recoiled at the poverty and filth. Sharpe thinks that these officers must have never seen his London neighborhood. When Sharpe meets Jem Hocking, the tone of the novel has passed one of mere danger, and the reader can expect with certainty that something violent will soon occur.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

It is a Friday night and Sharpe knows that is the night that tenants in Hocking's slums will bring their rent payments to him at a backroom of a tavern. Hocking has two bodyguards with him. Sharpe buys beer for the men.

Sharpe claims that his business is in seeking drummer boys. He tells Hocking how much the army will pay, but Hocking is skeptical. He believes Sharpe, who he thinks is named Dunnett, wants something else. Sharpe says he is also interested in purchasing young girls and he wants one tonight. Hocking says he can arrange that later. In the meantime Sharpe can wait in a room or watch the dog competitions in another room. Sharpe decides to watch the dogs.

When Sharpe takes a seat, a man next to him is suspicious and brandishes a knife. Sharpe refers to him by name, Dan Price, and reminds him that they were childhood friends. Price is shocked to see Sharpe. He is even more shocked to see that Sharpe is an officer. As they watch the dogs kill rats, Sharpe asks if Dan minds that there will be trouble later. Dan says he does not mind, but he warns Sharpe to be careful because Hocking is never alone.

Sharpe goes to the room where the girl will be brought. Inside the room are badger cages and a bed. Hocking arrives with a very young girl. Hocking's bodyguards wait outside the room. Sharpe closes the door, puts the girl on the bed, and covers her head with a blanket. Sharpe places his sword to Hocking's throat and demands money. Hocking refuses, and Sharpe slashes his face with the sword. Hocking reaches for his pistol, but Sharpe disarms him. Hocking piles coins on the table, but he also throws a badger cage at Sharpe. After dodging the cage, Sharpe picks up Hocking's pistol and fires it near the door to dissuade Hocking's bodyguards from entering. Before killing Hocking, Sharpe tells him his real name.

Sharpe gives the girl some money and tells her to hide. He then turns off the lamp, opens the door slightly, positions the badger cage, and releases the badger. When the badger enters the hall, the guards panic and kill it. Sharpe bursts from the room and kills one guard and runs from the other. More men join in the chase for Sharpe, but he eludes them. As Sharpe hurries away from the area of the killing, he continually checks to ensure that he is not being followed.

After finding a tavern popular with army officers, Sharpe goes inside and requests a bed, meal, and ale. He doubts the authorities will seek him for Hocking's murder, and he hopes no one else gets blamed for the killing. Sharpe decides that after some food and a night's rest he will think of a plan. Someone places a hand on Sharpe's shoulder and says he has been looking for Sharpe.



Chapter 2 Analysis

When Sharpe spends all of the money he has in order to buy beer for Hocking and his men, it is clear that Sharpe is planning something drastic. Once the reader gets a glimpse of Hocking's character, it becomes easier to sympathize with Sharpe's hatred for the man. Hocking will gladly sell young children for exploitation.

The roughness of the neighborhood becomes evident once again when the man seated next to Sharpe brandishes a knife. What is even more surprising than the fact that Sharpe knows the man is the fact that the man does not seem the least bit troubled by the indication that Sharpe intends to do harm to Hocking. Hocking is a generally hated and feared man.

While by this point the reader has become accustomed to Sharpe's rage and it is not surprising that he intends to harm or perhaps even kill Hocking, it is surprising that a man so full of rage takes the time to do what little is possible to shield a child from witnessing violence. He seems to know that visions of violence are lasting. This indicates that Sharpe has seen a great deal of gruesome violence in his life. While the fact that he kills Hocking is not surprising, the intense brutality of the event is disturbing. Some readers may find it difficult to empathize with a protagonist that commits a violent murder so soon in the story.

While Sharpe waits in the tavern for his food and drink and tries to think of a plan, the tone is foreboding.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Major General Sir David Baird says he has been looking for Sharpe. Baird asks about Grace and Sharpe answers that she died during childbirth and that their child also died. Sharpe begins to cry and Baird commands him to stop weeping. Baird reminds Sharpe that he saved many lives in India. Baird wants to know why Wellesley promoted Sharpe. Baird had assumed it was for general bravery because he did not know about the specific event where Sharpe saved Wellesley.

Baird has tried to keep track of Sharpe's progress, and he has heard that Sharpe is an excellent soldier but a poor officer. For an upcoming mission Baird needs a tough soldier. Sharpe explains that he is thinking about leaving the army, but he does not mention that thievery is one of his future career choices. Baird encourages Sharpe to remain in the army. He says that if Sharpe is successful in the upcoming mission, he can be assured of advancement.

Copenhagen is the location of the mission, and Sharpe's task will be to protect an agent the British are sending. It will be Sharpe's job to see that the agent gets safely out of Denmark. Baird says he has transportation arranged for the following morning.

The following morning Baird is in a foul mood due to a hangover. In the carriage Baird advises Sharpe to wear civilian clothes while in Denmark. They are joined in the carriage by another passenger who does not speak. The carriage makes a stop at the Tower of London, and they take on another passenger, Lavisser.

Baird says that Sharpe is the replacement for the recently deceased Willson. Lavisser appears momentarily shocked but soon regains his composure. Lavisser says that the gold should be carried inside the carriage, and Sharpe is surprised to hear about gold. Lavisser is friendly to Sharpe and explains that their mission involves taking gold to the Danes. Lavisser introduces the passenger who has not yet spoken as Lord Pumphrey. Baird says that Sharpe is not like Lavisser or Pumphrey in that Sharpe is a tough soldier. He refers to Sharpe as a thug and tells Sharpe to recount his service in India.

The men discuss the reason for the mission. The British fear that the French will try to seize the Danish naval fleet to replace the ships the French lost at the Battle of Trafalgar. The gold will be given to the Danish Crown Prince in hope that he can be persuaded to send the Danish fleet to British ports. Sharpe asks what will happen if the Crown Prince refuses, and Baird enthusiastically says that the British will invade Denmark.

When they reach the port and get out of the carriage, Lavisser introduces Sharpe to Barker and says Barker will accompany them to Copenhagen. Pumphrey speaks to Sharpe alone and says that he worries about trusting Lavisser with a large quantity of



gold because Lavisser is in debt. Pumphrey tells Sharpe that if the mission fails he must bring Lavisser and the gold back to British control. He gives Sharpe a piece of paper with the name of an emergency contact in Copenhagen and tells Sharpe not to disclose the name to Lavisser.

Sharpe, Lavisser, and Barker take a rowboat out to a frigate named the Cleopatra. Lavisser asks about the note that Pumphrey gave to Sharpe, and Sharpe tries to lie, but Lavisser laughs and says that he knows that Pumphrey does not trust him. Lavisser thinks he knows Sharpe from somewhere, and then he realizes that he knows Sharpe from the gossip that surrounded Sharpe and Grace. At the mention of Grace Sharpe begins to become gloomy again, but Lavisser tries to cheer Sharpe and even manages to make him laugh.

The captain of the Cleopatra introduces himself, but he is not friendly or hospitable toward Sharpe and Lavisser. When Sharpe and Lavisser have the opportunity to talk further, Sharpe mentions that the only weapon he has is an ineffective saber. Lavisser says he can get any weapon he wants in Denmark, but he tells Sharpe he will not need weapons on this mission.

