

# **The Surgeon's Mate Study Guide**

**The Surgeon's Mate by Patrick O'Brian**

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## Plot Summary

Jack Aubrey, Stephen Maturin, and Diana Villiers enter Halifax, Nova Scotia, aboard the victorious HMS Shannon. They enjoy a heroes' welcome and then settle down to await transport to England. Maturin passes the time wondering about Villiers while Aubrey pursues an extramarital affair with the flighty Amanda Smith. Meanwhile, Villiers frets about her pregnancy by Harry Johnson. Finally, their transport sails to England, pursued relentlessly by privateers in the employ of Johnson. In Portsmouth and London, the three characters settle down to a period of relaxation and recuperation, Maturin meeting with his friend and confidant Sir Joseph Blaine.

After some few days, Maturin proceeds to Paris to lecture at a scientific academy. Villiers accompanies him and is established in Paris with some of Maturin's friends. While in Paris, Maturin is probed by various French agents but maintains a strictly academic role. Returning to England, Maturin finds Aubrey yearning for the sea. Blaine then enlists Maturin's assistance in a difficult situation involving Catalan troops garrisoning an impregnable Baltic Sea fortress (Maturin is Catalan). Maturin accepts the mission and enlists Aubrey as naval expert and captain. The two men repair aboard HMS Ariel where they are joined by a young Swedish officer, Jagiello. Aubrey finds Ariel well-crewed and efficient; Maturin finds Ariel a typical ship and teaches what little he knows of things nautical to the even-more-ignorant Jagiello.

The party proceeds to Grimsholm fortress where Maturin goes ashore by stratagem. By fortunate coincidence, the local commander is Maturin's godfather and the Catalans quickly defect to the British cause. Throughout all this success, Maturin pines for Villiers and worries that his depression is incurable. Under Aubrey's leadership, a small convoy bears the Catalan forces homeward. On the voyage, Aubrey intervenes in a nautical chase to bring a French frigate to heel, and then sails away into a mounting storm system unsure of his location. Unfortunately, Ariel sails on blindly into a maze of reefs and shoals and by the time Aubrey discerns their actual location the ship is doomed. Ariel strikes on a rocky shore and sinks. Her men are taken into French captivity. Aubrey, Maturin, and Jagiello are transported to Paris.

There, Maturin makes his presence widely known while Villiers—who has suffered a miscarriage—sells her beloved and immense diamond to secure Maturin's release. This muddies the waters, however, and eventually a French political faction intervenes to effect the three prisoners' escape. They join with Villiers aboard a shadowy English packet commanded by William Babbington, and head away to England and freedom. Just miles from England Villiers accepts finally Maturin's repeated proposal and Babbington marries the happy couple, Aubrey giving away the bride.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Jack Aubrey, Stephen Maturin, and Diana Villiers are all passengers aboard HMS Shannon. The threesome has recently escaped from Boston and is being pursued by Harry Johnson, Villiers' one-time lover and an eager American intelligence officer possessed of extensive personal wealth. Aubrey participated as a combatant in Shannon's recent victory over USS Chesapeake, and the captured American heavy frigate accompanies Shannon on her voyage into Halifax, Nova Scotia. Word of the recent British victory spreads like wildfire and the town and environs erupt in a tumultuous celebration. Amidst much cheering, Aubrey is repeatedly invited to recount the battle from his own perspective. While the celebrations are going on, Maturin attends to the wounded until they are comfortably transferred to a hospital ashore.

Over the next days and weeks celebrations continue unabated and Aubrey is something of a local hero. Even so, letters from home bear the depressing news that Aubrey's business agent, Kimber, has exhausted many funds without producing anything substantive. Aubrey fears he is financially ruined. Maturin advises Aubrey to not fret over things he cannot control. Meanwhile, Maturin worries about various difficulties arising from his recent intelligence work while a nominal prisoner in America. He delivers copies of Johnson's voluminous papers to Beck, the local intelligence officer. He obtains for Villiers a certificate of safe passage—Villiers has recently become an American citizen, and America is a belligerent nation.

For one celebration, Maturin buys Villiers an expensive gown. She plans to attend adorned with her fabulous diamond necklace bearing the famous Blue Peter diamond. Villiers had been given the diamond by Johnson during their courtship. As their relationship soured, he recovered the diamond but during her escape Villiers had stolen it. Throughout this period Maturin proffers marriage to Villiers as the surest way of reasserting her British citizenship. Villiers, typically, declines. Maturin begins to realize that Villiers is pregnant and asks fellow physicians how one might diagnose early pregnancy.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter One is critical to an understanding of the text; it introduces nearly all of the dominant characters and establishes the setting and time period of the historically-based narrative. The novel is the seventh novel in a series of novels that runs to twenty completed volumes. Most of the characters in the novel have appeared numerous times in previous novels and have well-developed backgrounds and complex histories. Aubrey and Maturin have sailed and fought together for years and enjoy a close, particular friendship. Aubrey has been married to Sophie for several years, and Maturin holds Sophie in high regard. Villiers is Sophie's cousin and has enjoyed a full but complex life.



During two previous novels, the romantic relationship between Maturin and Villiers has been developed in considerable detail—in general, they share a devoted friendship and a romantic love that is mutable depending on circumstances. Maturin has suggested marriage on several occasions, and Villiers has occasionally accepted—only to later spurn Maturin. On the most recent occasion, Villiers left Maturin for Johnson, travelled to America, and renounced her British citizenship. Throughout this period, Maturin has suffered a fairly deep depression and managed his emotion by withdrawal and opium addiction.

Villiers relationship with Johnson naturally began to involve much of his intelligence work. As America and England are belligerents, Johnson's work is repugnant to Villiers who remains devoted to England. Aside from this, Johnson has a voracious sexual appetite and is used to controlling people. Thus, his relationship with Villiers has soured and become quite adversarial. As usual, Villiers turns to Maturin for assistance and Maturin happily renders it.



# Chapters 2 and 3

## Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Maturin attends the ball and passes the time watching other people and examining the potted plants. Villiers attends and is resplendent in her new gown and the Blue Peter diamond; various men comment on her exceptional beauty and Maturin finds her grace irresistible. Aubrey attends and broods through the early evening. He then meets a young woman, Amanda Smith. Smith dotes on Aubrey, finding him easily seduced and socially important. Aubrey drinks more than he should and begins to find Smith remarkably attractive. After much regaling and small talk, Aubrey comments on Nelson's Maxim—"Never mind manoeuvres; always go straight at 'em"—and Smith interprets this in a seductive and sexual manner. They leave the ball and search for a secluded spot, even as Smith, impressed with Aubrey's tales of violent combat, is frightened out of her wits by a toad crossing the path. Maturin and Villiers spend much of the evening in each other's company and Villiers comments that Smith will certainly spell trouble for Aubrey and that the older man should certainly know better; Maturin declines to intervene in Aubrey's behavior.

In Chapter Three, the next day mail from home arrives and confirms Aubrey's worst fears about Kimber. The days pass as everyone waits for Shannon's Captain Broke, seriously wounded in the encounter, to recover enough to write his official communiqué. During this period Smith pursues an increasingly unenthusiastic Aubrey with determination and spreads the news of their relationship far and wide—Aubrey begins to avoid her. Villiers finally confides in Maturin that she is pregnant, a fact he has decided upon for some time. As Aubrey's situation becomes increasingly untenable he waits for the happy day when, finally, Broke's communiqué is readied and the packet sails for England. The official communiqué goes aboard a fast packet while Aubrey, Maturin, and Villiers sail on a secondary packet with a second copy of the communiqué.

The threesome boards *Diligence*, a fast-sailing, lightly-armed packet captained by Dalgliesh. The passage begins normally, with Villiers becoming immediately and severely seasick. Aubrey is glad to be away from Smith and back to the sea; Maturin is as reserved as usual and spends most of his time bird watching. *Diligence* is quickly intercepted by two armed American schooners that converge on the packet—one of the schooners, *Liberty*, often pursues British ships in the area. Dalgliesh assumes the schooners will be easily outrun and is surprised when they show a dogged persistence. He wonders why they should allow the official packet to pass but attempt to capture the backup packet. Villiers and Maturin quickly deduce that Johnson must be funding the capture attempt at considerable expense. Several tense days pass and it appears that, slowly but surely, the *Diligence* must be captured. As the chase draws to an apparent conclusion the *Liberty* strikes submerged ice and staves in her hull. Sinking quickly, her crew is rescued by her consort and *Diligence* happily escapes.



## Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

These two Chapters form a transition phase in the novel and in many ways bridge the previous novel's concluding developments to the current novel's action. Much of the discussion refers heavily to events developed in previous novels. For example, Johnson's single-minded dedication to recovering Villiers, Maturin, and the Blue Peter diamond is only fully appreciated by knowing far more about Johnson than is considered in the current novel's character gloss. Smith's dogged pursuit of Aubrey leads to several embarrassing situations, and after the pleasurable excitement of the initial few sexual encounters wanes, the world-wise captain rues his involvement with the somewhat attractive but fairly vapid young woman. Aubrey's primary desire in sailing away on the packet is to escape Smith—his escape will prove only partial, however.

Character development continues through these introductory chapters—Aubrey's early suggestion of decisive action between Diligence and Liberty proves to have been a correct assessment of the situation though Dalgliesh ignores it. Only a hidden iceberg saves the day after a lengthy but exciting chase that forms the bulk of Chapter Three. The sinking of Liberty foreshadows the later sinking of HMS Ariel. The contrast between Aubrey, the man of action, and Dalgliesh, the man of caution, is noteworthy.



# Chapters 4 and 5

## Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Diligence arrives at Portsmouth where the news of Shannon's victory is widely known and celebration is ensuing. Amidst the tumultuous celebration, Aubrey makes his way to naval authorities and files his lengthy and improbable preliminary report, spanning many months and several ships. After making his report Aubrey returns home and finds it much reduced—nearly vacant, in fact. He meets his children and locates Sophie, and the two enjoy a joyful reunion. Mrs. Williams, Sophie's mother, is fortunately away. During their re-acquaintance Aubrey muses about clocks. Sometime later several businessmen arrive, stating they are representatives of Kimber. They murmur out vague threatening when Aubrey refuses to give them more money and then depart in a nebulous haze of the threat of lawsuits. Aubrey is then joined by Maturin and the two men travel to London to make their official reports.

For Aubrey, the official report is largely a repeat of his preliminary report, but through formal channels. Maturin makes his formal report to Sir Joseph Blaine. Blaine and Maturin have enjoyed a lengthy professional relationship and share many interests outside of intelligence work. The two men esteem each other and have what borders on a personal friendship. Blaine reviews Maturin's report and the papers captured from Johnson. He then mentions that Catalan forces are garrisoning a Baltic Sea fortress called Grimsholm, and that Maturin was viewed as the ideal candidate to talk with the forces. Maturin's absence, however, compelled British intelligence to entrust the mission to another agent, Pompeu Ponsich. Maturin states that Ponsich was an admirable selection. He then states his intention to travel to Paris to lecture at a scientific academy. Blaine and Maturin discuss the relative risk of such a voyage and conclude it to be likely safe. Maturin plans to take Villiers to Paris for her confinement and Blaine arranges for Villiers' safe passage. Blaine suggests a competent attorney for Aubrey after vituperating the intelligence of the average British seaman while ashore.

In Chapter Five, Maturin and Villiers travel to Paris and spend a few days sightseeing. Maturin learns that Villiers spent a few years of her early childhood in Paris and she points out some of her old environs. Maturin arranges for Villiers to stay at the Hôtel de la Mothe, operated by his friend who is sympathetic to the English. Over the next few weeks various Frenchmen, mostly minor intelligence agents, probe Maturin about his willingness to convey messages to England and so forth: Maturin behaves entirely like a disinterested academician. Maturin also observes Villiers' entire fascination with the Blue Peter diamond—a stunning gem, it has wholly captivated her and is her most-cherished possession. The day for his speech finally arrives and Maturin delivers a lengthy speech in a very uninspiring manner. After the opening lines, most attendees drift off into private conversations. After concluding his speech Maturin overhears that Ponsich has drowned in some type of accident. He quickly bids Villiers goodbye and returns to England.





Meanwhile, Aubrey is exceedingly unhappy ashore. Amanda Smith has sent a constant stream of letters demanding money and suggesting that she will momentarily travel to England and establish herself as Aubrey's public lover; she alludes much to Lord Nelson's infamously scandalous marital situation. Aubrey responds by sending money and urging delay. Meanwhile, he yearns for a command to leave the country. To make things worse, his legal and financial troubles with Kimber continue. In a previous cruise, Aubrey's first lieutenant, Grant, had proved cowardly and difficult. Now Grant is circulating slander about Aubrey. All this combines to make Aubrey's stay in England anything but pleasant.

## Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

Chapter Four presents a transitional phase, bridging the novel's introductory material and establishing the rationale for the novel's middle military exploit. The characters return home and find that after their prolonged absence home is not quite as inviting as they had remembered it. Aubrey's fascination with having an available timepiece in every room heavily foreshadows his eventual desperate need for a reliable clock in Chapters Eight and Nine. His children's play refers to political elections and issues of the time period. Blaine's discussion with Maturin includes mention of the Baltic fortress of Grimsholm, held by Catalan troops. In this instance, the troops are considered Spanish and were at one time France's allies. Recently, France has occupied Spain and England has invaded, Spain having declared against France. Thus, the Catalan forces are actually at war with France. As France has kept them in the dark on their island fortress, the troops know nothing of this development. British intelligence believes that if a credible messenger were to inform the Catalan forces of the situation, they would defect to the British cause. The entire discussion appears as a minor aside in Chapter Four, but in fact it forms the basis of much of the novel's subsequent action. The initial messenger, as Maturin soon learns, is unsuccessful in reaching the island fortress. To further entice Maturin, Blaine notes that the Catalan forces are led by Maturin's godfather. The discussion between Blaine and Maturin is, as usual, enjoyable and forms some of the best dialogue writing in the novel.

Maturin's visit to Paris appears to modern sensibilities as fantastical; such, however, were different times. Maturin travels under a safe conduct pass because of his reputation as a natural scientist. Of course if French officials knew of his intelligence work they would not be so welcoming. Villiers is emplaced with one of Maturin's trusted friends; her allusion to abortion and Maturin's Catholic abhorrence of the practice are an interesting social commentary on the period. The various French attempts to compromise Maturin foreshadow his eventual difficulties with French intelligence, late in the novel. Maturin's speech is a complete failure, as one would expect, but a failure very humorous in the making. Ponsich's death is a major narrative turning point and to devoted readers spells the realization of Aubrey's wish to soon be at sea again.



# Chapters 6 and 7

## Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

Aubrey yearns to return to sea to escape his various problems ashore. Maturin travels to Aubrey's home in England and hints that Aubrey's wish will soon be realized by a voyage to Grimsholm in the Baltic Sea. Aubrey and Maturin then discuss marriage and women at some length. Some days later Maturin meets with Blaine and accepts an invitation to travel to Grimsholm. The forces there are led by Ramon d'Ullastreti Casademon, Maturin's Catalan godfather. Blaine briefs Maturin extensively and Maturin prepares for his mission rather casually, noting that the actual meeting will call more for nimble thinking than prepared statements. Meanwhile, Aubrey is further slanderously hazed by his erstwhile lieutenant Grant who now claims that Aubrey did not sink *Waakzaamheid*, a Dutch ship-of-war, but simply a nondescript transport.

Soon enough Aubrey takes command of *Ariel*, a flush-decked, ship-rigged corvette. *Ariel* bears sixteen thirty-two-pound cannonades and two long-nine chase guns, throws a broadside weight of metal of 265 lbs., and has a normal complement of 112-120 men. Her crew is well disciplined and trained. *Ariel*'s senior lieutenant is Hyde, a left-handed man who suffers from a language impediment in swapping words around in sentences and frequently mistaking left for right and so forth. Aside from that, Hyde is reliable and unimaginative. Aubrey and Maturin are also joined by Jagiello, a young officer of the Swedish service. Jagiello is to act as an advisor and observer though his role is ill-defined in the narrative. His overwhelming characteristic is his beauty and enormous sex appeal.

