

Sharpe's Tiger Study Guide

Sharpe's Tiger by Bernard Cornwell

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Contents

Sharpe's Tiger Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	8
Chapter 4.....	10
Chapter 5.....	12
Chapter 6.....	14
Chapter 7.....	16
Chapter 8.....	17
Chapter 9.....	19
Chapter 10.....	20
Chapter 11.....	22
Characters.....	24
Objects/Places.....	28
Themes.....	30
Style.....	32
Quotes.....	35
Topics for Discussion.....	37



Plot Summary

In 1799 Richard Sharpe contemplates deserting from the British army in India but not out of cowardice. Private Sharpe only wants to better his life somehow with Mary Bickerstaff who is his love interest. However, Sergeant Obadiah Hakeswill sets up Sharpe for a severe flogging by goading him into a fight witnessed by an officer and an ensign. While receiving his flogging that would have likely killed him, General Harris sends for Sharpe.

Harris offers Sharpe a promotion to sergeant if he joins Lieutenant Lawford in a plan to rescue Colonel McCandless, who has been captured by the enemy and is imprisoned in the city of Seringapatam, capital of the Mysore Kingdom. Sharpe agrees and leaves with Lawford the next morning. While preparing to move into enemy territory disguised as deserters, Mary joins the two men.

The cavalry of Tippoo Sultan who is the king of Mysore, captures Sharpe, Lawford, and Mary. The men must agree to joining with the Tippoo's forces and Mary must work in the house of General Appah Rao. Tippoo allows Sharpe and Lawford to serve under Colonel Gudin of the French army who serves as a military advisor to the king. The British army arrives and begins preparations to breach the two walls surrounding the city. Unknown to the British command, Tippoo has been building a huge black-powder mine with the intention of destroying most of the invading army by means of a single massive blast between the walls. McCandless knows of this plan from Rao, who had warned of the mine and its location on the west walls of the city before McCandless was captured. McCandless manages to tell Sharpe about the mine in the hope that Sharpe can deliver the news to the British command.

Sharpe's only chance to deliver the news comes when Gudin orders him to ride a horse toward a fight in a wooded area outside the city and try to confuse the British. Unfortunately, Sharpe finds Hakeswill and they engage in a time-wasting fight. Hakeswill and other British soldiers are captured, and Sharpe's chance slips away.

Hakeswill reveals Sharpe's and Lawford's true identities, and Tippoo throws them in the dungeon with McCandless. Hakeswill is held in the dungeon as well, the Tippoo having spared his life for betraying Sharpe and Lawford. A large tiger is released when the two guards leave for the night or for other reasons. Meanwhile, Mary has agreed to marry one of Rao's relatives and is given a loaded pistol for killing herself if she must during the upcoming battle. She instead throws the pistol to Sharpe so he can kill the tiger and escape the dungeon. He does this and sets off the black-powder mine before it can do its damage to the British army. The British take the city, Sharpe kills Tippoo, and the British army promotes Sharpe to sergeant, but Hakeswill still lives even though Sharpe threw him to six chained tigers. Sharpe sees the skin of the tiger that he had shot draped over Tippoo's coffin, which ends the story and gives meaning to the title.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Richard Sharpe, a private in the Thirty-third Regiment of the British army, observes vultures while he contemplates desertion. The vultures circle over dead pack animals and will soon be circling over dead soldiers. Sharpe has seen action only once and that battle had lasted just a few minutes. Sharpe is stationed in India where resistance to British rule continues and the year is 1799. The French have been helping the Indian resistance while Napoleon carries out his campaign in Egypt (1798-1801.)

Sharpe talks with another private about the terrible Sergeant Hakeswill, and a few ineffective cannon rounds are shot their way. The army is moving toward Seringapatam, the capital city of the Kingdom of Mysore and ruled by Tippoo Sultan. Hakeswill challenges Sharpe about talking while on the march and demands to inspect his musket. Unknown to Sharpe, Hakeswill takes the flint out of the musket and replaces it with an ordinary stone. He later tries to entrap Sharpe into a flogging offense, but Sharpe had checked his flint, found the stone and replaced it with a good flint. Meanwhile, Tippoo's troops advance and the British prepare a firing line of seven hundred musketeers. The battle is short and decisive for the British because Tippoo had not used cavalry to reinforce his advancing infantry. The British fire a single volley and charge with fixed bayonets into the Tippoo's troops. Tippoo watches the defeat of his infantry with a French colonel named Gudin who acts as an advisor and suggests the use of cavalry before the fight begins. Tippoo ignores him.

Sharpe tries to find money on an enemy officer whom he had bayoneted in the throat. He finds the coins in the dead officer's turban while the British cavalry finishes off the rest of Tippoo's infantry.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces Richard Sharpe, the hero of the story, and Sergeant Hakeswill, Sharpe's first primary antagonist. Richard had been lowborn to a prostitute who abandoned him shortly after his birth. He then lived a rough life before joining the British army and is greatly underestimated by Hakeswill. Hakeswill is an abusive sergeant who demands more of his men than is necessary, such as remaining quiet while on the march. Sharpe has no love for Hakeswill and considers him less than human.

The extreme animosity between Sharpe and Hakeswill is shown through the attempted entrapment that Hakeswill engineers. He replaces Sharpe's musket flint with an ordinary stone and accuses Sharpe of having sold the flint, but Sharpe is too smart for the sergeant. Sharpe is also more clever, as indicated by his needling of Hakeswill after the failed entrapment. This sets up the heroic character as being very tough and intelligent while still thinking about deserting the army but not out of cowardice. He simply wants a



better life for himself and Mary, a character who is briefly mentioned and for whom Sharpe may have romantic feelings.

The author gives Hakeswill a few signature characteristics. He has a constant facial tick that can turn into disturbing spasms. He shows exaggerated respect for his superior officers that borders on boot-licking, and he constantly says that scripture supports his absurd ideas while everyone else knows better. This sets Hakeswill up as a menacing yet comical villain, but not humorous in a pleasant way. Instead, he is more pathetic and bothersome.

The conflict between Sharpe and Hakeswill suspends for the more immediate issue of battling with the enemy. The character of Tippoo Sultan comes through as a stubborn man who does not listen to good advice, although doubt remains that he may have been simply testing the methods of the British army. This leaves a chilling impression that Tippoo is heartless and sadistic because he sent a large number of his men to die for no sane reason and perhaps for his own entertainment.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Sergeant Obadiah Hakeswill thinks about the widowed Mrs. Mary Bickerstaff while he searches for plunder among the dead and dying Mysorean troops. He finds a living man and demands money, which the man has taped to his chest. Hakeswill then kills the man with his halberd, a type of spear. Spotting Sharpe, he argues with him about Mary, suspecting that Sharpe has romantic interests. Sharpe denies any interest in Mary and Hakeswill leaves.

Sharpe joins Mary, who is half English and half Indian, and they talk about him becoming a sergeant one day. Mary had been married to an English sergeant, and she suggests that Sharpe request to formally marry her. Sharpe agrees that it is a good idea and would keep Hakeswill away, who watches them talk from a distance, his face twitching. Sharpe later asks Captain Morris for permission to marry and Morris promises to bring the matter up to Major Shee.