Below deck Sharpe changes into his civilian clothes. He also uses his picklock to break into the chest containing the gold. He takes a small amount and uses some of it to bribe a sailor to give him a cutlass and two pistols from the ship's armory. The sailor says that Sharpe must hide the weapons until he is off the ship, so Sharpe asks Lavisser to place the weapons in the chest with the gold.

When they reach Denmark, Sharpe, Lavisser, and Barker are rowed ashore on a deserted beach in the middle of the night.

Chapter 3 Analysis

It is immediately apparent that Baird thinks highly of Sharpe. He seems to feel a sort of kinship with Sharpe despite their vastly different economic circumstances. Baird thinks that Sharpe and he are both true warriors and very different from the politicians who wield control. Baird calls Sharpe a "soldier's soldier," meaning that Sharpe is a man who can focus on an expedient solution to a problem without worrying about all the political intrigues that might surround a situation. Baird's idea of a compliment to Sharpe is to refer to him as a thug.

Sharpe is not the only thug that will go on the mission. Lavisser openly admits that Barker, the man in his employ, is a former criminal of the roughest kind. The objective of the mission seems to get more complicated the nearer Sharpe gets to departure. He jumped at the opportunity to put distance between himself and the murder in Wapping, but the more he learns the more confusing the situation becomes. This is especially true when Pumphrey informs him that part of his mission includes watching Lavisser, who some in the British government do not trust.

Lavisser uses the same dazzling charm on Sharpe that he employs on others. Perhaps because Lavisser puts Sharpe off balance by mentioning Grace, Sharpe is not suspicious of Lavisser. Sharpe's immediate concern is acquiring weapons. Sharpe is thinking like a soldier.

The fact that Sharpe is skilled with a picklock says a great deal about his past. He is certainly no typical officer. He has nothing in common with delicate and sophisticated men like Lavisser and Pumphrey.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Lavisser says he must go meet his contacts and he tells Sharpe and Barker to wait. Sharpe wants Lavisser to open the chest so Sharpe can retrieve the pistols and sword, and Lavisser says that Barker has the key. After Lavisser has departed, Barker searches for the key and then claims he does not have it. Sharpe begins to use his picklock on the chest. A noise from offshore startles Sharpe, and he turns just in time to see Barker coming for him with a knife. Sharpe dodges, throws sand in Barker's eyes, and then runs into the nearby dunes.

While hiding in the dunes, Sharpe realizes that Lavisser intended to kill him all along. While Barker searches the dunes, Sharpe sneaks back to the chest, but he cannot find his picklock, and Barker returns. Sharpe returns to hiding in the dunes, and he sees a group of cavalry arrive. They search for Sharpe, and Sharpe overhears Barker and Lavisser talking. Barker apologizes for failing to kill Sharpe, and Lavisser says that Sharpe is useless.

Sharpe examines the paper that Pumphrey gave him, and he sees the name Ole Skovgaard with an address. When Sharpe thinks the cavalry have gone, he stands and discovers that he has been tricked. The cavalry left one man behind to watch for Sharpe and signal when he came out of hiding. The cavalry soldier charges at Sharpe, and Sharpe pulls him from the horse and kills him. Sharpe takes the horse and rides in an erratic circling route hoping to throw off his pursuers. Then Sharpe unsaddles the horse, hides, and waits until the cavalry abandon the search.

Sharpe walks and comes to a town. He sees men who appear to be searching for someone so he continues walking and avoids the town. He sleeps in the woods, and in the morning he finds a farm and some food. Sharpe hides in a hay wagon, and while he is resting the wagon begins to move. Since the wagon is moving in the direction of Copenhagen, Sharpe stays hidden. As he rides in the wagon, Sharpe plots revenge against Lavisser.

After Sharpe arrives in the city, he asks an old man for directions. Sharpe claims to be an American, and he finds that the residents of Copenhagen are friendly and helpful. When Sharpe arrives at Skovgaard's warehouse, he meets Aksel Bang. Bang says that Skovgaard no longer lives next to the warehouse, but Bang will take Sharpe to Skovgaard. They pass through the city gates without incident.

Upon arriving at Skovgaard's house, the first person that Sharpe encounters is Skovgaard's daughter Astrid. She is initially shocked at seeing Sharpe as if he reminds her of someone. Two men arrive and escort Sharpe to a room where Skovgaard awaits. Skovgaard is also shocked at Sharpe's physical appearance and says Sharpe looks like his late son in law.



Sharpe explains why he has come and tries to answer Skovgaard's questions. Skovgaard is not friendly and says he knows the British are coming and will try to seize the Danish fleet. He writes a letter and gives it to Bang with delivery instructions. Skovgaard reads a newspaper article to Sharpe. In the article, Lavisser is praised as a Danish patriot. Also in the article is Lavisser's statement that Sharpe has come to assassinate the Danish Crown Prince. Skovgaard then says the note he gave to Bang was sent to Lavisser. Before Sharpe can leave, Skovgaard and one of his men point pistols at Sharpe.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Tension is high as first Lavisser and then Barker deny possessing the key to the chest. The audience is aware of the danger Sharpe is in, but Sharpe has no idea that two men intend to kill him. When Sharpe escapes to the dunes and realizes the peril he faces, the audience can feel some measure of relief, but it is short lived because Lavisser soon brings reinforcements to help in the apprehension and murder of Sharpe.

As Sharpe travels, the narrator reveals how Sharpe was once briefly wealthy and how he lost that wealth. The audience can sympathize with Sharpe's feelings of resentment toward those born to privilege who use that station to prevent the rise and well being of those less fortunate.

Sharpe's first impression of Bang and Skovgaard is not at all positive. Bang is overtly religious, and Skovgaard is rude and condescending from the moment Sharpe first meets him. The condescension turns to outright hostility as Skovgaard decides to detain Sharpe. By contrast, in the brief moment that Sharpe meets Astrid, he is immediately attracted to her.

Lavisser has turned out to be a much more formidable adversary than Sharpe could have imagined. He has already succeeded in alienating Sharpe from anyone that might provide assistance.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

British ships approach the Danish shore, and Danish soldiers in a castle prepare heat shot, cannon balls heated so that they cause ships to catch fire. The fortress commander says they must wait to be fired upon. The British fire cannons, but the defenders can tell that the cannon fire contains no shot and is merely a salute.

Sharpe can find no way out of the room in which he is confined. He knows that Lavisser will kill him if he remains. The only possible way out frightens Sharpe. Sharpe knows he can try to go out the chimney, but he risks getting stuck and dying. Sharpe climbs up into the chimney and finds that it is too narrow. The only way to try is to do so naked. Sharpe enters the chimney naked and after a long and painful route, he drops into the fireplace of Skovgaard's study. There he finds his pack and his coat. He cannot get dressed until he has washed the suit away.

Outside, Sharpe finds a rain barrel and climbs inside. Afterward he goes back inside, dresses, and searches for weapons. He finds his folding knife and finds two of Skovgaard's pistols.

Sharpe goes back outside and hides while he tries to formulate a plan. He hears people approaching. One of the men appears to be Barker, and they all sneak into the house. Sharpe hears a scream and realizes that the men have come for Skovgaard as well as him. Sharpe enters the house and hides in a room. The servants are forced into the same room where Sharpe hides, and Sharpe hears Lavisser tell Barker to go to the room where Sharpe had been confined. Astrid is also held in the room with the servants. Astrid worries about her father, and a woman tells Astrid that her father must now pay for helping the English. The door closes and a single guard remains to watch Astrid and three servants. Sharpe steps out from behind the screen and disables the guard. He tells Astrid not to watch while he kills the guard. Sharpe takes the guard's pistol. He knows that he now has three shots, but he faces five adversaries.