In Chapter Seven, *Ariel* sets sail for the Baltic Sea. Throughout the voyage Maturin attempts to educate Jagiello to the usage of the sea while Aubrey is constantly irritated by Hyde's fumbling speech and frequently incorrect orders. Jagiello proves remarkably clumsy aboard ship and on one occasion seriously injures his hand. Because of his injury, he is unable to cut the salt-horse meat at mess and Hyde assists him. During one such meal Hyde fumbles the meat and the rock-hard cut shoots off the plate, across the table, and strikes Aubrey with considerable force. Aside from this social mistake, the cruise proceeds pleasantly with much conversation. Maturin happily watches bird while Aubrey puts the ship through maneuvers. Eventually *Ariel* sails through the narrow Baltic entrance under an ineffectual fire and rendezvous with Admiral Sir James Saumarez's fleet. There, more political discussions and planning sessions are held. Maturin suggests that a captured trader must be used as conveyance into Grimsholm—any strange ship will be fired upon and sunk. Saumarez can offer no available ship but notes that French officers are known to be en route to Grimsholm.

## Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

Aubrey and Maturin embark on a sea voyage, marking a major narrative turning point. Their expedition will consume Chapters Six through Nine and its after-effects lead to the action of Chapters Ten and Eleven. Ariel is established as a well-found ship, and her crew is certainly up to any task reasonably asked of her. Hyde alone poses a problem because of his difficulty in speaking about relative direction. Clearly, aboard a ship keeping starboard and port correctly identified is critical—particularly when giving navigational orders. Hyde's tendency to mix right and left in speech is extremely disconcerting to Aubrey. Chapter Seven provides much foreshadowing of future events. Hyde's constant tendency to mistake left for right and right for left will have disastrous consequences in the novel's concluding nautical scene. The salt-horse meat hitting Aubrey (page 197) foreshadows the lead-line striking Aubrey (page 310) just prior to the wreck and loss of Ariel.

One unusual feature of the novel concerns the repetitive consideration of the Baltic mission. Blaine and Maturin discuss it during Chapter Four, and then re-discuss the matter at additional length in Chapter Six. Once again Chapter Seven presents a discussion of the mission between Samaurez and Maturin. The situation is fairly simple, and each discussion focuses on slightly varying points. Note that the novel's introductory "Author's Note" considers Samaurez' presence in the Baltic during this time period—Samaurez being a lightly fictionalized representation of the eponymous famous historical admiral. The fact that Samaurez has no captured prize ship to offer Maturin as conveyance to Grimsholm sets off the minor chain of events considered in Chapter Eight.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Aubrey takes Ariel in search of a suitable ship to capture and use as Maturin's conveyance. Maturin feels that any strange warship approaching Grimsholm would be fired upon and sunk—thus Aubrey searches for a local transport or small vessel likely to be known to Grimsholm as friendly or at worst neutral. Samaurez points Aubrey in the right direction to encounter a local ship. Ariel eventually sights Minnie, a local transport known as a fast sailor. He gives chase and gradually gains on the fleeing vessel. Meanwhile another Royal Navy ship, humorously named Humbug, joins the chase. It is a close thing and Minnie nearly escapes before accidentally running slowly aground on a mud flat. Several French officers immediately take to a boat and attempt escape—after warning them several times and in several languages, Aubrey opens fire and destroys the boat and the Frenchmen.

Ariel and Humbug then combine efforts over many hours and eventually heave Minnie off the mud flat. Maturin suggests that Ariel falsely chase Minnie into the harbor at Grimsholm, adding to the impression that Minnie is a friendly transport seeking shelter from a hostile English vessel—and thus gaining the dock. During the planning of the mission Aubrey offers a toast to success and then shockingly drops the glass, which shatters on the table—an ill-omen indeed. A few hours later, Aubrey has a strong premonition of disaster—another ill-omen. In the event, however, Maturin's plan succeeds. Apparently chased by Ariel, Minnie flies into Grimsholm harbor and makes the dock without drawing hostile fire. Maturin greets his godfather with great joy and within a few hours the fortress garrison has decided to defect to the British cause. Ariel leads several transports full of English troops into the harbor. After the English land and possess the fortress, the Catalan forces board the transports and look forward to returning home.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Most of Chapter Eight is devoted to setting up the mission rather than actually accomplishing it. Maturin is sure he can succeed if only he can gain the fortress harbor. Earlier, Ponsich had failed because his ship was sunk by hostile fire before he could intercede with the Catalan forces. Time is of the essence because new French officers are en route to bolster the defenses. Maturin, a Catalan, has a great desire to spare his countrymen from their abusive and deceptive French service. Minnie proves a suitable craft and Aubrey captures her largely due to fortune—just as she is about to escape, Minnie runs aground in the shallow waters. Minnie's misfortune is reminiscent of Liberty's misfortune in striking submerged ice during the opening chapters of the novel. Much technical detail about the process of drawing Minnie off the mud flats is given—the procedure takes hours and a maze of lines and anchors, but is finally successful. Minnie's code book is somewhat dated and Maturin fears that the recognition signal



may be expired—hence his request that Ariel pursue Minnie. It is noteworthy that Maturin here envisions the successful nautical ruse de guerre rather than Aubrey—certainly an exceptional role reversal in the series of novels.

Aubrey's breaking of the toast-glass, and his premonition of disaster, apparently foreshadow a disastrous attempt by Maturin. Yet Maturin is successful. Aubrey thereafter dismisses both omens as nonsense but instead he has simply attributed them to the wrong event. Both heavily foreshadow the forthcoming loss of Ariel and its attendant complications. Combined with Liberty's and Minnie's grounding, Hyde's inability to order left or right, and Hyde's accidental striking of Aubrey all combine to strongly suggest the nature in which Ariel will be lost. The final element of the gradual tragedy will be the accidental breaking of the ship's chronometer in Chapter Nine, foreshadowed by Aubrey's musing about the desirability of many timepieces in Chapter Four.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Ariel escorts the transports loaded with Catalan troops back to Admiral Samaurez's fleet. D'Ullastret meets Samaurez and civilities ensue. The ships then continue onward and rendezvous with a huge commercial fleet, intending to convoy through the Baltic straits. One morning Maturin and Jagiello go aloft through a low-lying fog—Maturin exults in the beautiful view which Aubrey refers to as the 'day blink.' The convoy proceeds onward through difficult waters. Pellworm, the Baltic pilot, mentions various omens and repeatedly states the voyage is doomed. Then disaster strikes—the ship's only chronometer is broken. Aubrey delivers a rather technical discussion of time and navigation to Maturin, in which he makes it clear that without a chronometer the ship will be unable to determine their correct longitude. The broken chronometer is replaced by Maturin's hack watch, which is noted to lose about a minute every day; accurate enough for taking a pulse, but woefully inadequate for accurate navigation.

A large storm system moves into the area and the overcast sky makes celestial navigation impossible. Ariel and her transports manage to weather a promontory while the merchant convoy does not. As the bulk of the fleet runs for shelter, Aubrey continues onward. Pellworm's duties concluded, he is put ashore with a final ominous prediction of disaster. The little fleet continues to sail through storms for several days. Aubrey becomes increasingly worried about the ships' actual positions in the dirty weather. Then, Ariel encounters HMS Jason chasing the French ship-of-war *Médusae*. Jason is unable to catch the French ship and Ariel moves to intervene, leaving her transports to fare for themselves in the now-friendly waters. Aubrey is concerned that his unknown position may put him dangerously close to the lee shore of France, but he is determined to help Jason bring the French ship to bay. Tiny Ariel can do no more than harass the French ship, but any delay will allow Jason to engage. A lengthy and dangerous chase ensues. While Aubrey commands on deck, Maturin and Jagiello retreat below and Maturin tells Jagiello what is happening. Ariel finally closes the French ship and exchanges gunfire. Aubrey aims for the rigging and causes enough damage that the French ship slows perceptibly. Ariel then turns away and attempts to follow the two ships—she succeeds enough to see a violent battle in the hazy distance but is then swallowed up in the increasing storms. Aubrey, exhausted for many, many hours of chase, goes to sleep, leaving the ship in Hyde's control.