Colonel Hector McCandless of the King's Scotch Brigade waits at an ancient temple for General Appah Rao, one of the commanders in the Tippoo's army. Rao has no sense of loyalty to Tippoo and wants the ousted Rajah reinstated. McCandless tells Rao that the English will beat Tippoo at Seringapatam and reinstate the Rajah. The two men study a map of the city and determine that the best place for the British to attack is anywhere but the west wall. Rao says that Tippoo has ordered a massive black-powder mine to be laid that would destroy any troops caught between the inner and outer city walls. They discuss an intercepted letter from Napoleon that promises more French troops for Tippoo.

Mary and Sharpe eagerly await word that their marriage has been approved. Instead, Hakeswill lures Sharpe to a seemingly deserted place near the cavalry's horses. The sergeant proceeds to goad Sharpe into a fight and Sharpe resists a great deal. Finally, Sharpe obliges and breaks Hakeswill's nose with a single punch. Captain Morris and an ensign come forward as witnesses to the fight, which is a flogging offense.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The conflict between Sharpe and Hakeswill deepens when the truth is revealed that both men want the same woman, Mary Bickerstaff. True to the traditional villain, Hakeswill continually schemes against the hero, Sharpe. He concocts a plan to trick Sharpe into a fight and thereby have the hero flogged, which was his intent when switching the flint for a stone in the previous chapter. This time the trick works because Hakeswill presses the right emotional button in Sharpe: He insults the hero's courage to fight for his woman, Mary. Threatening to sell her off as a prostitute does not work, nor does trying to insult Sharpe's abilities as a soldier. Attacking only his courage fails, but



when combining courage with love, the hero snaps as all good heroes should. This confrontation also reveals more of Sharpe's character. He knows that he has absolute courage and simply does not believe that Hakeswill has the power to dominate Mary. He does not care what anyone thinks of him as a soldier, especially the contemptuous Hakeswill, but crossing the line of courage and love results in a broken nose. This is a hero with passion and the ability to carry through once the passion is sparked.

The interjected scene where McCandless meets with Rao serves to introduce major plot elements. The upcoming Battle of Seringapatam could reinstate the former leader, thus getting rid of the Muslim Tippoo. Rao is Hindu, as is the Rajah, and could become an ally in the fight. Additionally, Rao tells McCandless that attacking the west wall of the city would be a mistake due to the massive black-powder mine that Tippoo is planting there. Now that McCandless knows this important piece of information, he will need to get it to the British command before it's too late. Without this knowledge, the decision will probably be to attack the west wall because it looks tactically advantageous. The element of time shortening quickly establishes suspense.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

While on his way back to the British forces with his valuable information, McCandless and his Indian escort run into a force of Tippoo's cavalry. At first escape looks possible, but then a larger force of enemy cavalry arrive and a fight ensues. The Indian escort loses all but one man, known as the Havildar, and McCandless urges him to escape. McCandless's horse had been seriously wounded, so he shoots it dead in a mercy killing. Facing the enemy cavalry, he prepares to do battle using his Scottish sword, known as a claymore. However, he is grossly outnumbered and reluctantly gives up his sword to an enemy cavalry officer.

Sharpe prepares for his court-martial, but his case looks hopeless. He would have to prove that an officer and an ensign were both lying about Hakeswill being attacked unprovoked, and even if he could establish this, it is still against regulations to attack a superior whether provoked or not. He loses the court-martial and is sentenced to a two-thousand stroke flogging. Sergeant Green assures Sharpe that Mary will be safe from Hakeswill and offers to marry her to ensure this should the flogging kill Sharpe. Hakeswill takes delight in preparing the flogging while Green provides a good bellyful of rum to Sharpe for reducing the pain to come.

McCandless stands in the courtyard of the Inner Palace within Seringapatam. He sees six large tigers chained to a courtyard wall while he thinks of the French Colonel Gudin, whom he hopes is pleading his case with Tippoo. Gudin had done the preliminary questioning of McCandless.

Gudin and Tippoo arrive. Gudin proposes that McCandless had been foraging for food and not spying. Appah Rao is present too and evades the question of spying by simply stating that McCandless is the Tippoo's enemy. One of Tippoo's generals suggests that McCandless should be killed, but Gudin argues that not showing mercy now would cause the British to not show mercy for any prisoners they take. Tippoo decides to imprison McCandless for the time being.

Sharpe's flogging begins. Two drummer boys whip him across the back while he is tied to a tripod made of three halberds. An officer keeps count of the strokes while Hakeswill looks on quite pleased with the proceedings. Sharpe suffers two hundred and one strokes before Colonel Arthur Wellesley rides up and halts the flogging. He orders that Sharpe be released, his horrible wounds tended to and then brought before General Harris.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The capture of McCandless puts him into jeopardy and threatens to thwart his delivery of the news about the city's west wall to the British command. Tippoo could easily kill



him for being a suspected spy, and only the arguments from Gudin spare his life. The reader receives a close-up look at Tippoo, who is overweight and bedecked in jewels. He has a throne made out of gold and silver and studded with more precious stones that he has never sat upon. His goal is to defeat the British first before sitting on the throne, a symbol of authority and victory. One of his favorite playthings is an organ that has an animated tiger scratching the face of a British soldier, and the organ produces the sound of the soldier's cries. He is a superstitious man who believes in prophetic dreams and keeps a diary of his dreams. He also consults with oil readers who foretell the future.

While Tippoo is a cruel and unpredictable character, Gudin is his opposite. Gudin argues for the life of an enemy using cool-headed logic rather than an appeal to emotion, which he knows would not work with Tippoo. His attempt at this during the first fight in the story foreshadowed this change in argumentation strategy, and both attempts were to save human life from being needlessly wasted. Gudin possesses a strong sense of morality and has compassion for his fellow human beings, whether they be enemies or friends.

McCandless shows himself to be a tough old warrior. He suspects that if Tippoo were to order him killed, it would be by the chained tigers and not by the stroke of a sword. McCandless faces his fate with no show of emotion and presents himself as a proud British officer. This sets him into a role of being one of the hero's helpers, although just how is not yet clear.

Tippoo at this point is not a direct antagonist of Sharpe's, but the implication is that Tippoo hates all British soldiers and could become an antagonist. In the same sense Gudin could become one of Sharpe's helpers, while Mary and Sergeant Green demonstrate that they are on his side, although perhaps for selfish reasons as hinted by Green's offer to marry Mary should the flogging kill Sharpe. Including selfishness in the heroic characters lends greater depth to them, bringing them closer to real people. Such characters in fiction are referred to as having three dimensions rather than only two (cardboard characters). Sharpe is not always good and Tippoo not always bad because he does show mercy to McCandless, if only for the time being. By creating three-dimensional characters, the author opens the way for more meaningful thematic ideas to emerge.