Sharpe hears Barker saying that he has escaped, and he hears Skovgaard cry out in pain. He tells Astrid to remain in the room, and he leaves to find Skovgaard being tortured. Sharpe quickly shoots two men and aims his remaining pistol at Lavisser. Lavisser and a woman leap through a window as Sharpe fires. Sharpe hears someone cry out in pain, but he does not know if he hit Lavisser or the woman.

Sharpe frees Skovgaard and curses him for not trusting earlier. Sharpe asks who the woman was and what the group wanted. Skovgaard says she is from the French embassy, and they wanted Skovgaard to reveal the names of those that provide him with intelligence reports. Skovgaard wants to move back to his house in the city. Sharpe says that now that Lavisser has been revealed as a traitor, Sharpe's mission is to protect Skovgaard.



In a village north of Copenhagen, the local Danish watch the arriving British army. A Lieutenant Colonel approaches the villagers, and the pastor asks if the people will be harmed. The colonel assures the pastor that no one will be harmed. Riflemen arrive, and Captain Dunnett announces that the penalty for British soldiers stealing from the Danish is death. Dunnett approaches Rifleman Harper and asks what is in a nearby bag. Harper claims to have never seen the bag. As soon as the captain is gone, Harper tells another soldier that he has three chickens in the bag.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Hope that war can be averted diminishes as the British fleet passes within view of the Danish fortification. The Danish want to fire, but the commander insists on following the conventions of war even though he knows that he has passed an opportunity to fight the forces that will likely later attack Denmark.

Sharpe's journey through the chimney is harrowing. Few people would have the fortitude to endure the terrifying claustrophobic conditions and the suffocating soot. Sharpe's life full of hardship has toughened him and allows him to do things that average people cannot comprehend.

Initially it is difficult to tell whether Sharpe is more motivated by the desire to seek revenge against Lavisser or the desire to save Skovgaard from torture and death. Once Sharpe discovers French involvement in events, he quickly realizes that the needs of his mission have changed. Sharpe is proving to be more than a mere thug, and it becomes evident why high-ranking officials such as Baird have such confidence in him. Sharpe is intelligent as well as hardy.

The arrival of British land forces make war a near certainty. The ominous tone is tempered with the humor of the exchange between Harper and Murray.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The Danish Crown Prince speaks to General Peyman and Lavisser while he prepares to leave the city. The Crown Prince tells Peyman that he must defend the city for two months so that the rest of the Danish army can come to Copenhagen from southern Denmark. The Crown Prince believes that the British movements are just a bluff. He says that Denmark has no ill will toward Britain, but Denmark will not willingly surrender the fleet. Lavisser tells the Crown Prince that Skovgaard is a traitor and should be arrested and interrogated. Peyman contradicts Lavisser and convinces the Crown Prince to leave Skovgaard alone.

Skovgaard and Astrid want to watch the Crown Prince leave the city. Sharpe insists on coming along. Skovgaard is getting annoyed with Sharpe's presence and wishes Sharpe would rejoin the British army. Sharpe asks why the Danes do not move the fleet, and Skovgaard says there is no place it would be safe from the British Royal Navy.

When Skovgaard and Astrid move back into the house next to the warehouse, Sharpe checks all entrances and exits. He then speaks to Bang and says that Skovgaard is in danger and if Bang sees anyone suspicious to inform Sharpe immediately.

Sharpe accompanies Astrid on her regular visits to an orphanage. When she meets acquaintances, she tells them that Sharpe is a visiting American, and the Danes are friendly. Astrid tells Sharpe that he resembles her dead husband. She also asks Sharpe if she is in danger. Sharpe says that she is in danger if she has the same knowledge as her father, and Astrid admits that she often helped her father decode messages. She explains how people use newspapers to pass secret messages.

When visiting the orphanage, Sharpe is shocked at the humane and caring atmosphere compared to the cruel foundling home where he grew up. He tries to tell Astrid of the differences in the two places, but she does not understand. Back at Skovgaard's house, Bang and Skovgaard are growing increasingly annoyed with Sharpe and Astrid's closeness.

The following day, news arrives of the British marching toward Copenhagen. Bang joins the militia and supervises a half dozen elderly men at Skovgaard's warehouse. Bang tells Sharpe that if he does leave the city he will be arrested. Skovgaard also says that Sharpe must leave. Astrid walks with Sharpe to the city gates and says goodbye.

Mistaken for an American, Sharpe is pressed into helping the Danish civilians prepare to resist the advancing British. Sharpe meets a Danish shipbuilder named Jens who takes a liking to Sharpe. While waiting for the British advance, Sharpe sees Lavisser and Barker on horseback. Sharpe wonders if there is a way to grab Lavisser and take him to



the British. Sharpe hears the British command to open fire. He grabs Jens and forces his head down.

In the confusion of battle, Sharpe walks in search of Lavisser. Jens follows Sharpe and suddenly shoves him. Sharpe looks up to see that Barker has fired a pistol and missed. Sharpe begins loading one of his pistols, and Barker starts to come at Sharpe with a sword. When he sees that Sharpe too has a sword, Barker stops and encourages Sharpe to leave and rejoin the British. Barker says that he knows he cannot beat Sharpe with a sword, and he fights only when he knows he can win. Lavisser arrives and begins loading a pistol. Before he can finish, the British troops overtake the position, and Lavisser flees.

The British recognize Sharpe as a Rifleman and ask a few questions. Sharpe sees that Jens has been taken prisoner and tells the British soldier that Jens is with him. Sharpe then asks for directions to General Baird's location.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The Danish government is in an impossible situation. They want to maintain good relations with Britain, but it is unacceptable to simply give away their fleet to a foreign power. France threatens from the south. The Danes want to remain neutral but the British and French are creating a situation where neutrality will be impossible. One of the two opposing sides is likely to force Denmark into an alliance.

Skovgaard underestimates the danger he is in, and this leads him to fail to appreciate the protection Sharpe provides. He sees Sharpe as an annoyance at best, and a killer just the same as the French at worst. Occasionally Skovgaard's subtle insults toward Sharpe are the source of humor.

Astrid and Sharpe seem to have much in common. Both have lost spouses and children. Astrid volunteers at an orphanage, and Sharpe was raised in an orphanage.

In another instance of recurring humor, Sharpe passes himself off as an American, and once the Danes believe he is not English they are warm and friendly.

While being morally reprehensible, Barker displays a remarkable amount of self-awareness. As he tells Sharpe, he fights only when he faces a weaker or otherwise disadvantaged opponent.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Once out of sight of the British troops, Sharpe gives Jens Skovgaard's pistol and tells Jens to take it to Skovgaard. Sharpe continues toward the British encampment. Baird has Captain Gordon deal with Sharpe because Baird does not want to be associated with what he regards as a failed mission. Gordon and Pumphrey question Sharpe, and Sharpe recounts recent events. He says Lavisser is working with the French. Gordon says it is crucial that Sharpe not speak openly about recent events, and Sharpe says that if he is still an officer then Gordon can simply order him not to speak publicly. Sharpe also says that Skovgaard is still in danger, but Gordon says that Sharpe's role in the matter is finished. Before leaving, Sharpe says that the British cannot bombard Copenhagen because the city is full of women and children. Later Gordon, Pumphrey, and Baird agree that Sharpe should be commended so that Baird is not associated with a failed mission.

