

The Thirteen-gun Salute Study Guide

The Thirteen-gun Salute by Patrick O'Brian

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Contents

The Thirteen-gun Salute Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapters 2 and 3.....	7
Chapter 4.....	9
Chapter 5.....	11
Chapter 6.....	13
Chapters 7 and 8.....	15
Chapters 9 and 10.....	17
Characters.....	19
Objects/Places.....	24
Themes.....	27
Style.....	29
Quotes.....	32
Topics for Discussion.....	36



Plot Summary

The novel, the thirteenth volume in a series that extends to twenty completed novels, is set during the prolonged war between England and Napoleon's France. The two primary protagonists, Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, are particular friends of long acquaintance. Aubrey has spent most of his life as an officer in the Royal Navy, eventually rising to the rank of post-captain. However, political enemies have contrived to falsely accuse him of financial crimes which has resulted in his ejection from the navy. Recently, Aubrey's accusers have in turn been discredited as traitors and have fled England for France; nevertheless, Aubrey remains a private citizen. Maturin is a natural philosopher and surgeon of great skill; he also works as a covert intelligence agent for the Royal Navy. Maturin, a man of means, owns *Surprise*, a letter of marque captained by Aubrey. The ship has a long-standing mission to travel to South America, but the planned voyage has been interrupted several times. The novel opens with *Surprise* departing for South America only to be diverted, at Lisbon, back to England due to recent developments between England and Spain. In England, Aubrey formally is reinstated in the Royal Navy and, along with Maturin, is appointed to HMS *Diane*; *Surprise* continues on as a letter of marque under the capable captaincy of Tom Pullings.

Diane sets off for Pulo Prabang, a Malay state in the South China Sea. *Diane* conveys Mr Edward Fox, the English envoy, and his retinue. Fox proves a complex and excessively proud man who rubs most of the crew the wrong way. Aubrey and especially Maturin make great efforts to get along with Fox. The envoy travels through much adventure to Pulo Prabang and meets with the Sultan. The Sultan is being simultaneously wooed by France and the French delegation includes Ledward and Wray, the very two traitors who wrongly implicated Aubrey in financial improprieties. The politicking drags on and on as the English delegation gradually gains the upper hand. Throughout the period Maturin enjoys a prolonged stay ashore observing and often collecting the local flora and fauna. Maturin also meets and befriends van Buren, a biologist of international repute. The diplomatic situation finally tips markedly in favor of the English when Ledward and Wray are discovered in a homosexual tryst with the Sultan's young cupbearer and favorite catamite Abdul. Abdul is put to death and Ledward and Wray are ejected from the palace and formally released from Royal protection as the French delegation collapses. While Fox concludes an English treaty with the sultan Maturin arranges for the assassination of Ledward and Wray. Later, he and van Buren fully dissect the two cadavers of his erstwhile enemies.

Diane then departs for Batavia and a planned rendezvous with *Surprise*. During the voyage Fox becomes increasingly egotistical and offensive and entirely alienates Maturin and Aubrey. *Diane* then runs aground on an uncharted reef. Aubrey supervises a partial evacuation to a nearby island while repairs begin. Fox, impatient to carry news of his success to England, departs in the ship's largest boat for Batavia, only a few hundred miles distant. *Diane*'s demise occurs when an unseasonable storm shatters her against the reef before she can be floated off; Aubrey surmises that Fox must surely have perished in the same storm. The novel ends with Aubrey surveying substantial

pieces of Diane's wreckage that have washed ashore; he and his associates begin to plan the construction of a smaller ship from the remaining pieces.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 introduces most of the novel's principle characters and establishes the texture of the narrative. England is at war with Napoleon's France and only a strong naval presence allows the empire to survive. Captain Jack Aubrey is a formal Royal Navy captain of fame and experience who has been struck from the list for financial crimes of which he has been falsely accused. His accusers, Ledward and Wray, have been discredited as traitors and spies and have fled the country, leading to his acquittal but not reinstatement. More than anything else, Aubrey craves reinstatement even though past fortunate cruises have made him very wealthy. He lives at Ashgrove Cottage, an ample country estate, with Sophie, his wife of several years, and their three children.

The novel begins with Aubrey in command of *Surprise*, a letter of marque or private man-of-war. *Surprise*'s first lieutenant, Tom Pullings, is a volunteer Royal Navy officer. Pullings, a post-captain without appointment, takes employ as a lieutenant in *Surprise* because he has little chance of gaining a naval command of his own due to lack of political or financial influence and needs additional money to support his wife and growing family. Aubrey and Pullings are long-time shipmates and close personal friends; both men are exceptional sailors and warriors. The ship *Surprise* is actually owned by Stephen Maturin, a natural philosopher and surgeon of great wealth and prestige. Maturin and Aubrey are particular friends and have sailed together for many years. Maturin covertly works for the English intelligence services and purchased *Surprise* as a letter of marque during a period when Aubrey was financially ruined. Maturin's assistant surgeon, Nathaniel Martin, is a long-term associate who shares many interests. Martin is also recently married and takes to the sea to secure a reliable source of income. *Surprise* is crewed by a mix of nationalities and races, but all of the men are hand-picked and experienced. Many hail from Shelmerston, a notorious port on the Southern coast of England. After many preparations, *Surprise* sets sail bound for South America. Near her departure her crew is augmented by the appearance of Mr. Standish, a recommended but inexperienced purser.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel opens ashore with Aubrey and Maturin preparing for sea. Much of the first chapter is devoted to a fairly detailed recounting of the various characters' situations in life. This technique is common for sequel novels and provides needed background and characterization for the narrative. All of the many events discussed are detailed in previous novels in the series of novels. The *Surprise* has, for quite some time, planned on traveling to South America there to interfere in political developments. The voyage has been interrupted in previous novels and here the ship sails, finally, on its long-delayed mission. Yet again it is not to be as will shortly develop—note the early



contemplation of a circumnavigation: in fact the ship shortly will circumnavigate Ireland, but not the globe. Also, during a dinner ashore, much talk about banking foreshadows Aubrey's future financial troubles with rumored banking collapses. Maturin's reference to the Fuggers, a historically prominent banking family, humorously is misheard by Aubrey as a vituperative comment on bankers. Note also how Maturin, a very wealthy man, quibbles about a few pence being deducted from his account.