The chapters have so far left hanging plot elements to maintain reader's interest, along with broadly stroked hints of possibilities. The outstanding questions at this point is whether Mary and Sharpe will find a better life, whether McCandless will get his message through to the British command and what General Harris could possibly want with Sharpe. The certainties are that Hakeswill is a murderous devil out to destroy Sharpe, that a confrontation between the British and Tippoo is inevitable and that Sharpe is still looking for a way to break away from the army. The flogging had most likely turned Sharpe's desire into a burning need. That he avoided death enrages Hakeswill, and so another attempt at killing Sharpe might happen.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Within the tent of General Harris, officers discuss how to break McCandless out of Tippoo's dungeon. Lieutenant Lawford brings forward an idea that interests Harris, which involves Lawford playing the part of a deserting British soldier to gain access to the city and somehow from there achieve the break. His details are sketchy and the idea easily criticized by the other officers. However, when Lawford suggests that Sharpe accompany him as a fellow deserting soldier, Harris starts to warm up to the plan. Wellesley argues that the Sharpe's flogging conviction should be carried out because Lawford's plan is unworkable, and if tried, another soldier other than Sharpe should be chosen. Lawford argues why Sharpe is the best man for the job. Eventually Wellesley gives in to Lawford's idea.

Sharpe is called into the tent and the discussion turns to his value for the mission. The officers can tell that he is a good liar and would be a convincing deserter with his flogging wounds still fresh. The plan evolves into Lawford posing as a clerk deserter afraid of flogging and Sharpe playing the role of private and the victim of flogging, an easy task for him. They will attempt to contact a merchant named Ravi Shekhar once in the city. Upon questioning about his past, Sharpe admits to having been a house burglar with the knowledge of lock picking, and this turns out to be in his favor. Once in the dungeon, he will be able to pick the lock and release McCandless. Sharpe asks Wellesley if he can be made a sergeant should he succeed in releasing McCandless, to which Wellesley agrees.

Tippoo executes two men by using his jettis, which are Hindu strongmen. One of the prisoners is killed when a jetti drives a spike into his head, and another jetti kills the other man by twisting his head and breaking his neck. Gudin expresses admiration for the strength of the jetti if not the methods of execution. He would have preferred the guillotine, which kills instantly when the heavy blade falls.

Under orders to not say a word about his mission, Sharpe returns to his company. Hakeswell tries to wheedle information from Sharpe, but Sharpe does not reveal anything important. He then meets with Lawford who fills in the details on how they are to leave camp unnoticed. They depart the early the next morning, and Mary joins them. Lawford protests, but Sharpe tells him the presence of Mary could be very beneficial to their story. He also takes control since Lawford is no longer an officer and needs to play the part of a timid clerk. They make sure their stories about joining the army and subsequently deserting make sense and do not contradict each other. Sharpe and Lawford then turn their coats inside out as a signal of desertion and thereby protection from being shot on sight as they enter enemy territory.



A group of Tippoo's lancers spots the deserters and attacks. Sharpe fights back, kills one of the lancers but another pins him to a tree. Mary translates the demand to surrender and join Tippoo's forces, and the deserters agree.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Sharpe agrees to help free McCandless because the mission is better than dying from flogging and might give him and Mary a chance to escape the army. He shows interest in the mission by offering good advice on how to carry it out, which indicates that he has more motivation than simple selfish interest. He also anticipates adventure, which is a universal trait of heroes. His new status emboldens him to stand up to Hakeswell and even express contempt for him because Sharpe knows the sergeant is powerless to do anything. Hakeswell responds with a satisfying amount of frustration before Sharpe simply walks away to attend to more important business with Lawford.

Sharpe's power further increases once they leave camp. Lawford can no longer act as a superior officer and has no experience being a private, having initially joined the army as an officer. He must follow Sharpe's directions and accept Mary into the group, although he protests without hesitation. Nevertheless, if he is to survive he must follow Sharpe's lead.

The overall effect of taking on the mission juxtaposes Sharpe's low status as a private taking orders with a leader issuing orders to his former superiors. This is his first experience with leadership, and he takes to it naturally without thinking too much about the irony. His main focus is on survival so he can complete the mission successfully. This will also mean a promotion to sergeant and a better chance to marry Mary.

The Tippoo's executions foreshadow the use of his jetti strongmen in future executions and set the jetti up as formidable sidekicks of the antagonist. This usually means that the hero will have to fight the jetti at some point or in some way defuse their threat. Sharpe's fighting skills come out more when he resists the lancers, adding to the scene about the first fight with Tippoo's infantry and the scene in which he broke Hakeswell's nose. This builds anticipation for more heroic fighting against daunting odds in which Sharpe will cleverly prevail.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The lancers herd the deserters into Seringapatam, and they see how heavily fortified it is. High walls surround the entire city along with various defensive structures meant to deflect cannonballs and give soldiers protection. The lancers turn the deserters over to a detachment of guards who lock them in a guard house. The next morning they are taken into a large courtyard in which six large tigers are chained. Colonel Gudin introduces himself.

Gudin questions Sharpe and Lawford about their reasons for desertion. He determines that the deserters have no useful information and calls for a doctor to treat Sharpe's flogging wounds. Tippoo arrives with McCandless and talks about the deserters with Gudin, then challenges Sharpe to shoot McCandless as a test of sincerity. Sharpe loads the offered musket, walks straight up to McCandless and pulls the trigger. The musket does not fire. Sharpe quickly tells McCandless that he has come on orders from General Harris. When he gets a chance, McCandless whispers to Sharpe that the British should not attempt to breach the west wall. They put on a show to convince Tippoo and Gudin that they hate each other and then McCandless is taken back to his cell.

Tippoo allows Sharpe and Lawford to serve under Gudin for a probationary period in which they will be closely watched and limited on their duties. Mary is directed to go with one of Tippoo's officers to work in his house.

At the British encampment, officers discuss the changes made now that Lawford and Sharpe have gone. Major General Baird looks over Sharpe's entry in a punishment book. He insists that a general comment be made that Sharpe is to be taken alive if discovered during the upcoming battle.

While on guard duty, Sharpe explains to Lawford that he realized the gunpowder provided to shoot McCandless was not really gunpowder but probably dry ink. Sharpe could tell because of the consistency and taste of the powder. This realization enabled him to put on a good show for Tippoo and Gudin while communicating on the sly with McCandless. He then tells Lawford about McCandless warning not to attack the west wall.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The story plot takes a stepwise movement into the city of Seringapatam. First the deserters were captured in the previous chapter, they are escorted into the city and held in a guard house, then they are dealt with in Tippoo's courtyard. Sharpe manages to convince Gudin that they are truly deserters who want to join the Tippoo's forces, although Mary must be kept in an officer's house because the forces have no place for



her. Sharpe and Lawford have good luck and become part of the French army rather than directly under Tippoo. Had that happened they would have been forced into the Muslim religion and circumcised. Sharpe feels that this would be too much of a sacrifice, and his misuse of various words close to the sound of circumcision is employed as a bit of comic relief.

The greatest conflict occurs when Tippoo insists that Sharpe kill McCandless. The reader does not know until later that Sharpe quickly identified the dry ink that had been passed off as gunpowder, so he expected the musket not to fire. However, the entire scene has to be played out without flaw in order for the important information to pass from McCandless to Sharpe. Once the musket misfires, the tension briefly abates until the playacting commences when Sharpe jams the musket barrel into McCandless' stomach, but not with full force. McCandless plays along and doubles over, and this gives the opening for quickly whispered communication. Their successful performance results in Sharpe and Lawford being assigned to the French forces.