Jens never makes it to Skovgaard's house. He is killed on the way.

General Castenschiold speaks to an aide. They discuss British troop strength and locations. The aide says that Wellesley is in command of the nearby British troops. The majority of the troops under Castenschiold's command are simply civilians who have joined the militia, and they have the wrong caliber ammunition. Castenschiold hopes to march toward Copenhagen and engage the British before they know his forces are coming, but before they can depart, the British are sighted. Castenschiold decides to defend rather than attack.

When Captain Dunnett sees Sharpe he is extremely rude. Dunnett has never liked Sharpe. Soon thereafter, Sharpe encounters General Wellesley. Sharpe and Wellesley have not spoken in three years. General Wellesley makes brief and polite conversation. After Wellesley leaves, Dunnett again is rude to Sharpe and asks sarcastically if Sharpe knows Wellesley well.

Sharpe joins the other Riflemen in their advance on the Danes, but Sharpe feels guilty and cannot bring himself to fire his rifle. Sharpe sympathizes with the Danes as he watches the British riflemen kill them from well outside the range of the Dane's muskets. The Dane's soon retreat, but some take refuge in a church. One of the defenders shoots from a tower, and Sharpe turns and returns fire, killing the man in the tower.

When Sharpe speaks to an old man in town, he realizes he is near Lavisser's family's home.



Chapter 7 Analysis

More of Sharpe's history and relationship with Wellesley is revealed. Sharpe's promotion is the result of having saved Wellesley.

It is clear that Baird, Gordon, and Pumphrey regard Sharpe as little more than a tool. Baird refuses to speak to Sharpe while he believes that Sharpe has failed in his mission, and Gordon and Pumphrey recommend commending Sharpe not out of concern for Sharpe but because they think it will make Baird look more favorable.

The Danes have no idea of the slaughter they are heading toward in fighting the British troops. The Danish militia is composed of civilians who have no military experience, but the British troops are professional soldiers, many with battle experience.

Dunnett's jealous comments to Sharpe are humorous in an ironic sort of way. When he sarcastically asks if Sharpe knows Wellesley, he has no idea of the history between the two men.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Sharpe approaches Lavisser's family's property and sees a woman in a chair on the lawn. The woman is sleeping. Sharpe enters the house and searches for the gold. He sees a case with the initials MLV. Sharpe remembers that the woman who Skovgaard said worked for the French embassy was named Visser. Sharpe sees that the sleeping woman has crutches next to her chair. He wakes the woman and introduces himself as the man who shot her. He also asks about the whereabouts of the gold. Visser is not at all worried, and she rings a bell to summon a servant. A maid arrives, and Visser tells her to go for help. Sharpe again asks about the gold, and Visser says she has no idea where Lavisser would hide a thousand guineas. Sharpe says the figure is forty-two thousand, and for the first time Visser appears interested in what Sharpe has to say. She does not believe Sharpe intends to return the gold to the British government, and she says that her silence will cost five thousand.

Sharpe returns to searching the house, and Captain Dunnnett and six other riflemen arrive. Dunnnett declares that Sharpe is under arrest, but Sharpe insults Dunnnett and resumes searching. Captain Murray asks both Dunnnett and Sharpe to remain calm. As the tension is reaching a dangerous level, Wellesley arrives. Dunnnett tries to explain that he is arresting Sharpe. Wellesley is captivated by Madame Visser's beauty, and he asks Sharpe if he was bothering the woman, and Sharpe says he shot her. Wellesley is shocked at both Sharpe's answer and his impertinence, but then Sharpe shows him a newspaper Visser has, and both men notice the small holes under certain letters. Wellesley deciphers a coded message instructing French agents to burn the Danish ships, and he tells Sharpe to take the message to General Cathcart.

Sharpe has dinner with Cathcart and several other high-ranking British officers. Captain Chase remembers Sharpe from Sharpe's time aboard Captain Chase's ship. The officer's discuss plans to bombard Copenhagen, and Sharpe says the city contains women and children. They also discuss Lavisser's orders to burn the fleet and discuss the option of killing Lavisser. Some officers think it is impossible to get British troops inside the city, but other's point out that Sharpe managed to get inside and stay for some time. The officers decide to send a group of sailors to prevent the burning of the fleet and to send Sharpe to deal with Lavisser.

Sharpe and Pumphrey stand on a dune watching a mortar being dragged into place. They discuss the upcoming bombardment while Pumphrey paints the city skyline. Pumphrey says that Sharpe can expect to have a career full of advancement, but Sharpe disagrees. Pumphrey reminds Sharpe that both Generals Baird and Wellesley think highly of Sharpe. Pumphrey also states that some high-ranking British officials would be relieved if Lavisser is killed. Sharpe asks if there will be a reward and says that he no longer wants to be a quartermaster. Pumphrey answers that there was a recent murder in Wapping, and many witnesses claim that the killer was an army officer.



Sharpe boards a boat and is reunited with Captain Chase and other sailors he remembers from Trafalgar.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Madame Visser is a captivating figure, both in her calm demeanor and her physical beauty. Despite knowing that she is a cruel French agent, Sharpe cannot help being attracted to her, and he finds this troubling.

Dunnett hates Sharpe, and his hatred increases when once again General Wellesley shows a familiarity with Sharpe. Dunnett cannot stand that Sharpe has done something to impress the general.

Wellesley is also captivated by Visser's beauty, and his initial reaction is to act in a chivalrous manner and condemn Sharpe.

At the dinner with the high-ranking British officers, Sharpe sees that they are not at all troubled by the notion of bombing a city full of women and children.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Sharpe and the sailors go to a bomb ship to wait until it is time to enter the city. Hopper provides Sharpe with additional weapons including a seven-barreled gun. Hopper also expresses the crew's sympathy for Sharpe's loss of Grace and their son. Chase later tells Sharpe that the crew had made a crib for Sharpe's baby from ship timbers but burned it after hearing of the deaths.

Chase explains the plan. Chase himself will not go on the mission. The admiral has said that Chase is too valuable. Another officer will be in charge. The sailors will go from ship to ship disarming the incendiary devices intended to burn the fleet while Sharpe goes on his mission.

Sharpe sleeps through the day and wakes at dusk. The crew of the bomb ship is adjusting the guns in preparation for the bombardment. Chase says Sharpe will leave at midnight. Chase then claims to be ill and says goodbye to Sharpe. Sharpe joins the sailors in a launch, and they head to shore.

Once ashore Sharpe is surprised to see that Chase has come along. Chase had pretended to be sick in order to fool the admiral who had forbid him from going on the mission. The sailors follow Sharpe through the streets of Copenhagen on their way to the location of the fleet. They are surprised by the lack of sentries.

Two British officers bring a letter to General Peyman, and Peyman asks Lavisser to translate. The letter states that if the Danes will agree to move their fleet to British ports, the British will keep the ships in safety and then return them once France no longer poses a threat. Peyman sends a letter saying that the Danes will not surrender the fleet.

Chase's sailors hide in a Danish ship and Chase asks what Sharpe will do. Sharpe answers that he must catch Lavisser.