Aubrey is awakened to an emergency—the ship is much farther east than though, and she is surrounded by shoaling water and breakers. Aubrey gains the deck and sees a massive crag—The Thatcher—nearby. He attempts a desperate and dangerous maneuver known as a club-haul to spin the ship around. As Aubrey barks commands in the tricky situation, the lead-line is kept continually sounding. However, then disaster occurs—the leadsman hurls the lead-line with force but wildly, and the lead smashes into Aubrey's face, knocking him insensate for a moment. It is the critical instant, and Hyde shouts out orders "Larboard all—I mean starboard" (p. 310); confusion ensues as



the crew works at cross purposes, and Ariel drives backward onto The Thatcher, staving her stern and breaking her keel. Aubrey recovers, but too late. He takes the ship off and sends her ashore where she beaches, wallowing, and begins to break apart. The crew exits her safely, but walks into the arms of awaiting French soldiers.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

In many ways, Chapter Nine is the climax of the novel. It depicts the only ship-to-ship combat action of the book, sees Aubrey firing his only broadsides, and is the culmination of much foreshadowing. Aubrey's monologue about the desirability of many clocks, his dropping and breaking of a toast glass, his premonition of disaster; Pellworm's many predictions of doom and his fascination with ill-omens; and Maturin's education on longitude and navigation all combine to heavily predict Ariel must come to trouble. The timing is made certain when a variety of miniature disasters occur all-at-once: an exhausted Aubrey turns in; a bumbling Hyde commands the ship; Aubrey is struck down by the lead-line; Hyde fumbles his words setting the crew at cross purposes; and tiny Ariel is lost in the tempest. Note the great lengths to which the narrative construction goes to obviate culpability on Aubrey's part for the wreck. He can certainly be said to have done as much as one man could to avoid it; for example, had the admiralty only supplied an additional chronometer—had Aubrey time to buy one of his own. Even Jason's last-minute position must have been inaccurate. At any event, Ariel's loss concludes the novel's dominant action arc begun in Chapter Six but predicted in Chapter Four. The loss of Ariel, however, can be strategically balanced by the destruction of *Médusae*, which would not have occurred without Ariel's intervention—an act leading directly to her loss.

Note the interesting parallel construction of the chase scene—while Aubrey acts on deck, Maturin instructs Jagiello below. In a rare example of nautical knowledge, Maturin generally gets it right. A similar but less obvious meanwhile-in-parallel construction exists in Chapter Five, dealing with Maturin in France and Aubrey in England. The remainder of the novel deals with the incarceration of Aubrey, Maturin, and Jagiello, and their eventual assisted escape.



# Chapters 10 and 11

## Chapters 10 and 11 Summary

The crew of Ariel is imprisoned for several days and subjected to routine questioning—the men give ridiculous answers. Maturin is questioned a second time in a more vigorous fashion, and then Aubrey, Maturin, and Jagiello are transferred to Paris. On the way, Maturin surmises that his nature as an intelligence agent has been discovered and that he will likely be subjected to torture and murder; he plans to use a glass capsule of poison to prevent divulging information. The men are escorted by Duhamel, a peculiarly mild French agent. As the journey progresses over several days Maturin thinks often of Diana and muses about her infinite pleasure in possessing the Blue Peter diamond. Arriving in Paris, the three men are imprisoned in a high tower in The Temple, an ancient fortress undergoing demolition. Maturin reflects that the choice of The Temple indicates the political faction interested in him is not the military or established French intelligence—a good thing. The turnkey Rousseau delivers a lengthy rambling monologue about The Temple, imprisonment, French politics, and local food options. Maturin requests medical attention and then uses a series of ruses to let it be widely known that the men are imprisoned—he hopes to garner the attention of friendly factions and theorizes that a simple 'disappearance' will be hampered by wide local knowledge. Aubrey, having received food poisoning on the journey, slowly recovers. Weeks pass without incident, and Aubrey begins working to widen the hole through which waste is dropped from the high tower. Meanwhile, the beautiful Jagiello sings and parades and gains the attention of a nearby cooking girl. His long-distance 'seduction' causes her to send tools to help Aubrey, disguised in sumptuous foods. Aubrey refers again to Nelson's maxim (p. 343) to urge Jagiello to press the advantage.

In Chapter Eleven, after several weeks have passed, Maturin is questioned a few more times. Various false accusations are made, leaving Maturin confused—he is obviously suspected of something, but his true nature is not known. Aubrey works on an escape route, but the progress is slow; Maturin ponders his fate. Aubrey learns that Jason in fact destroyed Médusae, and he thereafter feels the loss of Ariel repaid. Then Duhamel offers to help Maturin escape in exchange for carrying information from France to England. It is either a subtle political move or a subtle trap for Maturin—either is as likely. Then, within a few moments, Maturin learns that Villiers has traded her beloved Blue Peter diamond for his escape and Aubrey learns that Amanda Smith has married a hapless military officer: both men suddenly are inflamed with a newfound passion to live and pursue their romantic goals. Maturin ponders Duhamel's offer but then his mind is instantly made when Harry Johnson appears at one questioning session and identifies Maturin as an enemy of France.

Maturin returns to the prison cell and informs Aubrey that they must either escape immediately or be killed shortly. The men work furiously to enlarge their escape hole and manage some success, just as Duhamel arrives in the cell through a back door, as it were. Duhamel repeats his offer and of course Maturin accepts. Following Duhamel,





the three men leave the prison and are driven out of Paris. They rendezvous with Villiers and journey to a harbor town where they go aboard a discreet English packet. Villiers confides that she has miscarried. Aubrey is delighted to discover the ship is Oedipus, commanded by his good friend and protégé William Babbington. Oedipus puts to sea and some few miles from England Babbington happily marries Stephen Maturin and Diana Villiers; Aubrey gives away the bride.

## Chapters 10 and 11 Analysis

Chapters Ten and Eleven conclude the novel with an additional episode. The novel's construction yields a somewhat disjointed texture because of the episodic nature of the narrative: a journey from America to England, a journey from England to France, a military expedition to the Baltic, loss of a ship in a storm, and imprisonment and escape. The vicissitudes of military service tie the episodes together and form a creditable rationale for the chronology; but the obvious dominant theme that attempts to drive the novel's development is the flowering of reciprocated romantic love between Maturin and Villiers. For several years Maturin has openly pined for Villiers but she has repeatedly declined his advances; this has left him in a deep depression from which he gradually emerges during the current novel. Villiers' parting with the Blue Peter signals to Maturin that she cares for him more than he realized. Note that Villiers' intervention with the diamond serves actually to complicate Maturin's release inasmuch as it draws broad attention to him and is probably directly responsible for Johnson's presence in Paris. Even so, Maturin allows Villiers to believe that her intervention was decisive. Just as Maturin's romantic prospects look up, so to do Aubrey's. He learns that Smith has married someone else and hence he is freed from her advances; his marriage is saved from his own folly. The two protagonists' love interests increase just as Jagiello's comes to an end—his pretty cooking girl says goodbye symbolically as he escapes The Temple, symbolically his roost.

Oedipus is an English packet on technically illegal business, yet business tolerated by the belligerent nations as their respective governments value such services. Babbington, as a captain, legally is entitled to perform the marriage. His long history with the three characters makes him not only a legal, but a delightful choice. Babbington's infamously lecherous behavior also foreshadows marital complications for Maturin and Villiers, of course. Yet even so the novel ends on a resoundingly happy note.



# Characters

## Jack Aubrey

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

As described in previous novels of the series, Aubrey is a post captain who arrives in Halifax after an event-filled excursion departing from England aboard H.M.S. Leopard. After much catastrophe and misfortune, Aubrey escapes from American imprisonment and embarks on the series of adventures and misadventures detailed in the current novel.

Aubrey wears his blonde hair in a long queue and dresses as a traditional ship's captain. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent; his weight fluctuates wildly. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds including an ear sliced apart in an old encounter and various scars on his head. Aubrey is usually quite useless on land—for example, he has signed over his fortune to a scheming enterpriser—but on military occasions he proves useful enough.

Aubrey's lack of judgment while ashore is perhaps nowhere better illustrated in the current novel than his early dalliance with Amanda Smith, the social climbing young woman in Halifax. Even though he should know better, and not to mention is married, Aubrey engages her in an affair and spends the next approximately year worrying about the effects of such an affair upon his marriage, reputation, and future.