The hero is in suspension at this point. Sharpe must take care to maintain the deserter ruse while trying to complete his mission, but while in the probationary period he has no freedom of movement. Nevertheless, Sharpe's character changes because now that he has a chance to think about it, he misses the British army and becomes a true soldier rather than a streetwise thief in a uniform. This transformation prepares him for the heroic acts to follow.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Four days later the British army arrives at Seringapatam. While the army settles in, Tippoo prepares his defenses, which are primarily cannons mounted on the city walls. He also has about thirty thousand troops within the walls. The British army and the Indian forces employed by the East India Company amount to fifty thousand, along with many field pieces and siege cannons.

Sharpe and Lawford examine a stack of rockets on the city wall. Lawford explains that the rockets can be deadly but have little accuracy. While British officers scout the area around the city, Sharpe and Lawford witness the use of rockets. At this long of range they do little than turn heads and cause horsemen to take minor evasive action. The effect is more psychological than physical with all the sputtering, flaming and erratic courses. Sharpe comments that Tippoo has thousands of rockets that, if they were all to go off at once, would cause a great deal of panic and damage.

The British army establishes camp to the south of the city. Gudin gives Sharpe and Lawford rifles and orders them to shoot two British officers. Sharpe misses his man by six inches, but Lawford, having experience with hunting rifles, takes down his target. He feels remorse for this action against his own army but hides it from Gudin. Sharpe takes Lawford to a tavern in an attempt to raise his spirits. They talk about Hakeswell's scheme to sell Mary into prostitution and the characters of other officers with whom they have had trouble. Lawford begins to admire Sharpe's easy way with the harshness of the world.

Mary works in General Appah Rao's house and Rao's wife Lakshmi takes a liking to her. Lakshmi shows Mary how to properly wear an elegant sari. One of Mary's primary tasks is to teach the three children English, which Rao believes will be important for their futures. Mary tells Lakshmi that Sharpe is her half-brother. Lakshmi thinks that Mary would make a good wife for Kunwar Singh, one of her relatives.

The British begin their siege on the west wall of the city, exactly where Tippoo wants them in order to destroy most of the army once between the inner and outer city walls by setting off the massive black-powder mine. The British attempt to drive Tippoo's troops out of a stand of trees at night, but the fight turns into chaos. Sergeant Hakeswell becomes separated from his company and hides. He murders one of the ensigns who had been insulting him earlier and claims the blood on his halberd is from the enemy. However, the ensign had not been intentionally insulting. The transgression is all in Hakeswell's twisted mind.



Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 lays out the configuration of the British army for the siege on Seringapatam and sets up plot elements for the coming battle. The Tippoo's rockets play a minor part here but will likely become more important as the battle unfolds. Unfortunately, the British army selects the west wall to attack because it does not know about the huge mine and the potential of losing most of the troops in one gigantic blast. This means that Sharpe must break free and bring the news to the British command very soon.

Mary seems to have found a comfortable home with Rao and especially with Lakshmi, who has plans for her. Mary tries to protect Sharpe by claiming that he is her half-brother, but what this does is open the gates for Lakshmi to prepare her to marry one of Lakshmi's relatives. In this chapter, Mary's story starts to veer away from Sharpe's.

Hakeswell displays more pathetic and disgusting behavior. He is as usual a blowhard, but the battle scene brings out his cowardice and murderous nature. Hakeswell's character becomes worse as the story moves on, leaving questions on just how bad he can get. Among his annoying habits, he also claims that he cannot be killed because as a child he had been hung for a crime but his uncle arrived in time to cut him down. Hakeswell likes to show off the rope scars on his neck when claiming immortality.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Gudin orders Sharpe to ride a horse toward the British fighting in the woods and issue confusing commands to them. Sharpe tries but does not receive an answer until he calls out Hakeswill's name. Sharpe heads into the woods toward Hakeswill, and a fight breaks out between them. A squad of British soldiers arrive, but a volley of musket fire chases them away. Sharpe had been hoping to slip through to the British command and warn them not to attack the west wall. The fight delays him long enough to kill his plan, Hakeswill is taken prisoner, and everyone returns to the city.

Tippoo has his jettis execute criminals, after which he honors the brave soldiers on his side. Sharpe receives a large gold medallion for his fight with Hakeswill that attracted the British squad that was subsequently captured. After the ceremony, Sharpe leaves to visit Mary at Rao's house, where he learns that Mary wants to marry Kunwar Singh. Sharpe accepts this as fair because he knows that Mary is just trying to survive as best she can. He then comes upon the gate where Tippoo's men are packing in a great deal of black powder for the mine. He manages to gain access and sees how the mine would destroy many British soldiers when set off.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 sets up more plot elements. The capturing of Hakeswill brings this antagonist into the city and close to Sharpe. Additionally, the fight with the sergeant eliminates Sharpe's only chance to inform the British command to avoid the west wall. Mary has decided that she wants to marry Kunwar Singh, and Sharpe lets her go without protest. Then he discovers the location of Tippoo's mine and comes to understand the danger.

With the chance to inform the British gone, Sharpe has to think of an alternative plan. Although Lawford suggests finding the merchant who may be able to take the information out of the city, Sharpe knows that this would be highly unlikely with the siege about to begin. His newfound knowledge about the location of the black-powder mine could be the key to an alternative idea.

Mary's story disengages with Sharpe's completely. She has helped the hero as much as she could and now it is her turn to watch out for her own future. Marriage to Kunwar Singh may be her way to a better life, especially since General Rao favors a British win over Tippoo. Since the British already know about Rao's true desires and Tippoo does not suspect him, she has a win-win situation.

Hakeswill's presence in the city poses no immediate threat to Sharpe. However, just being closer to the protagonist makes this a dangerous situation. Hakeswill's accusations about Sharpe being a traitor help to more strongly establish this falsehood in Gudin's mind, so the effect so far is to unintentionally help Sharpe.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

British officers discuss the battle plans. They are sure that the outer wall will be breached and that the initial assault forces, known as Forlorn Hopes, will be able to gain entry into the city. They are called Forlorn Hopes because their chances of survival are low, yet there is never a lack for volunteers. As the officers discuss strategy, the army digs a zigzag network of trenches.

A mill fort offers Tippoo's troops cover to fire cannons effectively against the British position. The British mount an attack that successfully takes the fort, after which they bring their own siege cannons into it.

Tippoo entertains his troops with dancers, jugglers, snake charmers and strongman tricks from the jettis. He then brings in the British prisoners, including Hakeswill, and orders the jettis to kill all of them. When it comes to Hakeswill's turn, he dodges and ducks while spewing his usual lines. However, when he claims to have seen a British officer in the city, Tippoo halts the execution. To save his life, Hakeswill gives the name of the British officer, Lawford, and identifies Sharpe as a British private.

While Sharpe and Lawford discuss Mary's decision to marry an enemy and whether they were in jeopardy of being discovered, Colonel Gudin arrives to arrest them. He does this reluctantly because he has come to like Sharpe very much. Regardless, the two had been found out and are now Tippoo's prisoners. General Appah Rao questions Mary about her knowledge of what Lawford and Sharpe were up to, and she denies knowing anything. He then gives her a loaded pistol to use in case she needs to kill herself and thereby save herself from brutal soldiers. After questioning Lawford and Sharpe, Tippoo decides to put them in the dungeon with McCandless and Hakeswill rather than feeding them to the tigers.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The first part of Chapter 8 gives the preliminary work done for the siege through the conversations among the British officers and narrative. The officers are actual historical characters, while the dialog is speculative fiction. This technique brings the dry history alive and helps to explain why certain actions, such as taking the mill fort, were done. In the context of the story, this part does little to advance the plot or heighten drama but is necessary for the reader to understand the rest of the battle.