The bombardment begins, and the bombs immediately kill many civilians. After shooting exploding bombs, the British send projectiles designed to start fires. Sharpe walks to Skovgaard's house, and Astrid answers the door. She is happy to see Sharpe, but she asks why the British are bombing. Sharpe answers that they are all mad. Astrid and Sharpe go to the orphanage. General Peyman arrives, and Sharpe asks Astrid to inquire about Lavisser's whereabouts. Astrid does not get any helpful information, but when the Danes ask about Sharpe, Astrid tells them that he is an American sailor.

While they walk away from the orphanage, Astrid tells Sharpe that her father wants her to marry Bang. Sharpe asks Astrid to come to England, but she says she cannot while her father is still alive. Instead she suggests that Sharpe could remain in Denmark, and Sharpe agrees. When they arrive back at Skovgaard's house they encounter Bang who appears drunk. Bang points a rifle at Sharpe and orders Sharpe to hand over his



weapons. Sharpe pretends to comply and then strikes Bang and disarms him. Once Bang realizes that Sharpe and Astrid are romantically involved, Bang begins to cry. Sharpe puts the drunk Bang in bed.

As Sharpe prepares to go find Lavisser, Astrid asks about his intentions. He says that he will resign his commission legally once the conflict is over, but for now his job is to find and kill Lavisser.

When Sharpe arrives at Lavisser's house, he climbs a wall to get into the yard. Once in the yard, Sharpe has the strange feeling that the premises seem odd, like they are a trap. Sharpe is fired upon from inside the house, and he returns fire with a pistol and the seven-barreled gun. After he runs and reloads, Sharpe wonders why the house is fortified.

Back at Skovaard's, Sharpe lifts Bang out of bed and then throws him. Sharpe demands to know where Skovaard is. Bang claims innocence, but when Sharpe searches Bang's pockets he finds gold British coins. Sharpe holds a knife to Bang's face and demands information. Bang admits that he told the whereabouts of Skovaard in exchange for the gold. Astrid wakes, and Sharpe wants to kill Bang, but Astrid asks him not to. Sharpe locks Bang in a stable and tells Astrid he must go out again.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The friendship between Sharpe and the sailors is not limited to a friendship between Sharpe and just Captain Chase. The sailors also hold Sharpe in high regard, as revealed by their constructing a crib from ship's timbers for Sharpe's baby.

Chase's trickery in going on the mission despite being ordered not to seems like something Sharpe himself might do.

General Peyman still cannot believe that the British will attack a friendly nation, and he finds it incomprehensible that they would bombard a city full of women and children. Once the bombing begins, it is truly horrific. Scores of civilians die immediately, and then the British fire projectiles designed to start fires. This seems like the sort of strategy that would be used on military targets, not against innocent and defenseless civilians.

Bang has turned out to be more than merely a pretentious and condescending religious character. He has committed a cruel and traitorous act out of greed.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Sharpe returns to the harbor and tells Chase that he needs two men. Chase does not like the idea of participating in rescuing Skovaard and killing Lavisser because the order does not come from official military channels, but he says that Hopper and Clouter will accompany Sharpe. Well armed, the three men go to Skovaard's house.

Peyman tours the devastation in the city. Lavisser knows about the intruder at his house the night before, and though he worried it was Sharpe, Barker assures him that it was most likely a common thief. Peyman says that he hopes that a reduced number of bombs might mean that the British are running out of ammunition.

Sharpe still wants to kill Bang, but Astrid says not to. Sharpe wakes Clouter and Hopper, and the three men make bombs. Because all the men in Lavisser's house are likely French or agents of the French Sharpe tells Clouter and Hopper that the plan is to kill everyone. They leave each carrying a bomb.

After detonating their three bombs, the men enter the house, and Sharpe charges up the stairs. At the top of the stairs Sharpe fires his seven-barreled gun and is then joined by Hopper and Clouter. They kill several men and find Skovaard alive but suffering after having been tortured.

Sharpe carries Skovaard out of the house, and Astrid screams. She has come because she was worried about Sharpe. Skovaard must get medical attention, but they know that Lavisser will search for him at hospitals. They take him to the orphanage. Sharpe, Clouter, and Hopper discuss the situation. Captain Chase needs to know that his men are all right, and Sharpe says that they are free to return to the harbor, and he will stay at the orphanage.

Peyman calls a meeting and says that he believes the British are running out of ammunition, and Copenhagen will continue to resist. A hospital official gives a dire report. Lavisser and Barker discuss the assault on the house. They know the bombing was not part of the naval bombardment, and Barker says that one man survived and identified Sharpe. Barker says that the gold is still probably in the house, but Lavisser is much more concerned about the list of names he got from Skovaard.

Lavisser requests twelve Danish soldiers to help him. He gives a false reason for needing them. When they reach Skovaard's house, the maid says that Bang is locked up in the stable. Bang says he knows Skovaard's location.



Chapter 10 Analysis

Captain Chase is understandably hesitant to get his men involved in Sharpe's unconventional war. He finds the secret dealings of Pumphrey distasteful. He allows his two best men to accompany Sharpe because of friendship.

Peyman and the Danes persist in believing that anything less than carnage will result in continuing to resist British demands. Peyman's belief that the British have a finite amount of ammunition is naïve.

Clearly Sharpe, Clouter, and Hopper are three battle-experienced men. They use bombs and superior tactics to defeat a larger number of adversaries in a fortified position.

With Bang's revelation that Astrid knows everything about Skovaard's contacts and that Bang knows her location, the tension and the danger to Astrid increases. While Sharpe is guarding Skovaard, he has no way of knowing that Lavisser knows his exact location and has command of a group of military men.



Chapter 11 and Historical Note

Chapter 11 and Historical Note Summary

Sharpe agrees that Hopper will go back to report to Captain Chase, and when the battle is over they will go to Lavisser's house and look for the gold. Astrid and Sharpe discuss plans, and Sharpe wonders what it will be like to leave the army. A bomb explodes nearby, and Sharpe covers Astrid. Because the Danes have not surrendered, the British increase the bombing.

Peyman gives an order to Lavisser's aide to burn the Danish fleet but the aide cannot find Lavisser.

Sharpe and Clouter rescue the children, and Sharpe tells Astrid to flee. Lavisser and the Danish soldiers arrive, and Sharpe and Clouter face them. A bomb kills all of the Danish soldiers, and Lavisser calls to Sharpe. Lavisser and Bang stand together, and Bang restrains Astrid. Sharpe tells Clouter to watch out for Barker, and Sharpe takes careful aim with his rifle and kills Bang. Barker fires at Sharpe but misses. Sharpe kills Barker with a pistol.

Lavisser tries to bribe Sharpe with money and promises of gifts from Napoleon. Sharpe shoots Lavisser's hand off and then pushes Lavisser off a balcony and into a raging fire.

The following morning Copenhagen surrenders. Sharpe, Chase, and a dozen sailors dig for the gold at Lavisser's house. Pumphrey arrives and Sharpe gives Pumphrey the list of names and says that Skovaard will be in danger once the British leave. Pumphrey promises to try to help Skovaard.

Skovaard forbids Astrid to marry Sharpe, and Astrid cannot disobey. Sharpe gives Astrid his share of the gold and tells her to use it to rebuild the orphanage.

Pumphrey tells Baird that he needs Sharpe out of Copenhagen. He says that the people that Sharpe kept alive are no longer needed.

As Sharpe leaves the city he decides that he will remain in the army.

The 1807 British attack on Copenhagen was far more devastating than the one six years earlier, but the earlier one is generally remembered more often. The 1807 attack killed 1600 civilians and caused a huge amount of property damage. Historians are still unsure why the Danish did not burn the fleet. No British soldiers were involved in preventing the burning. Perhaps in the confusion of battle the order was not given or perhaps Peyman feared reprisals if the British were denied their prize.