## Stephen Maturin

Maturin is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey; the current novel features Maturin more prominently than most. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area of medicine and he is also a natural scientist of some repute—for example, Maturin is invited to speak at the Paris Institute as an expert on various birds. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science and his medical opinions are surprisingly modern and always correct, though the present novel features little of Maturin's medical skills. Although possessed of financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life



and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct. Maturin, in addition to being a physician and scientist, is a pro bono agent for the secret intelligence network of England. From time to time, Maturin's relationship with the intelligence service is complicated, such as when he falls into French captivity at the end of the novel. Such is the life of an international spy.

Maturin is a small, squat man who in many respects is the antithesis of Aubrey. Maturin is much given to introspection, subtle interpretations, and Byzantine analysis of the current situation. He is nearly entirely mental, with little interest in things physical—though capable enough when the time comes. Although he is possessed of a nearly preternatural constitution, Maturin is not notably dexterous or strong, though his physique is rarely a handicap to his desires. Although he can be over-confident of his abilities, he is nearly always correct in his analysis of situations and people. A notable exception to his typical clarity of vision centers on his love interest, Diana Villiers; Maturin generally is unable to comprehend her complexities and unwilling to accept her rather obvious shortcomings. Like Aubrey, Maturin derives great pleasure from music and is a capable musician.

## Diana Villiers

Diana Villiers is exceptionally beautiful; indeed, physical beauty and sexual allure are clearly her dominant features and she easily controls most men through her physical charms. Even the usually resolute Maturin is smitten with her and in the past has irrationally held out hope that she would return his fervent devotion. Usually, his desire is returned by fairly cruel use. Villiers is in her mid thirties and has long, jet black hair and a long, slender neck. Villiers is the cousin to Sophie Aubrey, Jack Aubrey's wife, and has a long and complex history that is fully developed in several prior novels. She had accepted a previous marriage proposal from Maturin before absconding to America with Harry Johnson to avoid possible legal complications. Since that time her relationship with Johnson deteriorated and the two characters were at significant odds; hence Villiers' escape from Boston alongside Maturin and Aubrey.

Villiers becomes an American citizen but her heart remains with England. The novel finds Villiers much hardened by her stint in America. Maturin is shocked by her metamorphosis though her pregnancy, by Johnson, does not trouble him. Villiers' stay in Paris finds her much recuperated and her secondary but desperate flight from Johnson finds her much restored in vigor and vivaciousness. Her behavior during any crisis is always exceptional—indeed, she is 'at her best' during difficult times and situations.

## Sophia

Sophie is one of two secondary protagonists in the novel and the only fully sympathetic female character presented in any detail. She is an exceptionally beautiful and very devoted woman and the mother of Aubrey's three children—twin girls and a younger boy. Sophie's character and her engagement and marriage to Aubrey are all treated at



considerable length in prior novels. Sophie's mother, Mrs. Williams, is a notorious and penurious boor and hence Maturin comments upon her absence favorably.

Sophie's natural disposition is trusting, open, and honest. She is held in particularly high regard by most of Aubrey's friends, including Maturin who values her as a particular friend. Throughout the novel Sophie writes Aubrey long and frequent letters, informing him in an open style of her whereabouts and doings. Aubrey devours the letters and sends his own to Sophie. Sophie's sexual activity is muted, however, and following the birth of their last child the Aubreys have been entirely platonic—much to Aubrey's dismay. This is used as something of a justification for Aubrey when he engages in an extramarital affair which is certainly far less than the delightful Sophie deserves.

## Jagiello

Jagiello is a young cavalry officer from the Swedish service who is attached to Aubrey and Maturin's expedition as an observer and consultant. Jagiello begins his duties by always presenting in spurs and uniform. The spurs being excessively inconvenient aboard ship, he eventually abandons them. Aboard ship, Jagiello is somewhat accident prone. Jagiello's function on the mission is fairly obscure and aside from pointing out Hamlet's grave, he does little official consulting. He spends most of his time aboard speaking with Maturin about things nautical—which greatly clarifies his complete lack of knowledge about the sea! Jagiello's overriding character trait is his excessively, nearly otherworldly, sex appeal to women of all ages, nationalities, and socioeconomic classes. Serving girls swoon over him, proper women of society are compelled to salute him, and the men he serves with are as bewildered as they are jealous. From his introduction at the end of the first third of the novel, Jagiello is present in nearly every scene through to the end, even though his presence is something more akin to window dressing than substantive.

## Hyde

Hyde is the senior lieutenant of Ariel and has served in that capacity for at least several months—and probably years—prior to Aubrey's command of the ship. Hyde is well-liked by the crew and is a capable if unimaginative sailor and leader. He suffers from a defect, however, that proves fatal to Ariel if not her crew—he mistakes right for left when under stress and often switches words around in a sentence, obscuring his intended meaning. Maturin attributes this, in part, to Hyde being left-handed. For most of the novel, Hyde operates as a dutiful lieutenant though Aubrey finds his navigation somewhat questionable and often overly conservative. Hyde's language impairment is generally harmless, but during one critical maneuver while Aubrey is temporarily disabled, Hyde barks out the order "'Larboard all—I mean starboard'" (p. 310) and during the resultant moment of confusion the Ariel strikes a huge rock known as The Thatcher and is stove in.



## Duhamel

Duhamel is a French intelligence agent working for a faction of the French government headed by Talleyrand. The novel does not develop his situation in great depth, but he is obviously highly placed and possessed of considerable independent initiative. He first appears in the novel to escort Aubrey, Maturin, and Jagiello from their coastal fortress to Paris, where he sees them ensconced in The Temple. This choice makes Maturin somewhat relax inasmuch as it is not a military dungeon. Duhamel then vanishes from the scene for many weeks and reappears to offer Maturin escape in exchange for carrying secret messages from Talleyrand's faction to the English government—in history, such subterfuge was common during the period, though the episode here fictionalized appears entirely fictional. Duhamel owns a revolving, self-cocking pistol that Maturin describes as overly-heavy; such a weapon would be exceedingly rare during the period of time described in the novel and marks Duhamel as very rich and much concerned with personal safety. The actual escape is so well-organized that it makes Maturin marvel at Duhamel's prowess—certainly higher praise than any verbal effort could amount to.

## Don Ramon d'Ullastreti Casademon

D'Ullastreti is the Catalan commander of the forces garrisoning Grimsholm. The Catalans garrisoned the distant fortress during a period when Spain was allied with France. Since that time, France has invaded and conquered Spain and British forces have subsequently liberated much of Spain. The French have kept the Catalan forces ignorant of all these developments, however. D'Ullastreti happens to be Maturin's godfather, and when Maturin finally lands at Grimsholm the two men share a welcome reunion. D'Ullastreti is quickly convinced that he and his men have been haplessly duped by the French and he agrees to defect to the British cause. He is subsequently taken off the island and transported home. While aboard Ariel d'Ullastreti sings and converses constantly with Aubrey—a process hindered by the fact that they do not share a common language. Maturin describes d'Ullastreti's individual military prowess as remarkable.

## Amanda Smith

Amanda Smith is a young English woman at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her primary interest appears to be wooing a suitable mate through whatever means present—her lack of money, circumstance, social connections, and refined education means she usually approaches her target with a proffer of sexual availability. Aubrey, rather intoxicated, finds her very attractive while other men less in their cups find her pretty but not unavoidably so. Villiers comments to Maturin that Smith's reputation as a husband-seeker is widely known and held in disrespect. After having an affair with Aubrey, Smith seeks to make the most of it, parading their relationship around Halifax and making of herself a general nuisance. Really, however, Aubrey should have known better. By the end of the novel Smith is declaring, via letters, her intent to relocate to England and set



herself up publicly as Aubrey's lover. Aubrey responds rather characteristically by sending her money and telling her not to hurry. Fortunately for Aubrey, Smith manages to woo and wed another military officer before her journey begins. Smith's declared pregnancy is attributed to Aubrey but the novel suggests that Smith's pregnancy was either fallacious or of a 'false' nature.