A highly important plot turn occurs when Hakeswill reveals the true identities of Lawford and Sharpe. This accomplishes two things, which is that their spying careers come to an end and the hero moves closer to one of his primary antagonists, Hakeswill. Additionally, Mary is given a loaded pistol and in some manner, that needs to be fired soon. An amount of suspense builds because Rao gives her the gun in case things turn



badly enough during the upcoming battle to where she may want to commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of brutal enemy soldiers.

Sharpe's situation has turned from bad but survivable to worse and possibly deadly. He had gained the good will of Gudin who offered some hope that Sharpe would become a permanent French soldier stationed in France, but now Gudin must do his duty. Tippoo could have easily executed Sharpe and Lawford as spies, but he decides not to out of superstition. Tippoo thinks his luck has changed for the better while killing the other prisoners, and therefore no further sacrifices need to be made. This character can be merciful if he sees an advantage to it, although he makes the common mistake of villains by underestimating the hero's abilities to escape from dungeons.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Sharpe discovers that the dungeon holds an old tiger in one of the cells and that Hakeswill occupies the cell next to the animal. Sharpe and Lawford share McCandles' cell. They discuss the British situation, which is bad because Tippoo's black-powder mine is nearly finished and the attack will come straight into it. McCandles decides to teach Sharpe how to read and write.

Tippoo watches the British prepare for the attack. He hopes that an early monsoon rainstorm will put an end to the attempt, but that does not materialize. The British open fire with four batteries of cannons, targeting the walls to either side of where they will attempt to breach the city. This strategy removes enemy cannons that could fire into the flanks of the soldiers. Once completed, all the British cannons concentrate on the place where the outer wall must be opened before the troops can attack and take the city. As the time approaches for the breach, British troops file into the network of trenches and prepare for the attack.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 brings the plot right up to the battle starting point. Sharpe is behind bars and cannot do anything more than learn to read and write. He does discuss picking the lock and escaping but as yet no good plan has emerged. Hakeswill taunts Sharpe and seems to be begging for an ultimate showdown, an expectation that is sure to happen. The big question is how to eliminate the tiger, which is released at night when the guards leave. While pondering their chances, the prisoners hear the cannon barrage and realize that time is getting short.

The cannon barrage is presented from both the British viewpoint and Tippoo's. He can do little to evade the eventual breach of his city walls, but his big black-powder mine is ready. He expects that to end the battle in his favor, but he also plans a counter-attack to drive the British completely away. The British have too much confidence that their strategy will work because they have no knowledge of the trap into which they will soon be rushing.

This is the snapping point of the novel. The hero must escape a dungeon, the clock is ticking, a trap must be somehow defused, and a man-eating tiger stands in the hero's way. The situation appears hopeless and therefore something has to give.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Appah Rao sends six of his men to fetch McCandless from the dungeon and bring him to the relative safety of Rao's house. Mary shows up and demands to go with the men in order to save Sharpe, whom she has said is her half-brother. Kunwar Singh protests but Mary prevails and goes with the men. Singh goes along, not knowing what else to do. Mary still has the loaded pistol.

The group of rescuers find the outer gate to the dungeon unguarded but locked. The tiger had been released from its cell and keeps the prisoners from attempting to escape. Sharpe calls to Mary and asks if she has a gun. She throws the loaded pistol through the gate and down the stairs, but it hangs up toward the bottom of them. Sharpe picks the lock, the tiger lunges and interrupts, and finally Sharpe succeeds. He then quickly goes for the gun, the tiger leaps at him and he fires. The shot goes into the tiger's mouth and cuts its spine, disabling the beast that dies a short time later. The prisoners escape, except for Hakeswill who remains locked in his cell, only to be confronted by three jettis.

Lawford takes McCandless away while Sharpe engages the jettis. Mary tosses him a loaded musket, and he rams the muzzle into the first jetti's throat, putting the strongman down. He then slams the next jetti's temple with the butt, and for the third he fires the musket straight into the strongman's heart. Sharpe takes a sword and finishes off the other two jettis.

While the British prepare to attack into the breach, Sharpe and Lawford try to locate the black-powder mine and somehow defuse it. They find a cart of rockets and take it with them. Just as they locate the black-powder mine, the British attack begins. Sharpe cannot just walk up to the mine because it is guarded by several men. He lights the fuses of the rockets and pushes the cart toward the guards. The rockets go off, and Sharpe ducks into cover. After the last rocket launches, he looks to see the effect. All the guards are either dead or running away. Sharpe then hurries to light the fuse of the black-powder mine to set it off before the British reach the breach.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Mary's loaded pistol fires in Chapter 10, a critical change that releases the hero. The time limit is nearly over and the black-powder mine must be handled, but three jetti strongmen stand in Sharpe's way. Mary throws the hero a loaded musket, and he proceeds to quickly dispatch the imposing jettis with three rapid and deft moves. This fast-paced action leads to the next brilliant move by Sharpe, his use of rockets to clear the guards keeping him from the mine. At the end of the chapter, the mine blows and the details are to follow in the final chapter.



The questions left hanging and demanding to be answered involve the effect of the mine, the outcome of the battle, Hakewill's fate, Tippoo's fate, and how the hero will gain the recognition he deserves. Chapter 10 ends in a cliffhanger, a method that has not been used as strongly in the previous chapters. Blowing the mine is not the primary climax, so other events must follow that answer the hanging questions and bring the story to a logical end.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The black-powder mine blasts as it had been designed, directing the force between the inner and outer city walls. However, no British soldiers had made it that far, and the damage is mostly to Tippoo's troops stationed around and atop the inner wall. The walls take damage too, toppling some parts and loosening the stones and bricks. Sharpe ducks into a doorway to avoid the blast.

The Forlorn Hopes charge into the city and slaughter the stunned enemy who cannot mount any resistance. The rest of the British army follows while enemy reinforcements rush toward the breached city walls. The battle changes when Tippoo's men gain their senses and fire from cover into the amassed British forces. They desperately find whatever cover is available and fire back.

Sharpe gathers three abandoned muskets and loads them, then he finds Lawford and Gudin. Gudin comments to Lawford that Sharpe could go far in the British army as Sharpe heads out to deal with the still imprisoned Hakeswill. Sharpe shoots the lock off Hakeswill's cell and drags him into the street, then into the courtyard where the tigers are chained. Sharpe throws Hakeswill to the tigers but does not stop to see what happens.

Tippoo shoots musket after musket into the British, his aids reloading and handing him the guns. He thinks about his best escape route as the battle becomes hopeless. He is losing his city and now wants to save his life. He manages to maneuver to a water gate away from the fighting, hoping to make the stables and escape on horseback. His plan is to ride north to another one of his cities. However, the British cut him off just outside the city walls.

Sharpe enters the water gate and a guard closes the door behind him, cutting him off from the city. Tippoo's aids fight the British but are all killed. Tippoo tries to escape into the city, but Sharpe stands in his way. They fight and Sharpe succeeds in fatally wounding Tippoo.