Chapter 11 and Historical Note Analysis

Finally, Peyman acknowledges that he cannot continue to resist the British and save the fleet. However, by the time he gives the order to burn the fleet, Lavisser is off on his private and dishonorable mission.

True to character, Lavisser thinks he can rely on his charm until the very end. Sharpe could have killed him in a more efficient way, but Sharpe kills Lavisser in an intentionally slow and brutal manner perhaps as a means to vent his anger and perhaps as a way to show his contempt for Lavisser's lack of honor.

Pumphrey is not interested in recovering the British treasury's gold. He thinks the list of names is far more valuable. Though he tells Sharpe that he will try to protect Skovgaard and Astrid, Pumphrey's comments to General Baird are sinister and frightening. Though not entirely clear, it seems like Pumphrey may be saying that he intends to arrange for the murder of Astrid and her father.

Perhaps the reason that the 1801 conflict between Britain and Denmark is better covered than the 1807 assault in the English history books is because the English still bear some guilt over the later attack. The most remarkable thing about the brief historical note is the amount of actual history that the author was able to incorporate into this fictional work.



Characters

Lieutenant Richard Sharpe

Richard Sharpe is first described as tall, dark, and angry. In our first introduction to him, we learn that he hopes to sell his army commission. When that fails, Sharpe resorts to murder and robbery. He comes across as an opportunist looking for easy wealth. This first impression of Richard Sharpe is false.

Sharpe is the veteran of several battles, particularly in India. In many of those battles, Sharpe distinguished himself. An act of heroism caused his promotion from the ranks to officer, but this past full of bravery and service does not guarantee Sharpe preferential or even equal treatment in the army. Many resent his promotion from the ranks, and Sharpe is further hampered by grief over the loss of a woman and a baby.

Sharpe came from the most unlikely background for a British officer. He was raised in a foundling home, a cruel exploitive environment where even if one survives permanent physical and mental scars remain. The army provided the only avenue for stability in Sharpe's life, and he worked hard. He became a skilled soldier.

There is more to Sharpe than being a good soldier and fighter. He is capable of being a kind and compassionate man. When possible he always shields others from trauma as he does with the young girl before the murder of Hocking and the servants and Astrid before the killing of the French guard. Though poor and with no assets beyond his meager army pay, Sharpe donates all of his captured wealth to the rebuilding of an orphanage.

Captain John Lavisser

The most vivid way to think of the antagonist is as the exact opposite of Richard Sharpe. Whereas Sharpe was born into squalor, Lavisser was born into nobility and wealth. Sharpe is battle scared, but Lavisser is extremely good looking and clad in sartorial splendor. Sharpe feels uncomfortable in social situations, the perennial outsider. The social milieu of the privileged class is the environment Lavisser feels most comfortable, and he uses his good looks, charm, and social connections to promote his self-interests, which are often deceitful and dishonorable. Sharpe who has nothing but his desire for dignity hangs onto his notion of honor except when grief and frustration cause him to stumble.

Beyond these obvious differences, the two men do employ similar methods. Both are capable of murder. Sharpe does so out of necessity or in a moment of weakness. Lavisser does so as simply a cold and calculated means to an end. Lavisser wants even more wealth and leisure than he already has, and the easiest way to do that is to steal from the British and ally with the French. He has no qualms about doing that. In fact, once he is in debt and has made the decision to betray England, he gives more



promissory notes, debts he can never repay, and effectively ensures that his only option is to go through with the treachery. This is a course of action that Lavisser embarks on with a sense of delight.

Astrid Skovaard

Astrid Skovaard is the daughter of Ole Skovaard, the man who has been supplying the British with intelligence reports on the movement of the French military for years. She has something in common with Richard Sharpe in that she recently lost a spouse and child. It is not these commonalities that form the most significant basis for a relationship between Astrid and Sharpe. Astrid's ability to see what no one else sees in Sharpe is what makes her most notable.

Astrid is capable of seeing the qualities in Sharpe that no one else sees or would believe exist. She sees the kind and caring side to the man. When she takes him to visit the orphanage where she volunteers, she sees that he has an easy way with the children, and while she cannot comprehend the difference between the humane environment of her orphanage and the cruel atmosphere of Sharpe's workhouse, she sees that somehow Sharpe has the ability to empathize with these children who have no one.

Lord William Pumphrey

Lord Pumphrey is an enigma, but Sharpe cannot help liking the man. Pumphrey on the surface appears to be effeminate and fragile, but he is not at all hesitant to order the murder of people who pose threats to Britain. He seems to be almost sociopathic, but at the same time he seems to have a genuine fondness for Sharpe. Pumphrey was a schoolmate of Lavisser's at Eton, and the two men do exhibit some similarities, but whereas Lavisser is entirely self-serving, Pumphrey is unwavering in his devotion to England.

Aksel Bang

This employee of Ole Skovaard is overtly pious and condescending. He covets Skovaard's wealth, and his professed attraction to Astrid may simply be a means to get at Skovaard's wealth. He seems to be inept in most things, but his betrayal causes the most harm to Astrid and her father.

Ole Skovaard

This aging Danish merchant was once married to an English woman. For years he has been collecting information from a network of informants and supplying the information to England. Despite his alliance with England, Skovaard despises the British for



attacking Copenhagen. On a lighter side, some of his witty attacks on Sharpe provide some of the humor in the novel.

Barker

This former "footpad" or mugger is in the employ of Lavisser. He performs Lavisser's dirty work such as the murder of Captain Willsen.

General Ernst Peyman

This man is in charge of the defense of Copenhagen. He continues to retain hope that the city can somehow resist overwhelming odds and the Danes can keep their fleet.

Crown Prince Frederick

This prince is the head of the Danish government because his father the king is mentally unstable. The Crown Prince orders General Peyman to resist the British attack until the Danish army can return from the south.

Captain Henry Willsen

This man is considered the finest swordsman in England. To supplement his army pay he teaches fencing and pistol shooting.

Jem Hocking

This cruel man is the master of the orphanage and workhouse where Sharpe grew up. He uses the children for his own financial gain and he owns several slums.

Lady Grace Hale

A distant cousin of Sir Arthur Wellesley, this woman met and fell in love with Sharpe on his way back to England from India. She died while attempting to give birth to Sharpe's child.

Major General Sir David Baird

This high-ranking British officer admires Sharpe's skill as a fighter and enlists his help in performing a secret mission in Denmark.



Sir Arthur Wellesley

This man, later known as the Duke of Wellington, promoted Sharpe from sergeant to lieutenant after Sharpe saved his life.

Madame Visser

This diplomat attached to the French embassy in Copenhagen is as beautiful as she is cruel.

Captain Joel Chase

This naval captain is a friend of Sharpe's. He is in charge of preventing the burning of the Danish fleet and allows two of his men to assist Sharpe in finding Lavisser.

Hopper

This sailor thinks highly of Sharpe and helps him to rescue Skovaard.

Clouter

This sailor helps Sharpe rescue the children from the orphanage, and he helps Sharpe defeat Lavisser and Barker.

Captain Warren Dunnnett

This British officer is jealous of Sharpe's record of bravery and often insults Sharpe.

Jens

This Danish shipwright befriends Sharpe just before the British attack the Danish militia. When Barker is about to shoot Sharpe, Jens pushes Sharpe to safety.