As Maturin and Marin check over their surgeon's stores in the loaded ship Martin is surprised to see that Maturin carries only one small bottle of laudanum—in previous voyages it had been loaded by the five-gallon carboy. Martin notes laudanum had been Maturin's panacea for everything; Maturin responds by proclaiming he had injudiciously overestimated its efficacy. In fact, Maturin is recovering from a prolonged and serious addiction to the tincture of opium and a former loblolly boy was transported for attempted theft of laudanum to support his own habit, developed due, in large part, to Maturin's injudicious over-prescribing of the addictive substance. The first few pages of writing are particularly notable for their consideration of the distinct phases of life lead by seagoing men—an introspective and insightful contrast of life ashore versus life afloat. Ledward and Wray's introduction as traitorous spies foreshadows their appearance later in the novel.



Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Surprise leaves England and, near Land's End, sights a ship believed to be a French Privateer. Surprise gives chase and closes with the ship enough that Maturin can make out one Robert Gough, a one-time friend and more-recently opponent. Maturin goes through an agony of contemplation about Gough and his certain execution if Surprise proves successful in the pursuit. He contemplates using magnets to disturb Surprise's course during the nighttime hours but does not execute his plan. Much of his introspection focuses on the history of rebellion in Ireland and his and Gough's differing opinions about politics and tactics. Surprise chases the French ship up the east coast of Ireland but eventually loses the smaller vessel. Surprise then continues around the northern coast of Ireland through the North Channel, turns around Malin Head, and sails down the west coast of Ireland into the open sea and then on toward Lisbon. Through the unanticipated trip around Ireland, Maturin often gazes at the coast when it is visible and contemplates his earlier life there. Throughout the voyage the ship's new and inexperienced purser, Standish, suffers from seasickness and irritates Aubrey.

In Chapter 3, Surprise continues south and reaches Lisbon. As the ship enters port and anchors Maturin instructs Standish on maritime processes. Once in port Standish determines he will never again go to sea due to seasickness and he asks permission to leave the crew; Aubrey happily grants it. In Lisbon Aubrey, Maturin, Pullings, and Martin all receive news from home. Maturin spends a considerable amount of time thinking about his one-time assistant Padeen who has been transported to Botany Bay for crimes committed in the quest to satisfy his opium habit—a habit inadvertently created by Maturin. It then develops that Maturin's nominal superior in Naval Intelligence has traveled to Lisbon. Sir Joseph Blaine, Maturin's friend and accomplice, had undergone a hellish overland journey from Corunna to intercept Surprise and forestall her mission to South America. England and Spain have been involved in politics and the mission is no longer desirable. Instead, Aubrey is to be reinstated into the Royal Navy and appointed to Diane, of thirty-two guns. Ironically, Aubrey and Surprise had captured Diane previously. Diane will then proceed to Pulo Prabang and negotiate a treaty between the semi-piratical Sultan and England.

The mission will be complicated by the existing presence of a French delegation that includes Ledward and Wray and a warship named Cornélie, superior in guns to Diane. Ledward and Wray are the two treasonous English government officers who impugned Aubrey's name and caused him so much legal trouble, leading to his dismissal from the Royal Navy. The English delegation will be led by Edward Fox who will travel on Diane. Maturin is to assist Fox where possible. Blaine concludes by noting that after all this is accomplished, perhaps Surprise might then continue to South America. In the meantime, the privateer is to be commanded by Tom Pullings.



Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

The pursuit of Robert Gough does not recur as a narrative thread in the present novel; instead, it can be viewed as a shakedown cruise for Aubrey and a period of reflection—and characterization—for Maturin. The subsequent Chapter 3 voyage to Lisbon is unexceptional and the highlight of the voyage is Maturin's continual nautical instruction to Standish. Standish appears throughout the early chapters as a significant character but he does not recur beyond Chapter 4. Blaine's early attempt to summon Maturin is fairly risible, as is Maturin's indignant refusal to be, as he presumes, waylaid and murdered by French agents. The diversion from South America is a common theme running through several novels—the much anticipated voyage to South America does not occur in the present novel, either. Instead, Aubrey and Maturin will travel to Pulo Prabang, a fictional island nation in the Malaysia area. First, they will travel to Batavia, now known as Jakarta, in Java and visit the historic governor Raffles.

The primary development of Chapter 3 concerns not the diversion from South America, however, but the news that Aubrey is to be reinstated and given a new command. Ironically, his very accusers—Ledward and Wray—will be his principle adversaries in Pulo Prabang. This fact heavily foreshadows Aubrey's and Maturin's eventual triumph over Ledward and Wray, a type of warped-mirror-image duo of the protagonists. While Aubrey and Maturin are masculine and close friends, Ledward and Wray are effeminate homosexual lovers; Aubrey and Maturin are proper and respectable, Ledward and Wray are debauched and hated; and Aubrey and Maturin value honor and patriotism while Ledward and Wray are self-seeking traitors.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Aubrey learns of his proposed future and readily accepts. Surprise is handed over to Pullings to command and Pullings and Aubrey establish several rendezvous points and dates. Standish begs off future sea service due his extreme seasickness; Aubrey, feeling the man to be wholly incompetent anyway, gladly accepts the resignation. Aubrey, Maturin, Blaine, and Standish then voyage overland from Lisbon to Corunna. Along the way an army officer overhears Standish's violin playing and, being a lover of music, hires Standish as his personal secretary. Aubrey, Maturin, and Blaine then board *Nimble*, a packet, and return to England. In England, Lord Melville reinstates Aubrey to his previous rank of post captain with no loss of seniority and then appoints him to command *Diane*. While Aubrey is being reinstated, Maturin attempts to set his banking situation into order but is only partially successful.