## **William Babbington**

Babbington is the captain of Oedipus. He is a smaller man, stunted by various bouts with venereal diseases contracted during an active youth. A capable sailor and captain, Babbington is much infatuated with women and pursues them with a vigor rarely seen among even sailors. He was more-or-less raised aboard ships where Aubrey was the captain and owes much to his senior officer and friend; indeed, Babbington's promotion to his current rank is due mostly to Aubrey's influence. Babbington has known Maturin for many, many years and is only too happy to perform the marriage services that conclude the novel. Babbington appears with some regularity in the earlier novels in the series, and his appearance in the current novel is a welcome event.



# Objects/Places

## HMS Shannon and USS Chesapeake

Shannon and Chesapeake are two heavy frigates that fight a single-ship action off the coast of New England. The actual combat is detailed in a previous novel in the series, but the current novel opens aboard Shannon and describes her triumphal entry into Halifax. Shannon's victory engenders such celebration because it was the first British victory over an American frigate. The two ships are lightly fictionalized representations of historic vessels.

## HMS Ariel

Ariel is a flush-decked ship-rigged corvette captured from the French. She carries sixteen thirty-two-pound carronades and two long nine-pounder chase guns; she throws a 265 lb. broadside. Her normal complement is 112-120 men. Aubrey assumes command of Ariel for his expedition to the Baltic Sea and finds her crew well-drilled and capable. Ariel's senior lieutenant, Hyde, is a rather unimaginative but competent sailor who suffers from the serious problem of occasionally mistaking right for left and switching around words, particularly when stressed. Aubrey loses Ariel upon a huge rock known as The Thatcher in the concluding chapters of the novel.

## Minnie

Minnie is a Baltic transport that is well-known as a fast ship. Aubrey, in Ariel, chases Minnie until she runs aground on a mud flat and then captures her by a bloodless boarding operation. Minnie is hauled off by a concerted and lengthy operation and is then used to convey Maturin to Grimsholm. Minnie flies into the fortress harbor pursued by Ariel in a ruse de guerre which convinces the fortress to withhold fire.

## Grimsholm

Grimsholm is a fictional fortress located in the Baltic Sea and garrisoned originally by a large force of Catalan soldiers. The fortress is deemed impregnable by standard means and its location is highly detrimental to the British cause. Maturin lands on the island and convinces the garrison to defect to the English cause, leading to a resounding and bloodless British victory. An incident similar to this did occur historically c. 1808 though varying in detail.



## False and Failed Pregnancy

Two pregnancies are considered in the novel—that of Amanda Smith and that of Diana Villiers. Smith's pregnancy is presented in a series of letters addressed to Aubrey, the imputed father. Maturin encourages Aubrey to believe that Smith is merely hysterical and experiencing a false pregnancy. Whether hysterical or merely cunning, Smith's pregnancy indeed proves a false pregnancy. On the other hand, Villier's pregnancy is real but unwanted. It ends in an unfortunate miscarriage due, her attending physicians says, to her prolonged bout of seasickness and stress.

## HMS Jason and Médusae

Jason is an English ship-of-the-line that chases the French warship Médusae through a severe storm off the coast of France. Jason is unable to catch the French ship and enlists the assistance of Ariel to intercept the much larger Médusae. Ariel exchanges broadsides with the larger ship and in so doing cripples her rigging enough that Jason ultimately catches and destroys the French ship. Note that in ancient mythology, the medusa was killed by Perseus, not Jason.

## The Temple

The Temple is an ancient fortress, originally constructed by the Knights Templar during the 12th century. At the time of the early French Revolution, its use was converted to that of a prison and various notable royals were imprisoned there pending execution. In c. 1808 Napoleon ordered it destroyed because it was a symbol of royalist feeling. By c. 1810 the demolition was nearly completed; in the novel, the demolition takes place over a longer period of time, extending to c. 1812. The turnkey Rousseau is much distressed by The Temple's gradual destruction and deterioration and speaks often of the fortress' former glory.

## Duhamel's Pistol

Duhamel owns a very modern pistol—a double-action-only revolver. He gives it to Maturin as a convincing show of good faith and Maturin immediately returns it, noting that it is very heavy. Such self-cocking, revolving pistols would have been exceptionally rare at the time discussed and show that Duhamel is both exceptionally wealthy and very concerned about his personal safety.

## The Blue Peter

The Blue Peter is an enormous blue diamond, taken from a mine named Golconda. The diamond is given by Johnson to Villiers during their early courtship but then recovered by Johnson after Villiers loses his favor. Villiers steals the diamond during her escape





from Boston—events related in a previous novel—and wears it with much pride throughout the current novel until she trades it for Maturin's release from a Parisian prison.

## Oedipus

Oedipus is an English ship, commanded by William Babbington, once a favored midshipman of Aubrey's. Oedipus works as a packet, sailing between England and France. Officially plying an illegal route, Oedipus' mission is tolerated because both belligerent nations realize that such a clandestine but monitored exchange can be worthwhile under certain circumstances. Aubrey, Maturin, and Villiers escape France aboard Oedipus, and Maturin and Villiers are married aboard by Captain Babbington.



# Themes

## Friendship

The two protagonists of the novel, Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, share the spotlight nearly equally. The two men have enjoyed a prolonged friendship which has developed slowly over the course of six previous novels. Their mutual confidence has survived conflict, suspicion, and even competition for the attention of a woman, and emerged the stronger for it. Both men are able to haltingly share their innermost fears with the other, and their natures are such that their respective spheres of expertise complement the others' without conflict. Of course, this is limited with respect to Maturin's intelligence work, though Aubrey admits the work is important, finds it distasteful, and ignores it insofar as he becomes aware of it.

The constantly developing nature of their friendship not only drives the tone and texture of the novel, but is also generally responsible for the novel's plot development. For example, the narrative must contrive to place both men on distinct missions that happen to coincide upon a single ship—usually accomplished by having one support the military goals of the other. Both men take every opportunity to further their friend's career, however, and this constant exchange of graces and friendship runs as a dominant thread throughout the novel—indeed throughout all of the novels of the series—and forms one of the most enjoyable themes present. Such a close male-male friendship, entirely devoid of homo-eroticism, is indeed rare in modern fiction. Their friendship is perhaps enabled only by the nature of the environment used as the principle setting; that of a man-of-war on prolonged sea duty.

## Love

The novel's longitudinal theme, ranging through the entire narrative and continuing on from previous volumes in the series of novels, is the developing love between Maturin and Villiers. Throughout at least two or three previous novels in the series, Maturin has been deeply devoted to Villiers and has on numerous occasions suffered much personal grief because his feelings have not been wholly reciprocated. Indeed, Villiers is in America because she 'ran away' with Harry Johnson instead of honoring her engagement to Maturin. Thus, the complicated affair of the heart between Maturin and Villiers begins well before the opening of the current novel. Throughout the narrative, they are thrown into each other's company through the most unlikely of events. Maturin assists Villiers escape an untenable situation in America, they sail to Canada and then to England. Throughout this period Maturin uses his considerable behind-the-scenes influence to secure safe passage for Villiers even though she is a citizen of a hostile nation. Maturin then escorts Villiers to Paris where she intends to be confined during her pregnancy. Later still, Villiers nearly bungles Maturin's escape from Paris by attempting to help. Their love culminates in a heated episode of passion directly before their final wedding by Babbington aboard, humorously, Oedipus.



The theme of love is seconded by Aubrey's marriage to Sophie and its development. For his own part, Aubrey complicates his stable situation by engaging in an affair with the flibbertigibbet Amanda Smith; an affair that appears for several months to spell the end of Aubrey's married life. Fortunately, Smith is forward enough in general to capture the roving eye of another military officer—her subsequent marriage spares Aubrey's.

## The Vicissitudes of Military Service

One of the dominant themes of the novel is military service. Aubrey is a career military officer as are all of the men on the various ships in which he travels. Maturin has devoted his life to military service for the long term. Jagiello is recently embarked on a military career likely to span his entire productive life. Indeed, nearly every major—and most minor—character in the novel is either directly engaged in military service or is involved in an intimate relationship with someone who is so engaged. Even characters like Blaine, Johnson, and Beck who may not be military officers, per se, are engaged in intelligence work in direct support of military action. Thus, military service touches the lives—usually to a greater degree—of all the characters in the novel.