The next day Sharpe watches as Tippoo's casket is brought to his family's mausoleum. Fresh sergeant's stripes are sewn on Sharpe's coat, making him the equal to Hakeswill, who had somehow escaped the tigers. Sharpe tells McCandless that he will deal with Hakeswill later.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Although most of the battle descriptions are historically accurate, exactly who shot Tippoo is unknown. He might have been killed from a massive volley into the water gate rather than by a single soldier. However, in this fiction Sharpe, who is himself a fiction, is



given the credit. This brings the true climax of the story to a close. The city has been taken, Sharpe has been accepted back into the British army, and he has received his promised promotion to Sergeant. Sharpe has killed one of his primary antagonists, Tippoo, yet another still lives—Hakeswill. This antagonist will likely appear in future stories about Sharpe.

From the perspective of the heroic novel, Sharpe has returned home to the British Army. He is a changed man because he has become a true British soldier, loyal only to that army. He no longer thinks about desertion. He has lost Mary to another, which is atypical for heroic characters but logical within this plot. Sharpe will likely find many other lovers along his way. What he has gained is his promotion to sergeant and the firm friendships of Lawford and McCandless. Gudin thinks that Sharpe has a bright future in the British army, and that implies that his promotions are not over.

The story ends with the hero better positioned in life to seek out new adventures and do battle with old and new antagonists. He has demonstrated his fighting prowess and his quick thinking while under extreme pressures. The title of this book derives from the tiger that Sharpe killed in the dungeon. A closing scene shows the tiger's freshly skinned pelt draped over Tippoo's casket, identified by a long scar that Sharpe had noticed while in the dungeon.



Characters

Richard Sharpe

Sharpe is a young private in the British army and is stationed in India. He yearns to desert the army and start a better life with his romantic interest, Mary Bickerstaff. Sharpe's prostitute mother had abandoned him shortly after his birth and as a result he grew up an orphan who becomes street-wise and tough. He knows how to fight and thinks quickly while under enormous pressure.

Sergeant Hakeswill dislikes Sharpe to an extreme degree. He sets Sharpe up for a flogging that is supposed to kill the private, but instead General Harris spares Sharpe's life in return for taking on an assignment. Sharpe must accompany Lieutenant Lawford in an attempt to rescue an imprisoned British officer, Colonel McCandless. Sharpe takes the challenge and asks to be promoted to sergeant if he survives. His request is granted because nobody expects him to live through the mission.

Private Sharpe displays great strength, courage and resourcefulness during the mission. He earns the respect of Lawford and others, and manages to free McCandless. Sharpe single-handedly blows off a massive black-powder mine before it can destroy most of the British army, thus enabling the British to win the Battle of Seringapatam in 1799. He kills the opposing king toward the end of the battle, earns his promotion to sergeant and emerges as the hero of a twenty-novel series.

Sergeant Obadiah Hakeswill

Hakeswill is one of Sharpe's primary antagonists and his immediate commander. Hakeswill passionately dislikes Sharpe and wants to see the private flogged to death. Hakeswill's face has a constant twitch that erupts into contortions when he is upset or under pressure. He first tries to entrap Sharpe by switching his musket flint for an ordinary stone, but this attempt fails. Hakeswill later succeeds in goading Sharpe into a fight that is witnessed by an officer and ensign, but Sharpe does not realize this until after the fight. To Hakeswill's delight, Sharpe is sentenced to a two-thousand stroke flogging.

Hakeswill prepares the flogging, watches excitedly as Sharpe is tied to a tripod made from three halberds, and takes unholy pleasure in Sharpe's agony as two drummer boys whip away at Sharpe's back. However, Sharpe's life is spared for his mission, and that seriously vexes Hakeswill.

During a preliminary fight in the Battle of Seringapatam, Hakeswill murders an ensign for no sane reason and fights with Sharpe. During the fight, enemy forces capture Hakeswill, who later exposes Sharpe as a British spy. Sharpe attempts to feed Hakeswill to six chained tigers, but somehow he escapes this fate.



Besides the grotesque facial twitch, Hakeswill has the annoying habits of claiming to be immortal and attributing the most ridiculous ideas as being in scripture. He is a coward, a murderer, and a bootlicker. He is a thoroughly disgusting man who has no redeeming qualities in this novel and will likely be an important character in the subsequent Sharpe stories.

Lieutenant William Lawford

Lawford accompanies Sharpe on the mission to free McCandless. Lawford comes from a wealthy family and started his army career as an officer. He has none of the street-smarts of Sharpe and would be quickly killed if not for Sharpe's advice. This means that during the mission, Lawford must follow Sharpe's orders, which greatly annoys Lawford. Nevertheless, Sharpe earns his respect while in Seringapatam.

Lawford will likely be another main character in subsequent Sharpe novels. He learns about life from Sharpe and how to be a better soldier. Sharpe just starts to learn how to read and write during this novel, so Lawford should be able to help Sharpe to become a learned gentleman and possibly an officer.

Tippoo Sultan

Tippoo is the king of Mysore and another of Sharpe's antagonists. Tippoo orders Sharpe to shoot McCandless, but Sharpe knows that the gunpowder is actually dry ink powder. From this and Tippoo's behavior in an earlier fight that cost many of his soldiers, he is a cruel man who thinks little of his subjects and absolutely nothing of his enemies. Tippoo enjoys feeding criminals and prisoners to a set of six large tigers, which demonstrates his sadistic nature. He does have a few good qualities, being a fairly good leader and at least considering the advice from others. However, he is still a primary villain in the story and dies in the end by Sharpe's hand.

Mary Bickerstaff

Mary is Sharpe's lover in the first part of the story. She is widowed, having been married to a British sergeant. She encourages Sharpe to seek out a promotion to sergeant and wants to marry him, but the marriage never happens. She accompanies Sharpe and Lawford on the mission and is captured with them. While she works in an enemy general's house, she decides to marry Kunwar Singh.

Mary performs two very important actions in the story. She delivers a loaded pistol to Sharpe while he is imprisoned in a dungeon and throws him a loaded musket when he escapes. The first action enables Sharpe to kill a guard tiger and escape. The second action arms Sharpe so he can kill three approaching strongmen.



Colonel Jean Gudin

Gudin is a French officer and military advisor to Tippoo. Gudin meets Sharpe after his capture and takes a liking to him. Gudin accepts Sharpe and Lawford into his command and talks with Sharpe about joining the French army. Later, when Sharpe is exposed as a British spy, Gudin feels disappointed but still thinks Sharpe has a good chance at a successful military career.

Colonel Hector McCandless

McCandless learns about Tippoo's massive black-powder mine during a meeting with General Appah Rao and is later captured by Tippoo's cavalry. McCandless keeps his secret until Sharpe arrives and manages to pass the news to him. However, the British command never receives the warning to avoid the city's west wall, where the mine is planted. While in the dungeon and hearing Hakeswill's constant jabbering about things being in scripture, McCandless orders the sergeant to hold his tongue.

General Appah Rao

Rao works against Tippoo even though he is supposed to be one of his generals. This is because Rao's loyalties lie with the previous ruler, who still lives. Rao wants the British to win the Battle of Seringapatam but must act as if he is on Tippoo's side. When the battle takes place, Rao orders his forces out of the city.

Kunwar Singh

Singh marries Mary and accompanies her to the dungeon where Sharpe, Lawford, McCandless, and Hakeswill are imprisoned.