Later, Aubrey and Maturin are introduced to Edward Fox, the envoy who will lead the English delegation in Pulo Prabang. During their conversation Fox inquires about the nature of naval honors an envoy might expect and Aubrey explains that envoys receive a thirteen-gun salute. Aubrey and Maturin visit their respective wives; Maturin's wife is difficult and pregnant. Maturin spends much time contemplating the natural splendors of Batavia, hoping he will be able to experience some of them. He also thinks of a famous but little-known Buddhist sanctuary at Kumai. Maturin also enlists a young man named Ahmed as his personal servant. After a brief visit Aubrey and Maturin proceed to *Diane* and then to sea. *Diane*'s dismissed captain is offended at his ill use but acts the proper part as Aubrey takes command on the unusually precisely dated May 15, 1813. *Diane*'s senior officers are introduced as Fielding, 1st lieutenant; Elliott, 2nd lieutenant; "Spotted Dick" Richardson, 3rd lieutenant; Welby, marine captain; Warren, master; Graham, surgeon; and Blyth, purser.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The predicted rendezvous does not occur in the novel; in fact, delaying at one of the rendezvous points ends in disaster. Standish's dismissal and vanishing from the narrative concludes in this chapter. The overland voyage is contrasted with Blaine's earlier voyage along the same route in reverse only days before. With Maturin's knowledge of the area and people, as well as his money, Blaine finds the return trip much more enjoyable. Aubrey's reinstatement is, from a characterization point of view, the seminal moment of the novel, is performed in a fairly anti-climactic way, devoid of any pomp or circumstance. For Aubrey it is a public vindication but a very private moment. His appointment to *Diane* is complicated by her former captain, but such are the exigencies of the service. It is ironic that after successfully concluding his official mission Aubrey will lose his first command after reinstatement.



Maturin's continued banking woes heavily foreshadow imminent financial events; Aubrey's suggestions of banking establishments highlight the likely key failures—his financial sense is legendarily bad. Fox's inquiry regarding his due honors heavily foreshadows his future development as a vain and arrogant, if capable, man. The dismissal of Diane's former captain and third lieutenant has little significance in the present novel. Aubrey requests Richardson, a former associate, as his third lieutenant. Richardson's nickname of "Spotted Dick" derives from his nickname, his severe acne as a youth, and the fact that Spotted Dick was the name of a favorite type of pudding on the naval menu of the time. In any event, he proves capable but remains a minor character in the novel. Of the three lieutenants, Elliot proves the least capable and most excitable.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Aubrey takes command of Diane and sails for Pulo Prabang. The crew is disciplined but new and not well integrated and Aubrey sets out to weld them into a seamless whole by drilling in seamanship and gunnery. In general, though, Aubrey is satisfied by the crew of 209 men—a mere twenty-six short of full complement. He finds Diane, a 32-gun French-built frigate, a competently built and lively ship. Diane approaches the locale of a craggy landmass known as Inaccessible Island—inaccessible because of sheer cliffs that rise out of the water for hundreds of feet. The wind dies just as the ship crosses the current driving toward the island and for several tense hours it is touch and go whether Diane will be driven ashore and lost; the ship's boats tow her clear, however, just as the winds pick up again.

Diane has six midshipmen, including Seymour and Bennet, older and master's mates, and Harper and Reade, very young men. Aubrey takes their education seriously and holds frequent classes on various aspects of seamanship and navigation. They find spherical trigonometry boring and Aubrey discovers they have been copying each others' journals. During the voyage Aubrey also takes exactly daily observations of water temperatures and other things with an eye toward providing his readings to improve the charts initially produced by Alexander von Humboldt. The voyage enjoys continual weather resulting in many days of fast sailing. As the days slip by the crew becomes one and the ship settles into a daily routine with little variation. Fox's haughty demeanor grates on Aubrey and the two men develop a restrained dislike for each other glazed by professional courtesy. Most of the crew comes to openly loathe Fox who is necessarily forced into a state of isolation. He becomes bored and lonely and tends to be a hypochondriac to gain Maturin's private attention—simply as someone to speak with. Maturin finds Fox grating, too, but hides his feelings better than Aubrey. During one exchange Fox quotes a line of poetry to Maturin which Maturin interprets to be an opening into a discussion of sexuality. He adroitly avoids the situation and concludes his medical visit.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The near catastrophe at Inaccessible Island foreshadows the eventual wreck of Diane on the False Natunas. In the first encounter the island is obvious and obviously perilous while the latter island is invisible and invisibly dangerous. Aubrey's instruction of the midshipmen would be common practice aboard a ship the size of Diane. The two youngest midshipmen, Harper and Reade, recur with some regularity in latter chapters of the novel but all the young gentlemen are minor characters. The journal copying leads to a humorous situation in which Aubrey is unsure of whether or not the midshipmen are making game of him. His later discreet inquiry with Maturin is as funny as the original scene. The hygrometrical readings Aubrey takes are used by the Royal



Navy in compiled charts to show local weather and sea conditions; the fictional Aubrey's participation in this historic process adds realism to the narrative's historical fiction element. Surprisingly, the scientific-minded Maturin finds Aubrey's devotion to detailed physical observations uninteresting. The weather present during the trip makes for rough sailing but also delivers rapid progress over the vast distances. Aubrey finds it invigorating.

Chapter 5 also presents much characterization of the complex character of Fox. He is obviously well-educated, intelligent, and confident. However, he is also arrogant and self-serving. He becomes convinced that success in the negotiations will bring him a baronetcy and other worldly honors. He constantly seeks approval from those he considers his inferiors—while simultaneously holding them in near contempt. The entire crew of *Diane* comes to dislike him. Fox turns to Maturin for companionship and claims a variety of maladies to secure Maturin's personal attention. Maturin finds the process distasteful. On one occasion Fox quotes a few lines of poetry that he claims to have translated—paradoxically, the unattributed lines were published as part of "Bells in the Tower" by A. E. Housman, but not until 1939, and thus were clearly not only not translated into English by Fox or anyone else but were not even written when Fox was speaking. The author's rationale for including the poetry is unknown but has caused much discussion and speculation. In any event, Maturin assumes—probably correctly—that Fox is attempting to open a dialogue about sexuality and possibly pederasty. Maturin deflects the opening rather brusquely as by this time he, too, finds Fox irritating. Fox's mental state foreshadows his eventual megalomania.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Diane arrives at Batavia (now Jakarta, Java) and Aubrey, Maturin, and especially Fox enthusiastically are greeted by Governor Raffles. Although the reception is happy, Raffles delivers the unsettling news that the French delegation, including Ledward and Wray, have already arrived in Pulo Prabang where they have been enthusiastically greeted. Maturin makes various banking arrangements for Pulo Prabang; he clearly intends to draw vast sums of money to use as bribes and gifts. Fox believes that the French entourage must be countered in quantity as well as quality and he thus enlists an entire troupe of British diplomats to accompany him. The new men are boring, conceited, and generally obnoxious—perfect diplomats, in Maturin's opinion. Aubrey finds them irritating in an abstract sort of way, especially as they are completely ignorant of maritime practice and precedent. In Batavia, Aubrey and Maturin learn that a banking scandal, with many banks collapsing, has occurred in England—the details are sketchy, but Aubrey's bank seems to be implicated. This news causes Aubrey some considerable consternation. The entire entourage then proceeds to Pulo Prabang, a neutral port where they are greeted with standard honors.