The theme is further developed by the narrative plot structure, which revolves around various military operations and conflicts. Having escaped military confinement in America, Aubrey and Maturin travel to Canada and en route participate in a historic naval battle. Leaving Canada they face pursuit and gain England. Later, they travel to Grimsholm on a military operation that happily ends without loss of life. Subsequent to this they provide a military escort to Catalan forces and then briefly engage a superior naval ship in a delaying ambush. This leads to the loss by wreck of Ariel and the men, including Aubrey and Maturin, are taken into French prison. Once again prisoners, Aubrey and Maturin face an uncertain future until they make good their fortunate escape. Indeed, the plot consists of several military episodes strung together by the narrative constant of Maturin's and Villier's gradually evolving relationship.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person, limited, point of view. The narrator is reliable, entirely effaced, and unnamed. Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, the main characters, are the protagonists and central figures in all of the scenes in the novel. The narrator divulges some internal thoughts of the two protagonists, but in general not of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are infrequent and are used for characterization rather than plot development.

The third-person point of view allows Aubrey and Maturin to be presented in a highly sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Maturin's heartbroken despondency as intelligible rather than pathetic. The narrative also allows portrayal of characters' life situations as difficult but not ridiculous. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. As both characters are roughly equal in significance, the third-person point of view also allows their textual representations to be roughly equivalent though in the present novel Maturin is rather ascendant. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all of the novels of the series and is accessible and successful.

## Setting

The novel features two primary types of settings. The first and most enjoyable is shipboard in a British warship. Examples of these include Shannon, Diligence, Ariel, and Oedipus. Ariel is captained by Aubrey while he is merely a passenger on the remaining vessels. The novel presents Aubrey's leadership style in contrast to other men such as Broke, Dalgliesh, and Babbington; in a parallel development Maturin's intelligence work is contrasted to that of Beck, Duhamel, and even Blaine. One of the novel's achievements is the presentation of shipboard life as something intriguing and even desirable while simultaneously presenting a realistic view of the often horrible hardships endured.

The second setting presented in the novel is an amalgam of various ports and seaboards during c. 1812. These locales are described in general terms and various citizens are developed as minor characters. The novel presents Halifax, Portsmouth, and Paris as urban locales and also features various nautical places—The Downs, The Thatcher, Grimsholm—as minor settings. Typically, the action aboard ship is dominated by Aubrey, the action ashore is usually dominated by Maturin.



## Language and Meaning

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

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

## Structure

The 382-page novel is divided into eleven numbered chapters of roughly equal length though some chapters are noticeably longer than others. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. Of course, references to previous events occur with some frequency and characters from time to time think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle timeline is accessible and easily followed.

The novel is intended to be read as part of a series of novels; specifically as the seventh novel in a series which extends to twenty volumes, with an unfinished but published twenty-first novel available. All but one of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories developed in prior novels. Similarly, events happening prior to the scope of the current novel are often referenced and indeed form the foundation of the narrative plot. This structure may prove somewhat difficult for readers unfamiliar with the prior novels. Nevertheless, basic character glosses and event recaps are provided.

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, the main events in the novel are fictional or fictionalized events which could have occurred, or did occur, in the period of time used as the novel's setting; namely, the war between England and America during the year c. 1812. Thus, the novel's language,

technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically accurate representations. The introductory 'Author's Note' enumerates a few historical discrepancies.



## Quotes

'I trust there was no unpleasantness, sir? Durand is said to be a most unscrupulous, determined officer.'

'Pontet-Canet was worse: a busy, troublesome fellow that gave me real uneasiness for a while. But, however, I clapped a stopper over his capers.' Dr. Maturin was proud of his nautical expressions: sometimes he got them right, but right or wrong he always brought them out with a slight emphasis of satisfaction, much as others might utter a particularly apt Greek or Latin quotation. 'And brought him up with a round stern,' he added. 'Would you have a knife, at all? This string is really not worth the saving.'

'How did you do that, sir?' asked Beck, passing a pair of scissors.

'I cut his throat,' said Maturin, shearing through the string. Major Beck was used to bloodshed in open and in clandestine war, but his visitor's everyday, unemphatic tone struck a chill to his heart, the more so as Maturin happened to take off his spectacles at this moment, glancing at Beck with his expressionless pale eyes, the only remarkable thing about him. (p. 22)

At the supper-table itself she begged him to describe the battle in every detail, and he did so with great good humour: it was a comparatively simple single-ship action, lasting only a quarter of an hour; she followed it with the utmost eagerness and, it seemed to him, with unusual good sense and understanding. 'How glad you must have been to see their colours come down. How proud of your victory! I am sure my heart would have burst,' she exclaimed, clasping her hands over her bosom, which yielded to the pressure.

'I was delighted,' he said. 'But it was not my victory, you know. It was Philip Broke's.'

'But were you not both in command? You are both captains.'

'Oh no. I was only a passenger, a person of no consequence.'

'I am sure you are being too modest. I am sure you rushed aboard, sword in hand.'

'Well, I did venture on their deck for a while. But the victory was Broke's and Broke's alone. Let us drink to his health.' (pp. 51-52)

'I beg your pardon,' she said, quite daunted by his severity. 'I thought there was an action—that they had boarded.'

'Not at all, not at all. The most inveterate privateer, the Liberty, has undone herself entirely; she ran upon ice and sank not five minutes since; and the other, loaded like Noah's ark, is going home. Give you joy of your escape, my dear. You are looking better, I find,' he said, taking her pulse. 'Yes: you are far better. Should you like to take some fresh air, and see the discomfiture of our enemies?' (pp. 94-95)

'Signed papers without reading them?' cried Sir Joseph.

'I am afraid so. He had been appointed to a ship. It seems that he did not wish to lose the tide.'

'Good God! Yet really I should not be surprised: the imbecility of your sailor ashore



passes all belief. I have seen countless examples of it, in all ranks, even in very able men, capable of leading a fleet and of conducting difficult diplomatic negotiations with real finesse. Only last week a distinguished officer I know assigned his half-pay for a lump sum: with this sum in his pocket in the form of negotiable bills he walks into a coffee-house. There he falls into conversation with a stranger: the stranger proposes an infallible scheme for multiplying capital by seven and a quarter without the slightest risk: the officer hands over his bills, and only when the stranger has been gone for some time does he realize that he does not even know the fellow's name, far less his dwelling-place. But to return to your unhappy friend: has he any clear notion of the import of these papers?' (pp. 128-129)

'Marines, Captain Aubrey?'

'It would have been Colonel Aubrey if they had. Have I never told you about the Marines, sweetheart? It is a plum they give you when you have done well. They cannot promote you—there is no such thing as promotion out of turn once you are a post-captain, and even the King could not make you an admiral over the heads of the captains above you on the list—if he did, half his senior officers would resign. So since they cannot promote you, and since you cannot eat a baronetcy or the naval medal, they make you a colonel of the Royal Marines instead, and you draw a colonel's pay, without doing anything for it.'

'But is that not corruption, Jack? You were always very much against corruption when you were young, I mean younger.'

'So I am still: corruption in others is anathema to me. But you would scarcely credit the depths of turpitude I should descend to myself for a thousand a year; and a colonel's pay is rather better than that...' (p. 146)

'...I once sailed with a young man well versed in Chinese, and I remember his quoting a passage from the Analects of Confucius in which the sage congratulated himself on having reached the time of obedient ears, the time at which he could do whatever his heart moved him to do without the least transgression of the moral law. And Origen, as you recall, struck off the offending member, and returned to purer contemplations, undisturbed.'

'I quite take your point, and a very cogent point it is; but you forget that I am speaking not of a loose, irregular connexion—it is marriage that I have in mind. Yet even if that were not the case, I should still ask for your help. I do not think that I am a man of an unusually warm temperament, a particularly amorous man; when I take off my shoes and stockings I do not see a satyr's leg. But since this weakness came upon me I find that I must always have looked at the more personable members of the sex with a certain eye, an appreciative, even a remotely concupiscent, a faintly hopeful eye; and with that eye extinguished, it is as though the spring of life were gone. I had no conception of its importance. You are younger than I am, Maturin, and it may be that you do not know from experience that the absence of a torment may be a worse torment still: you may wish to throw a hair-shirt aside, not realizing that it is the hair-shirt alone that keeps you warm.' (p. 177)





The starboard cable glided in; the afterguard, the Marines, and most of the topmen heaved; the others veered out through the larboard hawse; the quartermasters and the foreclemen coiled the cable won in tiers, stinking of Thames mud. The cat-fall was overhauled, the fish was clear.