Sergeant Green

Green is friendly to Sharpe and offers to marry Mary should Sharpe's flogging end in death. Green also tells Hakeswill that talking while on the march is not against the rules after Hakeswill shouts at Sharpe to stop talking.

General Harris

Harris spares Sharpe's life and leads the British army through the Battle of Seringapatam.



Ravi Shekhar

Shekhar is the merchant who Sharpe and Lawford are to contact once within Seringapatam. Sharpe later learns that Tippoo had killed Shekhar by feeding him to the tigers, thus cutting off all hope of getting the message about the black-powder mine to the British command.



Objects/Places

Thirty-third Regiment

The Thirty-third Regiment is the part of the British army to which Sharpe belongs.

India

India is the country in which the British fight to gain enough power for increasing the trade of the East India Company.

Mysore

Mysore is the region of western India that Tippoo controls as king until the British defeat his army and Sharpe kills him.

Seringapatam

Seringapatam is the city that the British capture. It has two walls, including an inner and outer.

Black-powder Mine

Tippoo builds a massive black-powder mine to destroy most of the British army but Sharpe blows it off before it can kill any British soldiers.

Musket

The musket is the primary weapon in use by the infantry on both sides in the Battle of Seringapatam. Sharpe uses it as a jabbing and clubbing weapon as well.

Tigers

Tippoo keeps six large tigers chained in his courtyard. He likes to feed criminals and prisoners to the tigers. Sharpe must shoot a tiger in the dungeon in order to escape.

Dungeon

The dungeon is where Sharpe, Lawford, McCandless, and Hakeswill are imprisoned. The place reeks of sewage and is guarded by either two men or a single tiger.



Rockets

Tippoo uses rockets to defend Seringapatam and Sharpe uses them to clear away the guards near the black-powder mine.

Trenches

The British dig a network of trenches to allow their troops to approach Seringapatam in preparation for the battle.

Cannon

The British use cannons to open a breach in the walls surrounding Seringapatam, and Tippoo uses cannons to defend the city.

Throne

Tippoo has a throne made of gold and silver and studded with many precious stones. He has never sat on it and has vowed to only do so once the British are defeated.

Medallion

Tippoo awards Sharpe a large gold medallion for courage during a fight. Once Tippoo finds out that Sharpe is actually a British spy, he rips the medallion off Sharpe's neck.

Pistol

Mary throws a loaded pistol down to Sharpe while he is in the dungeon. Sharpe uses the pistol to kill the tiger and subsequently escape.



Themes

Courage

Richard Sharpe is the hero of this story, and as such he must display an extraordinary amount of courage. His rough childhood has prepared him to become a good fighting soldier, much more so than Lieutenant Lawford who grew up in a wealthy family. However, Sergeant Hakeswill also has led a rough life and shows no courage at all. This contrast shows that courage is not so much learned as inherited, at least in this story. A mystery remains who Sharpe's parents really are since he was born to a prostitute who abandoned him shortly thereafter. This novel does not explore the idea, but a subsequent Sharpe novel might. If so, it would make sense that Sharpe's parents are courageous as well.

The manner in which Sharpe takes Mary's news that she will wed another shows courage too. Sharpe has not hung his emotional wellbeing on Mary and looks only to himself for strength. His defense is to shrug off his loss as just the way people are, looking out for themselves first. This brings in the idea that courage and other strengths such as compassion and nobility do not necessarily go together. Sharpe may develop other strengths as his story evolves through nineteen other novels, but for now his courage is enough.

Much of his courage comes from taking action before thinking things all the way through. Sharpe does not stop to strategize, but grabs whatever is at hand and goes immediately on the attack. He gives himself no room to develop fear that might make him hesitate or freeze in place.

Loyalty

The primary characteristic that Sharpe lacks in the beginning of the novel is loyalty. He had not joined the British army out of any patriotic feelings or hunger for adventure. A recruiter had found him drunk in a tavern and obtained his signature through a series of misleading promises. Sharpe thinks constantly about deserting the army, he absolutely hates his sergeant, and the only thing that holds him back is that the army happens to be his only safe spot in India. This is a relative situation because Hakeswill sets him up for a deadly flogging.

Going on the mission to release McCandless gives Sharpe hope that he can escape the army and find a better life for him and Mary. Yet Mary is just a convenient woman. He has no true sense of loyalty to her, which is shown by his ease in letting her go.

Sharpe goes through an important transition while he serves under Colonel Gudin—Sharpe becomes a true soldier who misses the British army. He has finally developed a sense of loyalty, and with this comes the feeling of belonging somewhere, in this case the British army. By the end of the novel, Sharpe has gained a promotion to sergeant



and the friendship of Lawford and McCandless. An assumption can be made that many other British soldiers and officers will befriend him in subsequent novels.

The Reason for War

An outstanding thematic idea in this novel is that war is done for nothing more than increasing trade. The British East India Company does not want to rule India but exploit the country. Sharpe understands this concept immediately. He has not been exposed to what might be termed brainwashing about duty, honor and glory. He had been born in Britain, and that is his only tie to the country until he develops his loyalty later in the story.

Nevertheless, the war is funded by the East India Company to a great deal. The British soldiers march with Indians who have been hired by the Company to push Tippoo out of the way, and the only reason is to increase trade. A modern cynical view of war holds onto this idea, as with the slogan, "No Blood for Oil." Whether this is true or not likely depends on the war in question. The British military actions in India were certainly tied to colonialism, and that economic system was based on the exploitation of other countries. However, solid arguments can be made that other wars have been fought for entirely different reasons, such as gaining independence, holding a country together, defending against aggression and stabilizing a region.

In this novel the reason for war is simplified to economics, and the historical evidence points in this direction, although the simplification could serve another purpose. Since this is a twenty-novel series, other reasons for engaging in war could be addressed in subsequent books. This first book in the series introduces Sharpe as the hero and a few other major characters. This limited take on the reason for war may be an introduction to a thematic idea that expands through the remaining nineteen novels in the series.



Style

Point of View

The point of view is in the third person and offers reliable narrative throughout. Historical descriptions tend to be straight narrative that explains what is going on and oftentimes why, similar to a history textbook. Dialog brings the point of view closer to the characters and only as an observer and not as a participant.

The point of view at times moves within scenes, such as the descriptions of rocket flight. The narrative focuses on the rockets taking off, their erratic flight and the reactions of the British cavalry. The point of view then turns back to the characters and their thoughts about rockets. When later Sharpe uses the rockets to his advantage, the point of view hides the exact effects because Sharpe has ducked into cover. What he sees is what the reader sees, simply the aftermath.

The point of view with the Battle of Seringapatam moves between the British command and Sharpe. All preparations for the battle on the British side are from the command point of view. Sharpe observes the preparations that Tippoo does. When the battle begins, first Sharpe blows the mine and then the results are presented from an overview in which the British forces move into the city, the Tippoo's forces take a few minutes to react, and the fighting proceeds from there.

At the end of the story, Sharpe has the exclusive point of view. He kills attempts to feed Hakeswill to the tigers, kills Tippoo after which he relieves the king of all his precious jewels, and emerges the victorious hero. This style of writing the point of view confirms to the standard heroic story and consequently most readers should be comfortable with the format.

Setting

The overall setting concentrates on the city of Seringapatam and its immediate surrounding area. The first fight takes place some distance from the city, as does the scene where Sharpe, Lawford and Mary leave the army. McCandless is captured away from the city as well.