After the civilities conclude Maturin seeks out the Dutch intelligence agent and widely esteemed natural philosopher van Buren. Van Buren is known for his work on mammalian spleens and his hatred for the French. Maturin hopes to enlist van Buren on the side of the English delegation. As the days pass, Maturin and van Buren become close confidants. Van Buren has an extensive number of contacts and is firmly against the French—plus, the two men enjoy natural history and physiology interests. Van Buren assists Maturin in banking situations and advises him on other intelligence matters. After several days of preparation both the parties make their official representations to the Sultan of Pulo Prabang. The French presentation is first and Maturin finds it uninspiring. During the subsequent dinner, Maturin closely watches the Sultan. It is known that the Sultan is a pederast and his catamite, Abdul, acts as his cup-bearer. Maturin believes he sees Abdul casting knowing glances toward Ledward. As more days go by the English are surprised by the Sultan's hesitancy in accepting their superior offer and rejecting the French offer. Maturin believes that Ledward has influence over Abdul and Abdul has influence over the Sultan, leading to the unusual success of the French. Fortunately for Maturin, the Sultan's wife openly despises Abdul.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Maturin enters the negotiations with a particularly fierce devotion to success. He loathes Ledward and Wray and therefore the process has a personal element, beside the professional. Maturin finds in van Buren the perfect accomplice—their mutual interests provide a cover for their constant meetings, and van Buren is entirely competent and informed. Fox's official offer, coupled with Maturin's vast bribes, should easily sway the



Sultan in favor of the English—yet he is strangely hesitant to reject the French. The Sultan's reticence is explained by Maturin's insight at a formal dinner party—the Sultan is smitten by Abdul, his catamite; in turn Abdul finds Ledward appealing. Obviously, Ledward and Wray have seduced Abdul who carries their influence directly to the Sultan, who remains oblivious to Abdul's infidelity. This insight proves decisive in the narrative development. The other narrative development of note in this chapter is the introduction of van Buren. He is widely known as a natural philosopher and expert on the spleen—for this reason alone Maturin is keen to meet him. Van Buren makes frequent reference to contemporaneous science and scientists and is obviously intended to be a well-known and well-respected naturalist. He also happens to be a Dutch intelligence agent and strongly opposed to France. In effect, he is a ready-made contact for Maturin and within a few days both men have come to a common understanding and sympathy. Maturin learns much useful information from van Buren and the two men develop and enjoy a sincere friendship and professional esteem.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In order to impress the Sultan and his entourage, Fox invites them to tour Diane. Aubrey makes sure all is ship-shape and plans a cannonade of floating targets. Maturin purchases various rare earths to intermix with the black powder so the cannon discharges are colorful and fanciful. The entire process is successful save that Abdul makes a scene and demands a present from Fox. Later Maturin spends much time ashore and chooses to lodge in a bawdy-house which gives the Diane's crew much amusement. On one occasion Aubrey permits prostitutes to go aboard Diane; to save the morals of the youngest midshipmen he sends them ashore. Maturin finds them drunken and reveling in the bawdy-house in which he is lodging and in turn sends them back to the ship. Maturin then arranges several days off and proceeds to the Buddhist monastery at Kumai. It is reached by walking up a steep trail known locally as the 1,000 steps. Maturin finds the monastery a glorious locale of nature and particularly enjoys interacting with or watching orangutans and rhinoceroses. He also observes insects, orchids, and some birds. The break is one of Maturin's rare chances to enjoy the local flora and fauna. However, everything there is protected by the Buddhist belief and he is thus unable to collect anything.

In Chapter 8, Maturin returns to Pulo Prabang and finds the city embroiled in some type of political riot. He consults with van Buren and learns that the Sultan's wife, who is with child, has contrived to capture the Sultan's catamite Abdul in a sexual tryst with Ledward and Wray. As the Sultan is out of town on a religious pilgrimage, the vizier has imprisoned Abdul and ejected Ledward and Wray from the court. Maturin admits to van Buren that his had been the initial suggestion to the Sultan's wife, via proper channels of course. Van Buren tells Maturin that Ledward and Wray were released because the vizier was hesitant to breach the Sultan's offer of safe conduct—but that the same offer has now been officially rejected. With the Sultan's return shortly thereafter poor Abdul is executed by a bizarre method known as peppering. A bag full of pepper is tied around his entire head and he is then beaten with sticks until asphyxiating on the pepper. As this is all transpiring Aubrey happens to meet an old acquaintance's son, Pierrot Dumesnil. Dumesnil is an officer of the French frigate *Cornelie*, and he confides in Aubrey that the French ship is careened and in need of extensive repairs before again going to sea.