Objects/Places

Wapping

This is an area of London near the Thames River. It is where Sharpe grew up.

Copenhagen

This capital of Denmark is bombarded by the British in 1807 in an effort to capture the Danish naval fleet.

Footpad

This is a term for a robber who preys on pedestrians. Barker is a former footpad.

Heat-shot

This is the practice of heating cannon balls before they are fired so that they will start fires in wooden structures. It is particularly effective against wooden sailing vessels.

Bomb ship

This type of vessel is armed with mortars for bombarding places on land. Many of these ships are sailed near Copenhagen where they conduct the devastating bombardment.

95th Rifles

These elite light infantry troops wore a green uniform instead of the usual red uniforms of British soldiers.

The French Horn

This tavern is popular with British Army officers. It is here that Sharpe meets General Baird and agrees to go on the mission to Denmark.

Trafalgar

The Cape of Trafalgar is located in the southwest of Spain. In 1805 the Battle of Trafalgar took place, and the British destroyed the French navy. Sharpe took part in that battle.

Jutland

This is the mainland portion of Denmark.

Zealand

This large Danish island is the location of the capital, Copenhagen.



Themes

Duty and Desire

In real life and in fiction, people are often torn between desire and obligation. This theme is especially true of Richard Sharpe.

The first time we see Sharpe he is full of rage and looking for a way to vent that rage. He has also decided to desert the army and embark on a life of crime. This Richard Sharpe at the beginning of the novel has succumbed to emotion after grave disappointments including the death of loved ones and seeing his army career stall. The opportunity to go on a mission for General Baird is initially little more than a convenient escape for Sharpe, but once he is put in a military situation where his talents and skills are appreciated, his old sense of duty starts to return.

The further Sharpe goes into the mission, the more both his sense of desire and duty return. When Sharpe begins to fall in love with Astrid, this fuels his desire to protect her and this goal coincides with his military duties. Later when Astrid suggests that they could have a life together, Sharpe agrees but says that he will leave the army only if he does so legally by resigning his commission once the current conflict is finished. This is in marked contrast to the Sharpe that committed a murder and robbery in his rash plan to depart the army and what he saw as a miserable life.

Both duty and desire work together to restore Sharpe. They took him from being a resentful empty man to being once again a talented and valuable soldier. In a way, duty and desire made Sharpe feel alive once again.

Wealth, Status, and Character

A recurring theme throughout Sharpe's Prey is that of privilege and status based on wealth and power versus status based on merit and performance. Richard Sharpe came from an impoverished background, but he has worked hard and used his natural talents to succeed. Sharpe has been rewarded for his performance by promotion from the enlisted ranks to an officer's commission. But other far less talented and experienced men have been given far greater rewards because of their wealth and social standing.

A vivid example of the different social classes and how that condition is not always an indicator of character comes early in the novel. Both Sharpe, the protagonist, and Lavisser, the antagonist, commit brutal cold-blooded premeditated murders early in the story. Sharpe who comes from a cruel and impoverished background commits a murder out of rage and a longing for vengeance. Lavisser commits murder, or rather arranges a murder, out of cold emotionless avarice. While the audience might be more sympathetic to Sharpe's actions, both events are still crimes of the worst sort. The only distinguishing element seems to be that Lavisser commits murder by choice, and Sharpe is driven to murder.



Lavisser, who was born into wealth and privilege, has a choice. He chooses to commit murder because it is the most expedient path to his goal of more wealth and leisure. Sharpe, who is no stranger to backbreaking work, commits murder when a time of emotional turmoil makes his life of having been so often exploited seem unbearable. He seeks out one of his earliest and cruelest exploiters. In the end, it seems that character has little to do with wealth and status.

Glory, Terror, and the Real Victims

Often accounts of warfare, especially older accounts that contain notions of valor and glorious adventure portray war and violence as a valiant quest. Many contemporary movies portray instances of violence as exciting. No such romantic vision exists in Sharpe's Prey. Violence is portrayed as it really is. It is nasty, brutish and deadly.

In the scenes depicting fighting, there is nothing glamorous. Early in the novel Sharpe commits a horrific murder. The narrator says the blood gushed like a fountain when Sharpe cut into Hocking's throat, and later another character refers to the incident as a decapitation. The abduction and torture of Skovaard is perhaps even more horrifying in that Skovaard is not an offensive character like Sharpe's victim. Skovaard, an old man, has teeth forcibly extracted, an eye gouged out, and the bones in his hands mangled and crushed beyond repair.

In such a pitiless environment, even those usually thought to be shielded during time of war are the most common victims and targets. The bombs that the ships lob into Copenhagen kill women and children. Sharpe witnesses the death of many such children in the orphanage that is bombed.

Aside from the actual moments of deadly violence, even the environmental conditions are uncomfortable at best and tortuous at worst. One of the first things the British do upon landing in Denmark is to cut the water supply to Copenhagen. This lack of water will affect the civilians every bit as much as the military troops.

While other works of fiction might portray war and violence as something that happens between willing participants, Sharpe's Prey shows how the most common victims of violence are often the innocents.



Style

Point of View

Sharpe's Prey is told by an omniscient and third-person narrator and comes primarily from the perspective of the protagonist Richard Sharpe. However, the narrator can and does access the thoughts of other characters, and he does so often at length.

The perspective of Sharpe gives the novel its predominant tone and voice. Richard Sharpe is a newly promoted officer in the British army. While he is new to being an officer, he is no stranger to the army, and Sharpe has seen many battles. He tends to view things in pragmatic terms, and during this particular time in his life he is still suffering from the loss of his beloved and their child. Sharpe's background as an impoverished orphan also colors his perspective. Sharpe's calm reserve in the face of danger and his understanding of the unfairness of the control by the rich and powerful governs the way Sharpe and sometimes the audience understands situations and events.

Because the narrator can access and relay the inner thoughts of characters other than Sharpe, readers get a more complete picture of historical events than if we saw them only from Sharpe's perspective. Usually the narrator resorts to using other characters' perceptions to tell the story when Sharpe is not physically present. Examples of this include conversations between both high-ranking Danish officials and high-ranking British officials.

By presenting the novel primarily through the eyes of Sharpe, the narrator allows us to see the other characters through the discerning and critical eye of a man who has had to rely on his powers of keen observation for his survival.

Setting

The primary setting of Sharpe's Prey is determined more by the time than place. It is this element of time in the setting that all contemporary readers will find the most unfamiliar. The novel is set over two hundred years previous to our contemporary early twenty first century vantage. Because of this, the setting of Sharpe's Prey, like other historical novels that endeavor toward historical accuracy, is of vital importance.

The opening setting is the summer of 1807 in London. The reader can enjoy vivid accounts of London, although some are not scenes we might expect. The poverty and squalor of Sharpe's old neighborhood of Wapping is shocking. Sharpe's boat ride down the Thames is certainly unfamiliar to us accustomed to contemporary forms of metropolitan transit.

From London the setting switches to Copenhagen, a beautiful city then as now. At the time of the novel, the city is still enclosed by fortification walls, and the streets are filled



with pedestrians and horse drawn carriages. The narrator also provides limited but vivid accounts of the pastoral areas surrounding Copenhagen.