'Up and down, sir,' called the second lieutenant from the forecastle.

'Thick and weight for drying,' replied Mr Hyde in his agitation, and then with a nervous glance at Jack, 'I mean thick and dry for weighing.'

The Ariel's best bower broke the surface; the cat was hooked to the ring; her people clapped on the fall, ran it up to the cat-head and fished it in a most seamanlike manner; and with scarcely a pause the ship began to move over to her small bower, the capstan moving steadily. (p. 187)

'Were you ever in Elsinore, Mr Jagiello?' asked Jack.

'Oh, many a time, sir,' said Jagiello. 'I know it well. I believe I could show you Hamlet's grave from here.'

'I was really wondering whether they had tenor thirteen inch mortars on the upper terrace,' said Jack, 'but I should be very happy to see Hamlet's grave as well.'

'Both ten and thirteen, sir. And if you go a little to the right from the farthest turret, there are some trees: and among those trees there is the grave. You can just make out the rocks.'

'So there he lies,' said Jack, his telescope leveled. 'Well, well: we must all come to it. But it was a capital piece, capital. I never laughed so much in my life.'

'A capital piece indeed,' said Stephen, 'and I doubt I could have done much better myself. But, do you know, I have never in my own mind classed it among the comedies. Pray did you read it recently?'

'I never read it at all,' said Jack. 'That is to say, not right through. No: I did something better than that—I acted in it. There, the upper terrace fires. I was a midshipman at the time.' (pp. 207-208)

One of these was Wittgenstein, a Heligolander brought up in the Leith coal-trade: as a midshipman Jack had pressed him out of his collier, and they had sailed together in three or four commissions to their mutual liking. In the second of these, when Jack's navigation was still not all that it should have been, Wittgenstein was one of the prize-crew with which Jack had to take a valuable merchantman into Port-of-Spain; and thanks to Wittgenstein alone they had not only survived two very nasty blows that carried them a great way out of their course, but found their way, three weeks overdue, to Trinidad. He came aft to trim a stern-lantern, and Jack said, 'Well, Wittgenstein, I am glad to see you again. It must be seven or eight years since we were shipmates. How do you come along?'

'Pretty spry, sir, thank God, though we are none of us as young as we was; and I see you are pretty spry too, sir,' said Wittgenstein looking at him keenly in the yellow glow.

'Well, fairly spry, all things considered.' (p. 225)



'I should not care to affirm anything about Ireland, where people have the strangest notion of time; but at sea, I do assure you, it answers very well. That is why I should like to borrow your watch.'

'Alas, my poor friend, not only is it set to Carlsrona time, but it loses a minute or so a day; and from what you tell me, that would represent a span of some twenty miles. I am afraid we must imitate the ancients and hug the shore, creeping from promontory to promontory.'

'I very much doubt the ancients did anything of the kind. Can you imagine anyone in his wits coming within sight of a lee-shore? No, no: blue-water sailing for me; and after all, the old 'uns found their way to the New world and back again with no more than lead, latitude, and lookout. Even so, a watch true to a minute would be useful in case of dirty weather; I shall signal Juno and set it by their reckoning.' (p. 278)

The hawsers were not to the mastheads before the last dog-watch, nor anything like it. Squall after squall of very heavy rain swept down on the sloop, rain so thick that fresh water gushed from the lee scuppers, and the hands could hardly tell what they were at, while at the same time the turning gusts within the squalls knocked her about most brutally, taking her aback three times, and making it impossible to keep her steady on her course. The French ship and the Jason vanished entirely for the best part of an hour.

'Should I feel better if I were to vomit?' asked Jagiello.

'I doubt it,' said Stephen. 'It has done nothing for the Colonel.' (p. 296)

Among the young men in the nunnery cheerfulness returned with the sun that shone on Brest from a clear calm sky within twenty-four hours of their miserable journey from Trégonnec, and with it their naval sense of fun. The commissary charged with drawing up a correct official list, which included among other things their grandmothers' maiden names, dates and places of birth, received some strange answers, delivered in sober, lugubrious tones, so strange that the port-admiral summoned Captain Aubrey. 'I refuse to believe, sir,' he said, 'that all your officers but one are descended from Queen Anne.' 'I am sorry to tell you, sir, that Queen Anne is dead,' said Jack. 'Common decency, therefore, forbids me to make any comment.'

'It is my opinion,' said the Admiral, 'that they have replied with a culpable levity. Such parents as the Emperor of Morocco, Creeping Jenny, Guy of Warwick, Sir Julius Caesar... You may say that the commissary is only a mere civilian, which is profoundly true; but even so I must ask you to invite them to treat him with a proper respect. He is a servant of the Emperor!' (pp. 312-313)

'We scarcely had the heart to do anything, with you away,' said Jack, 'but if only I can get a solid purchase on the outer slab, I do not think the other should resist us long. Stephen, what is the French for a double sister-block, coaked? With a pair of them and a proper hold-fast, I could raise the Temple.'

'A double sister-block, coaked? The Dear alone can tell. I do not even know what it is in



English.'

'Then I shall have to try to draw it,' said Jack. 'Without a purchase that slab will never shift.'

'Do that thing, my dear,' said Stephen. 'For my part I am going to sleep.' (p. 355)

'They are at it hammer and tongs,' said Jack in a low, private voice. 'Hammer and goddam tongs. They might have been married this twelvemonth and more.'

'Dear me,' said Babbington, appalled.

The yards were braced just so, the Oedipus was heading for Dover over a quiet, gently rippling sea, her deck was almost as steady as a table, and now that all was coiled down and pretty there was scarcely a sound but the wind in her rigging, the distant cry of gulls, and the water slipping down her side. They were standing not far from the cabin skylight, and in the comparative silence they distinctly heard the words, 'God's death, Maturin, what an obstinate stubborn pigheaded brute you are, upon my honour. You always were.'

'Perhaps you would like to see our figurehead, sir,' said Babbington. 'It is a new one: in the Grecian taste, I believe.' (pp. 378-379).

## Topics for Discussion

Aubrey spends much of the early part of the novel worrying about a man named Kimber, to whom he gave power of attorney. Sporadic news from home seems to indicate that Kimber has expended most of Aubrey's fortune without results. However, Aubrey has no recourse and cannot alter the situation. Have you ever spend a large amount of time worrying about something that you can't influence? Is it better, do you think, to follow Maturin's advice to Aubrey and put things out of mind that cannot be successfully dealt with?

Amanda Smith seduces a willing Aubrey rather easily. During the preliminary stages of the seduction, Diana Villiers comments to Maturin that Smith will prove troublesome. What are some of the many warning signs provided in the narrative that Smith will prove a tenaciously irritating suitor of Aubrey?

Harry Johnson pursues Villiers, Maturin, and Aubrey with a fierce determination, going so far as to sail to France in pursuit of them. What narrative elements provide the rationale for Johnson's single-minded determination to capture the three individuals?

From the outset, English intelligence is reasonably confident the fortress of Grimsholm can be captured from the French without open hostilities. What components of the strategic situation lead English intelligence to this opinion?

Maturin travels from England to Paris to give an academic lecture, even in a time of open war between England and France. Do you think such a situation would be possible in today's geopolitical climate?

During much of the novel, Maturin educates Jagiello to the usage of the sea. Do you find that, in general, Maturin's efforts at education are reasonably accurate? Or does he make a fool of himself?

Several narrative elements foreshadow the eventual wreck of Ariel. What narrative elements can you recall that heavily foreshadow the loss of the ship?

As soon as Maturin, Aubrey, and Jagiello are deposited in a Parisian prison, Maturin goes to great lengths to widely publicize his imprisonment. What does Maturin hope to accomplish by doing this?

After Maturin, Aubrey, and Jagiello are imprisoned various factions within the French government seek to control their destiny—most want them tortured and executed. One faction, represented by Duhamel, helps them escape home to England. Why does Duhamel's faction help them escape? What does Maturin 'exchange' for the assistance in the escape?