Later still, Maturin arrives at van Buren's house with the corpses of Ledward and Wray—the two men have been assassinated and, complicit with the vizier's wishes, Maturin and van Buren completely dissect both bodies so that no evidence of their disappearance remains. Shortly thereafter the proposed French alliance is rejected and the English proposal is accepted. At an elaborate dinner party Fox grows very conceited about his presumed victory and his entire entourage acts in grossly flattering ways. Maturin is put off by Fox's arrogant hostility in victory and Aubrey's poor esteem of Fox



is confirmed. Shortly thereafter Diane departs from Pulo Prabang to carry news of the treaty—and the treaty itself—to Batavia and then to England.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Much of Chapter 7 is devoted to Maturin's experiences at the Buddhist monastery. While the scenes are interesting and the material is well written it does not contribute materially to the narrative development. Instead, it can be viewed as a sort of prolonged characterization of one facet of Maturin's complex personality. The material comparing Maturin to a domesticated orangutan is compelling. Chapter 8 provides a major turning point in the plot as well as concluding the competition between Aubrey and Maturin on the one hand, and Ledward and Wray on the other. Maturin has earlier deduced that the Sultan's catamite Abdul has been seduced by Ledward, and infers that the Sultan's reticence to reject the French and accept the English is largely based upon Abdul's influence in favor of Ledward. Maturin therefore moves at some point to suggest to the Sultan's violently jealous wife that Abdul can be discovered in his affair and removed from the Sultan's influence. The Sultan's wife takes this counsel and after a few attempts Abdul, Ledward, and Wray are indeed captured in a homosexual encounter. The Sultan is out of town and the vizier observes the Sultan's promise of safe conduct to Ledward and Wray for a few days—though it is later terminated by the Sultan, effectively making them foreigners without rights of any kind. They cannot leave Pulo Prabang because the French ship is undergoing a major overhaul. Shortly after Abdul's execution, Ledward and Wray end up assassinated. The narrative strongly infers that their demise came about because of Maturin's direct intervention and possibly by his own hand, though this is far from certain. The novel suggests several other competent marksmen throughout—at any rate, Maturin arranges to have them killed on the understanding that their corpses will never be found, which would embarrass the Sultan. Maturin and van Buren thus dissect the two bodies completely—van Buren being pleased to obtain two English spleens to add to his collection.

The French treaty proposal thus collapses and is formally rejected; the English treaty proposal is accepted and the critical mission of Diane is successful. While most men become benevolent in great success, Fox becomes arrogant and openly hostile. During an official state dinner he sits amidst the brazen flattery of his entourage and behaves so grossly and offensively that even Maturin is shocked. This development is a turning point in the development of Fox as a character; hereafter in the novel he behaves like a haughty superior to everyone with whom he comes in contact. The novel then transitions from Pulo Prabang to the closing segments at sea as Diane departs for Batavia.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Diane sails swiftly toward Batavia and makes good progress. Fox and his entourage become so arrogant that Aubrey, Maturin, and the rest find them all nearly untenable. On one occasion Aubrey invites Fox to an extravagant dinner to celebrate his successes but Fox takes the unheard-of action of turning down a captain's invitation. Shocked, Aubrey is further angered because he had already had his animals killed in preparation for the feasting. Instead, he turns to the gunroom with a last-minute arrangement and a great binge takes place among the ship's officers. On Coronation Day—presumably September 22, 1813—every ship in the Royal Navy discharges a full broadside in salute to the monarch. When Diane observes the ritual Fox mistakenly believes it is to honor him and his public acceptance and subsequent realization of his faux pas causes much hilarity among the crew and a deep resentment in Fox. As the voyage continues Maturin contrives to bumble into Aubrey's carefully sorted scientific instrumentation and ruins much of it. Aubrey is disgusted at Maturin's clumsiness and bemoans the fact that his various hydrographic readings will not be complete. The voyage continues as Diane attempts to meet Surprise at a few of the rendezvous coordinates. Fox chafes under what he sees as needless delays but Aubrey attempts each rendezvous. Then one night a catastrophe occurs and Diane goes hard ashore on a submerged and uncharted reef nears some islands Aubrey refers to as the False Natunas.

In Chapter 10 Aubrey attempts to lighten ship and heave off the sunken reef. The damage to the hull is not extensive and Aubrey believes if the ship can be floated again she will be seaworthy. The crew works for several days ferrying goods and baggage to the False Natunas; the ship's water is dumped and even the cannons are thrown overboard but it is no use—the ship is stuck fast upon the reef. Fox's principle concern is to hurry to Batavia—some 200 miles distant—and deliver the news of the treaty, which he is sure will result in much praise. To this end he takes the ship's best boat, most of his entourage, and lieutenant Elliott, and sets to sea with Aubrey's reserved blessing. The next day an unseasonable storm develops and turns into a furious gale—the seamen are all convinced that Fox and his group, in their small boat, have perished at sea. The same gale causes Aubrey to order everyone ashore onto the False Natunas, and later Diane is pounded apart on the submerged reef by the heavy seas. Welby, the marine captain, causes the shore camp to be laid out with military design and efficiency and Aubrey finds the breastwork and ditch needless but impressive. The novel ends with the breaking of the gale. Aubrey and the crew observe large pieces of the Diane's wreck washing ashore and conclude they can salvage enough lumber and materials to build a schooner and reach Batavia.



Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The False Natunas are an apparently fictional group of islets, probably intended to be in the South China Sea between Bangka and Biliton based upon their description and positioning in the narrative. The islands were identified by Aubrey and Pullings as a potential rendezvous point. Aubrey's cruising near them is thus established as a correct course of action. Elliott is in command as Diane runs ashore and it develops that he has neglected to closely observe some of Aubrey's standing orders, resulting in the disaster. For this reason Elliott accompanies Fox as an act of atonement and is presumably lost with the remainder of the envoy's entourage. Note Aubrey's reticence about Fox's departure—he clearly feels it to be an unsafe course of action. Fox is too concerned with securing worldly honors, however, to long sit idle when a potential avenue of advancement is open. As the weather thickens Aubrey orders all hands ashore; the marine captain erects a strong camp with much precision; the military camp plays a major role in the opening scenes of the subsequent novel in the series. Diane is then thrashed into pieces by the heavy surf, coming to an ignoble end. However, large pieces of the wreck wash up on the shore where Aubrey contemplates using the materials to build a schooner. Note that Aubrey is careful to preserve his painstaking notes of temperature, salinity, and other observed factors during the long voyage.



Characters

Jack Aubrey

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 on experience, insight, and a nearly infallible instinct to carry him through the various perils he encounters.