One interesting and unexpected element of setting rests on the narrator's contrasting descriptions of London and Copenhagen. The portions of the novel set in London have the tone of a gray dreary place of congestion and filth. Copenhagen on the other hand is described as an open and airy place where residents enjoy being outdoors. In many ways the narrator's vivid description of the beauty of Copenhagen add to the feeling of tragedy once the bombardment begins.

Language and Meaning

Despite being set in the early nineteenth century, Sharpe's Prey is presented in contemporary language. This makes the setting and the subject, the adventures of a man two hundred years ago, more accessible to modern readers. And while some may think at first consideration that the use of modern language is inadequate to present a world two hundred years gone, this is not the case with Sharpe's Prey.

In many cases, the names of specific items and practices are kept the same, but in each instance where a modern reader will be unfamiliar with a word or phrase, the author gives an outright definition or enables the reader to understand via context. Few readers besides military historians or fans of historical fiction will know what "heat-shot" is, but the author goes into sufficient detail in describing the practice of heating cannon balls before they are fired at a wooden structure such as a sailing vessel. And the author manages to provide these definitions without intrusive exposition that detracts from progression of the plot.

Perhaps the most striking use of language occurs in the scenes where battles are fought. The narrator makes no effort to conceal the brutal nature of armed conflict. On the contrary, all of the bloody and cruel horrors of violence are vivid and terrifying.

Structure

The structure of Sharpe's Prey is entirely linear and chronological. The plot, or rather the action, moves from beginning to end. Chapter 1 begins the murder of Captain Willsen, and the final chapter ends with Sharpe's triumph over the villain and antagonist. The novel contains no notable passes of flashback. It is non-stop chronological action from beginning to end.

The novel is divided into eleven chapters and a Historical Note section. The narrative is continuous and unbroken. Where one chapter ends the next begins. Often one chapter ends on a cliffhanger, which leaves a principle character in some element of danger, and then the next chapter opens with that character facing harm or finding a way out of the circumstance.

Possibly the most notable aspect of the structure is the way the author keeps the action and tension escalating in a nearly unending race to the finish. Time and time again it seems that Sharpe has become burdened with troubles he can never hope to escape. And little or no resolution is achieved until the very end. Even at the novel's conclusion, the action keeps its breakneck pace. Not until the very last pages, do we know whether Sharpe has triumphed and whether or not he will remain in the army.

The Historical Note section provides a compliment to the story. The author distinguishes between historical fact and creative fiction. Rather than focus on how much of the novel is composed of fiction, most readers will be surprised to learn how much is taken directly from historical records.



Quotes

"The Rifles were a new kind of Regiment, prizing skills and intelligence above blind discipline. They worked hard, rewarded progress, and encouraged the men to think for themselves. Officers trained with the men, even drilled with them, and the hours that other regiments wasted in pipe-claying and stock polishing, in boot-licking and tuft-brushing, the greenjackets spent in rifle practice" (Chapter 1, pg. 13.)

"'Yes,' Sharpe said, and the bitterness was unassuageable now, drenching him, consuming him, and the years of pain and misery were driving his right arm as he sawed the blade hard and fast across Hocking's throat. Hocking's last shout was abruptly cut short as a fountain of blood sprang up" (Chapter 2, pg. 34.)

"Sharpe liked Baird. Most soldiers liked Baird. He might be a general, but he was as tough as any man in the ranks. He could outswear the sergeants, outmarch the Rifles and outfight any man in green or scarlet" (Chapter 3, pg. 43.)

"'Then I shall educate you, Lieutenant. France and Russia are now friends while Prussia is reduced to a husk. Napoleon commands Europe, Lieutenant, and we all live under his shadow. Yet he lacks one thing, a fleet. Without a fleet he cannot defeat Britain, and there is only one fleet left in Europe that can challenge the Royal Navy'" (Chapter 4, pg. 86.)

"He wrapped the pistol in the hem of his jacket to muffle the distinctive sound of the flint being cocked. He had been out of his depth ever since he had arrived in Denmark, enduring insult, religion and imprisonment, but now he knew what he was doing. He was back where he belonged and he was smiling as he stepped out from the screen" (Chapter 5, pg. 103.)

"Sharpe took off his greatcoat and rescued his discarded pistol. A group of redcoats came down the slope. Their coats had blue facings, Welch Fusiliers, and their muskets were tipped with bayonets that pointed toward Sharpe" (Chapter 6, pg. 144.)

"Major General Sir David Baird had a musket wound on his left hand and another rivulet of blood where a ball had grazed his neck, but he was feeling ebullient. He had led a brigade into the gardens, ejected some Danish regulars, massacred some brave idiots fro the militia and now watched as his men secured the southern ground that would finally isolate Copenhagen from the rest of Zealand" (Chapter 7, pg. 147.)

"Sharpe, as an officer, should not have carried a longarm, but he liked the Baker rifle and so he had collected one from the regimental surgeon who had a small armory of weapons that belonged to his patients. The rifle was much less cumbersome than a musket, was far more accurate and had a squat, brutal efficiency that appealed to Sharpe" (Chapter 7, pg. 160.)



"'After you left Harwich, Sharpe,' Lord Pumphrey said with evident enjoyment, 'and before we ourselves embarked on a most uncomfortable vessel, a strange report came from London. A distressing murder in Wapping, of all places. Nothing strange in that, of course, except that a dozen witnesses swear that the criminal was an army officer. What do you make of that, Sharpe?'" (Chapter 8, pg. 189.)

"The city seemed asleep, not just the civilians, but the garrison too. There was an innocence here, Sharpe thought. Copenhagen might be under siege, yet still the city wanted to carry on with its ordinary life. No one wanted war and Sharpe sense that the folk perversely believed it would go away if they ignored it" (Chapter 9, pg. 195.)

"Some folk took refuge in the churches, believing there would be sanctuary from the enemy in sacred walls, but the churches burned as easily as the houses. One bomb exploded in an organ loft, scattering pipes like straws. Another killed ten people in a nave" (Chapter 9, pg. 202.)

"Peyman watched as a group of sailors dragged charred rafters aside to retrieve a body. He did not want to know how many were dead. Too many. He knew he must visit the hospitals, and he dreaded it, but it was his duty" (Chapter 10, pg. 224.)



Topics for Discussion

What stops Sharpe's self-destructive behavior in London? Is it the offer to go on a mission? Does sanctioned violence stop his urges to commit acts of unsanctioned violence such as the murder of Jem Hocking?

Both the protagonist and the antagonist begin their roles in the story by committing murder. Does Sharpe's murder of Jem Hocking have the same effect on the reader as Lavisser's murder of Captain Willsen?

Lavisser is charming and capable of dazzling others with his wit and good looks. Sharpe is dour and matter-of-fact. Does Lavisser's charm make him more dangerous?

Baird calls Sharpe a thug and this is an assessment that Sharpe seems to agree with but Sharpe has been rewarded for heroics in the past. Barker is certainly a thug. What qualities distinguish a thug from a hero?

Pilfering or stealing from civilians is strictly forbidden. How does this notion compare with the notion of "prizes of war" where high-ranking officers are allowed to keep money or profit from captured property, such as the captured Danish fleet?

In most tales of adventure, there are clear distinctions between the good forces and the bad forces, but in Sharpe's Prey those lines are blurred. Sharpe's Prey comes from the perspective of a British soldier, so one would expect the British to be the good guys. Which of the British officials might not be considered to be a good guy?

Sharpe's Prey, like the other novels in the Sharpe series, is a work of historical fiction. How does knowing that much of the story actually took place affect your enjoyment of the novel?