The major settings for the battle involve a forested area in which another fight occurs, the British command tent, the courtyard in the city and the city's dungeon. The fight in the forested area happens at night, which contributes to the confusion and resulting in the capture of Hakeswill. The British command tent is dark and humid, while the courtyard is open and pleasant except for the six chained tigers and the sadistic Tippoo. The dungeon is a horrible and smelly place with ancient bars and locks and a dank stone staircase.



Minor settings include the initial march in which Hakeswill first tries to entrap Sharpe, the flogging area, a temple in which McCandless meets with Rao before McCandless' capture and Rao's house.

Language and Meaning

The author uses uncomplicated syntax in narratives that are peppered with unusual words and period terminology. When he gives a voice to Sergeant Hakeswill, the style is British street and military slang of the time. Sharpe also uses slang, but not as pronounced. The French Colonel Gudin occasionally uses his native French, while the other characters speak mostly straight English without pronounced accents or very many period expressions. By exaggerating Hakeswill's speech, the character gains color while enhancing the irritation factor that McCandless finds intolerable.

The unusual words in the narratives are often debatable as to being the best choice, which reflects the author's style. Some authors like to employ unusual words for not much reason other than they are unusual, sending the reader to a dictionary. Other authors opt for more common expressions to enhance clarity. In this period novel the effect, probably intended, is to make it read like an older book from the very late eighteenth century. Usually the meanings of the unusual words can be guessed from the context, indicating that the author was fully aware of the impact and adjusted the narratives accordingly.

Other word meanings and expressions in dialog are so old and obsolete that a visit to the dictionary or a web search is necessary if the reader desires to fully understand the passages. Most readers would likely skip over them in favor of the overall story, which is clearly presented and follows the traditional heroic novel plotting.

Structure

The book contains eleven chapters simply titled Chapter 1 through 11. The chapters have breaks within them when the POV shifts from one set of characters in a particular place to another group in some other setting. The author includes historical notes at the end of the book that identify actual historical characters, fictional characters and where he had taken the liberty to fill in scenes that are not part of the actual history.

The plot follows the traditional heroic novel. The hero must leave someplace, must do heroic things, must change somehow and must either return home or find a home. In this novel, Sharpe finds his home in the British army. He changes by gaining a sense of loyalty. The heroic things he does include saving the British army and killing Tippoo, which because Tippoo wears many precious jewels, also makes Sharpe a rich man. Usually the hero wins the beautiful woman, but in this initial novel from a twenty-novel series, Sharpe loses Mary to Kunwar Singh.

Since this is the first novel in a series, the plot must leave some questions unanswered while wrapping up the story in the anticlimax. Tippoo is dead, the British are victorious,

and Sharpe has been promoted. Whether Sharpe continues his successful career is also known, but how far he goes and whether Hakeswill continues to be his antagonist are not. Furthermore, Mary may come back into his life.



Quotes

"A fight meant plunder, what the Indian soldiers called loot, and any man who was thinking of running and striking up life on his own could do with a bit of loot to prime the pump" (Chapter 1, pg. 17.)

"Sharpe licked his dry lips. So these, he thought, were the Tippoo's men. Fine-looking bastards they were, too, and close enough now so that he could see that their tunics were not plain pale purple, but were instead cut from a creamy-white cloth decorated with mauve tiger stripes"
(Chapter. 1, pg. 23.)

""I'll let you live, you bugger.' Hakeswill promised, leering at the wounded man. 'Not that you'll live long. Got a goolie in your belly, see?' He pointed at the wound in the man's belly where the bullet had driven home. 'Now where's your money? Money! Pice? Dan? Pagodas? Annas? Rupees?'"
(Chapter. 2, pg. 40.)

"His religion was Calvinism for Hector McCandless had grown up in Scotland and the godly lessons that had been whipped into his young, earnest soul had never been forgotten. He was an honest man, a tough man, and a wise one" (Chapter. 2, pg. 53.)

"Sharpe almost laughed, but then the thought of two thousand lashes choked off even the beginnings of a smile. Two thousand! He had seen men with backs looking like offal after just a hundred lashes and how the hell was he to survive with another nineteen hundred strokes on top of that?"
(Chapter. 3, pg. 87.)

"Colonel McCandless stood alone in the center of the courtyard of the Tippoo's Inner Palace inside Seringapatam. The Scotsman was still in his uniform: red-coated, tartan-kilted, and with his feather-plumed hat cocked on his head. Six tigers were chained to the courtyard's walls and those tigers sometimes strained to reach him, but they were always checked by the heavy chains that quivered tautly whenever one of the muscled beasts sprang toward the Scotsman" (Chapter. 3, pg. 93.)

"The Tippoo did not consider himself a cruel man, but nor, indeed, did he think of himself as a gentle one. He was a ruler, and cruelty and mercy were both weapons of rulers" (Chapter. 4, pg. 123-124.)



"Sharpe was back with his company before sunset. He was greeted ebulliently by men who saw in his release from the flogging a small victory for the lower ranks against blind authority" (Chapter. 4, pg. 129.)

"Course I bloody lied!" Sharpe snarled. 'What kind of a fool admits to having a picklock?'" (Chapter. 5, pg. 150.)

"Gudin gave Lawford a long scrutiny. The Frenchman was tall and thin, with a lugubrious and tired face, but his eyes, Sharpe decided, were shrewd and kind. Gudin, Sharpe reckoned, was a gentleman, a proper type of officer" (Chapter. 5, pg. 155.)

"The missiles climbed through the darkening sky, their exhaust flames unnaturally bright as they spewed volcanoes of sparks into the smoke trails that mingled as the rockets reached their apogee and then plunged toward the British and Indian infantry" (Chapter. 6, pg. 204.)

"Lawford shook off the tug and stared at the prisoners, unable to hide his chagrin at the sight of British soldiers being herded into captivity. Then he recognized Hakeswill who, at the same instant, stared into the Lieutenant's face, and Sharpe saw Hakeswill's look of utter astonishment" (Chapter. 7, pg. 227.)

"While inside the city, watching his precious cannon being destroyed, the Tippoo fumed. The mill fort, on which he had pinned such high hopes of delaying the enemy till the monsoon washed them away, had fallen like a child's wooden toy" (Chapter. 8, pg. 258.)

"Appah Rao took a pistol from his belt and began loading it. Both Mary and Kunwar Singh watched with alarm as the General carefully measured powder from a silver horn into the pistol's chased barrel" (Chapter. 8, pg. 274.)

"One by one the other siege guns woke and had their throats blasted clear" (Chapter. 9, pg. 302.)

"Sharpe felt a pang of sorrow for the dying man. He might have been a murderous enemy, but he was a brave one" (Chapter. 11, pg. 372.)

Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the characters of Sharpe and Hakeswill.

Why might Tippoo be so attracted to tigers?

What motivates the British to attack the city of Seringapatam?

How does Sharpe change from the beginning of the story to its end?

Describe the differences in how Sharpe handles a musket and Lawford's style. Why are they so different?

Why is the black-powder mine so important in the Battle of Seringapatam?

What is a private's life like in the British army of 1799?

What are the major differences between the Hindu and Muslim religions?

After a victory, what do the soldiers and women do to the fallen enemy soldiers?