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 though on military occasions he proves useful enough.

As described in previous novels of the series, Aubrey begins the current novel as a disgraced man cast out of the Royal Navy for crimes of which he is innocent but of which he has been convicted. The crimes involve fixing of the stock market and other financial improprieties, and the charges were contrived by Ledward and Wray. Aubrey's great ambition is to somehow clear his name and become reinstated as a post captain—which occurs in the present novel. By the middle of the present novel Aubrey is thus wealthy, respected, and once again entirely at peace with his standing in the navy and the world.

Stephen Maturin

Maturin is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. 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, van Buren has read Maturin's work. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science and his medical opinions are surprisingly modern and always correct. Although possessed of great 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; this is highlighted in the novel's opening chase scene as Maturin contemplates sabotage to allow a fellow dissident to escape. 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, especially as he has become entangled and identified in the past.

Maturin is a small, squat man who in many respects is the antithesis of Aubrey. He weighs about nine stone, or 126 pounds. Maturin is much given to introspection, subtle interpretations, and Byzantine analysis of the current situation. He is nearly entirely mental, with little interest in physical activities—though capable enough in combat 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, as is illustrated in the current novel at the court in Pulo Prabang. Like Aubrey, Maturin derives great pleasure from music and is a capable musician. In the past Maturin has been strongly addicted to laudanum, a situation that is referred to in several early passages in the novel.

Tom Pullings

Pullings has served under Aubrey as a lieutenant during previous novels in the series. He eventually gained promotion to captain, largely through Aubrey's efforts. He is an enthusiastic and optimistic captain, a devoted supporter of Jack Aubrey, and an extremely capable navigator, seaman, and officer. During the novel, Pullings lacks an appointment and is thus receiving only half-pay, though his time is entirely his own. Because he has no political influence he has little prospect for an appointment, and because he is married he has a financial responsibility. Because of this, Pullings has enlisted as the first mate aboard Aubrey's private man-of-war *Surprise*. Pullings' entire reliability allows Aubrey much discretion in handling the ship and is a constant comfort to both Aubrey and Maturin. Pullings is always dependable and is an always memorable minor character. Aubrey's faith in him is illustrated in the current novel when he promotes Pullings to captain of *Surprise*.

Fielding, Elliott, and Dick Richardson

Fielding is the 1st lieutenant of *Diane*; Elliott is 2nd lieutenant; and Richardson is appointed 3rd lieutenant upon Aubrey's request, the previous 3rd lieutenant being the son of a man with whom Aubrey has had a longstanding quarrel. The three men are competent seamen but lack political influence and are thus likely destined to a life as a lieutenant only. Fielding is competent and reserved and Aubrey finds him very likable and trustworthy. Most of the crew seems to like Fielding and he is a largely unexceptional character. Elliott is less competent and less skilled than either Fielding or Richardson. In fact, a lapse in Elliott's judgment leads to the loss of *Diane* during the closing chapters of the novel. Elliott then accompanies Fox in the ship's boat and is presumably lost at sea during an unseasonable gale. Dick Richardson has been one of Aubrey's protégés in earlier novels of the series and is a competent junior officer. He bears the unusual childhood nickname of Spotted Dick, a reference to his one-time



heavy acne and a favored nautical food of the time. The intended double entendre with sexual overtones is obviously quite at home in the present series of novels.

Awkward Davies, Barret Bonden, and Preserved Killick

The three men indicated are all long-time followers of Aubrey and have served with him in numerous prior commands. They are all wealthy from prizes captured under Aubrey's command, both as a naval officer and as a privateer. They are examples of the types of minor characters that comprise Aubrey's crew. Awkward Davies is a hulking man with little skill and less dexterity, but much devoted to Aubrey. In fact, Davies feels a sort of proprietary ownership in Aubrey. Preserved Killick is Aubrey's steward and has been a faithful servant for many years and on many occasions. Killick is keenly aware that his personal fortunes are inextricably linked to Aubrey's success and ensures that Aubrey is always presented in the most favorable circumstances attainable. Beyond professional interest, however, Killick is a loyal friend and defender of Aubrey and goes to great lengths to provide hot coffee, good food, plentiful drink, fresh fruit, clean clothing, and other amenities under often-difficult circumstances. Killick often serves as a sort of comic relief within the narrative; his presumptuous and rude lines delivered in a whiny nasal tone set Aubrey's teeth on edge. Barrett Bonden is Aubrey's coxswain. He is easily the most dependable character in Aubrey's crew. The reliable Bonden always demonstrates complete tact, honesty, and devotion.

Mr. Standish

Standish joins Surprise as the purser in the opening Chapter of the book. He comes recommended and arguably competent for the job, but Aubrey quickly concludes that Standish is hopelessly outclassed by the basic mathematics required to balance the ship's books. In turn, Standish is entirely satisfied to allow Aubrey to perform his duties while he sits idle. In other ways Standish is abrasive and does not adapt well to shipboard life. Standish alas suffers from severe seasickness and by the time Surprise reaches Lisbon, Standish begs off future service on the grounds that he would rather perish than return to sea. Glad to be rid of such a millstone, Aubrey agrees and Standish parts company with Surprise. Standish subsequently finds employment as a personal secretary to an English officer.

Sir Joseph Blaine

Sir Joseph Blaine is the head of the Naval Intelligence office during the period of the novel. As such he is fantastically knowledgeable about virtually any topic tangential to politics, the military in general, and the Royal Navy in particular. Sir Joseph is a thoroughly patriotic and entirely reliable man, not given to histrionics or political trends. He instead is completely focused on pursuing goals which further the interests of England. He shares a close friendship with Maturin; aside from both being involved in



secret intelligence work, both men are avid naturalists and scientists. Sir Joseph also admires Maturin's dedication to the work and not the remuneration. During the current novel, Sir Joseph demonstrates activity in securing for Aubrey a reinstatement in the ranks of the Royal Navy and in making an arduous voyage to Lisbon to intercept Maturin. Sir Joseph is a minor but recurring character in the series of novels and his political influence and close personal friendship with Maturin explains in part why Maturin, hence Aubrey, always seem to come out on top.

Edward Fox

Edward Fox is the envoy appointed to negotiate a peace treaty between Britain and Pulo Prabang. His primary focus is the Sultan of Pulo Prabang who apparently dominates his governmental council. Fox is highly recommended and proves capable and successful in the negotiations, securing the peace treaty for Britain over the rival claim presented by a French delegation. As Fox enters negotiations weeks after the French delegation, he does begin with a considerable handicap which makes his success all the more impressive. Fox's retinue includes several minor characters in the novel, most of whom are unlikable and vain men. Fox demonstrates a haughty condescension for nearly everyone he meets and considers few men his equal.

From the first days of the voyage Fox irritates Aubrey and the two men develop a distant relationship characterized by standoffish professional courtesy. Within a few weeks of sailing the crew and officers of *Diane* come to loathe Fox's haughty arrogance. Fox's untenable behavior leaves him isolated on *Diane* during her months'-long voyage and thus he becomes lonely. Fox develops a sort of hypochondria so that he can consult Maturin, as a physician, in private. The visits are an awkward blend of social call and professional consultation and Maturin dislikes them. On one such visit Fox ventures into maudlin sentimentality about poetry and Maturin interprets Fox's question as an opening into a sort of personal confession about homosexual behavior—he deflects the opening brusquely, not desiring to be overly-friendly with Fox. After Fox proves successful in the negotiations he becomes increasingly aggressive and haughty; Maturin is surprised that such public success does not bring out characteristics such as benevolence.

On the early stages of the return voyage, however, Fox behaves like a boor and becomes entirely estranged from Aubrey and the crew. When *Diane* walks aground, Fox takes the ship's best boat and makes for Batavia, believing that the news of his success is too important to wait for a better conveyance. Aubrey cautions Fox against the voyage but of course Fox ignores the wise mariner. Only a day after departing in the ship's boat, a freak gale blows up and Fox—along with nearly his entire retinue—is presumed lost at sea.

Ledward and Wray

Ledward and Wray are the novel's primary antagonists. In most scenes they are presented, and treated, nearly as a single character—but in a few key instances they



are distinct. Wray is said to be much diminished since Maturin had last seen him, with a thin body and worn-out expression. Ledward is said to be a good-looking man, though perhaps a little heavy. Both men are ardent pederasts, homosexual lovers, and frequently engage in licentious behavior with whoever proves available. The men have appeared in previous novels in the series where they were instrumental in bringing false charges against Aubrey resulting in his financial ruin and his ejection from the navy. They have also previously attempted to murder and kidnap Maturin and to professionally discredit him. Finally, they have been involved in various large-scale financial crimes, in betraying the trust of the British intelligence network, and of outright treason to the crown. Their eventual exposure resulted in flight from England to France for asylum.

In the current novel, then, they are well established as wicked men and opponents of Aubrey and Maturin as well as Britain. Ledward is the official translator for the French delegation to Pulo Prabang and also operates in the role of general consultant. Wray is apparently less significant to the French delegation and travels, more or less, as Ledward's companion. As the French delegation begins to collapse, Wray meets Maturin and offers to turn on Ledward in exchange for clemency—Maturin ignores the request. During the novel Ledward seduces Abdul, the Sultan's catamite, and along with Wray engages in homosexual liaisons with the young man. Maturin informs the Sultan's wife of this—she hates Abdul for his sway over the Sultan—and she contrives to expose them in the very act. This results in Abdul's execution and the expulsion of Ledward and Wray from the Sultan's court and protection. Shortly thereafter they are assassinated—an event surely arranged, if not actually carried out, by Maturin—and then they are completely dissected by Maturin and van Buren. They come to a fitting end for such unscrupulous and vile men.

The Sultan of Pulo Prabang

The Sultan is not named, but is described as a fine figure of a man at the peak of political influence. He rules Pulo Prabang with the consent of some type of ministry but the novel suggests the ministers are merely figureheads. The Sultan is an avid pederast and during the novel devotes his lustful attention to Abdul, his cub-bearer. The Sultan's wife, who is pregnant, resents the Sultan's diverted attention. Aside from his compulsion for sex with young men, the Sultan otherwise appears fairly normal and rules Pulo Prabang with insight. He apparently sponsors a type of regular piracy in the area but controls the piracy by decree—thus Britain and France both hope to sign a treaty to gain safe passage through the commercially significant area. The Sultan observes various rituals and is keenly aware of public support.



Objects/Places

Surprise

Surprise is a private man-of-war, owned by Stephen Maturin, and captained by Jack Aubrey and then Tom Pullings. She was French-built and has previously been known as L'Unité, Retaliation, and Retribution. Her figure-head is a gilded woman with an ample bosom and a look of surprise on her face. She displaces about six hundred tons, has a crew of about two hundred men, and carries a main armament of twelve-pounder long guns. Her crew is composed of unusually able seamen including Awkward Davies and other named individuals.

HMS Diane

Diane is a French man-of-war which was captured by Aubrey in an audacious cutting-out expedition described in a previous novel of the series. Purchased into the Royal Navy, Diane is given to Aubrey to convey Fox to Pulo Prabang. Diane proves a good ship, capable of fine sailing.

Batavia

Batavia is a British colony and strong outpost, overseen by Governor Raffles. The city is the setting for several chapters of the novel. Diane stops at Batavia to exchange mail, receive updated information about Pulo Prabang, and take on supplementary personnel for Fox's mission. Diane runs aground and sinks on her return trip to Batavia. Today, Batavia is known as Jakarta.

Pulo Prabang

Pulo Prabang is a fictional state in Malaysia, said to be fairly piratical in outlook. Pulo Prabang is ruled by a Sultan and run by a vizier. There is apparently a single large city and other smaller outposts, and at least one site of religious pilgrimage. Pulo Prabang lacks the resources to product large pirate ships and instead relies on huge native proas.

The Buddhist Monastery at Kumai

Kumai is a fictional locale in the nation of Pulo Prabang. It is located high in the mountains and is reached by a pathway known as the 1,000 steps because of its steep ascent. Kumai is the location of an ancient and nearly unknown Buddhist Monastery. Maturin visits the monastery and witnesses many natural splendors, including orchids, orangutans, and rhinoceroses.



The Treaty

The basic premise of the novel concerns Britain's desire to sign a treaty of mutual support and assistance with the fictional nation of Pulo Prabang. This is complicated by France's desire to sign a similar treaty. Fox leads a delegation to counter the French offer and ends with an elaborately produced treaty between Britain and Pulo Prabang. The treaty is written in golden ink upon scarlet paper and has various other gewgaws attached to denote its significance.

The False Natunas

The False Natunas are a fictional group of islets and submerged reefs probably intended to be in the South China Sea between Bangka and Biliton based upon their description and positioning in the narrative. The islands were identified by Aubrey and Pullings as a potential rendezvous point. Diane walks aground on a submerged reef in the False Natunas and is then pounded apart by surf from a storm. The novel concludes with Aubrey, Maturin, and the crew marooned on an islet in the False Natunas.

Humboldt's Observations

During the time period considered by the novel, the Royal Navy was anxiously engaged in producing global charts and sailing information. Much of this activity was based on expanding a series of close observations published by Alexander von Humboldt. To this end Aubrey has various special scientific instruments manufactured and carries on a series of observations and measurements throughout most of the novel. Aubrey intends to convey this information to the Admiralty for inclusion in future updates.

Peppering

The court of Pulo Prabang uses an unusual method of execution known as peppering. In the officially sanctioned process, the victim has a bag full of pepper tied around his head. The victim is then beaten about the bagged head with sticks causing inhalation of pepper and eventual asphyxiation. Van Buren notes the process leaves the victim's face grossly disfigured and body much ruined.

Naval Rank

Aubrey's primary concern at the beginning of the novel is his status within the Royal Navy. Due to trumped up charges for crimes he did not commit, Aubrey has been ejected from the Royal Navy and thus begins the novel as a private citizen, though in command of a privateer. During the novel he is reinstated to the Royal Navy with his previous rank and no loss of seniority. He finds this perhaps the greatest moment of his recent life, though he makes little public demonstration of it. Throughout the novel many

developments occur because of naval rank and the privileges attaching to it. In fact, the title of the novel refers to the salute due Edward Fox as the King's envoy.



Themes

Life at Sea

The novel presents two communities of seagoing individuals—one aboard Surprise and one aboard Diane. Similar in many respects, the two groups have distinctive traits—one is comprised of private sailors aboard a privately owned ship; the other is comprised of Royal Navy seamen aboard a man-of-war. The novel does an excellent job of contrasting the two communities. For example, aboard Surprise there is much singing, chatting, and frequent laughter while on Diane these things are not countenanced. Surprise is crewed of men seeking personal fortune whereas Diane is crewed of men seeking to carry out a mission with little chance of remuneration. In both instances, however, the men are part of a closed community that experiences prolonged isolation at sea and that must be entirely self-sufficient. Amidst such communities some men, such as Bonden and Aubrey, fit in well and are readily accepted. Other men, such as Davies and Maturin, perhaps don't fit in so well but are accepted for who they are and what they can do. A third class of men, such as Standish and Fox, are rejected by their comrades for various reasons and suffer a life of extreme isolation. The fact that Aubrey and Maturin go to sea so often and for so long has led them—particularly Aubrey—to a position of longing for life at sea because it is intelligible to them. The opening paragraphs of the novel focus on the simpler aspects of the seagoing life as contrasted to life ashore, and establish the theme of living at sea as one of the constant themes of the novel.

There's More than One Way to Skin a Cat

The basic premise of the novel involves an entourage of British subjects seeking to forge an official alliance between Britain and Pulo Prabang. To this end Diane conveys Fox and others to Pulo Prabang where they attempt to develop and sign a treaty while simultaneously attempting to prevent a French entourage from succeeding. The principle characters all attempt to secure the treaty in their own ways, proving that there is more than one way to skin a cat. The French delegation, specifically Ledward, seeks success through trickery, fraud, and sexual adventure. He engages Abdul in sexual intercourse and then uses Abdul's influence over the Sultan to gain support for the French entourage. Fox uses a more typical and straightforward approach which includes diplomatic negotiations, offers of special privilege, and monetary and military rewards. Aubrey's contribution focuses on detailing how much lumber, how many men, and what types of specialized laborers would be required to actually deliver on the French delegation's various promises of constructing a fleet of ships: Aubrey quite explodes the French promises. Aubrey also scouts out the French delegation's military force and finds it wanting. Meanwhile, Maturin moves behind the scenes to purchase influence through bribes and other payments and derives much useful information from contacts in the world of espionage. All of the British efforts are sensible and direct; they are effectively countered by the sly French efforts until Maturin arranges to have



Ledward's and Abdul's sexual liaison exposed by the Sultan's wife. In the end, Maturin clearly outplays the crafty Ledward and beyond the treaty enjoys the personal reward of extracting a terrible vengeance on Ledward and Wray.

Hubris Gets Punished

Hubris is excessive and arrogant pride. Hubris is demonstrated in the novel primarily by Fox and Ledward, though some other minor characters, such as Johnstone, suffer from the malady. Fox begins excessively proud and arrogant and demonstrates hubris to such a degree that the entire crew of Diane soon rejects his company. After his political victory at Pulo Prabang, Fox surprises Maturin by becoming hostile and even more arrogant. While most men become benevolent in victory, Fox's worst characteristics are exaggerated. He comes to believe he will receive a baronetcy for his accomplishment, and feels that conveying news of his success to the larger world is of paramount importance. He sees minor actions as intentional slights to his honor, and believes that any celebration must be to celebrate his importance. On the other hand Ledward approaches life with an arrogant hubris focused on his own sexual appeal and personal charisma. He is so convinced of his hold over Abdul and thus indirectly over the Sultan that he fails to take even normal precautions of privacy and secrecy. Thus, Maturin rather easily exposes his underhanded dealing. Both men pay the price for this hubris—Ledward, with Wray, is assassinated and dissected. Fox sails off against Aubrey's better judgment and is lost at sea during a storm. Both men, likely, were surprised by their own failings. The theme of hubris being punished is a common one in literature, and in the present novel is echoes in foreshadowed and fairly predictable ways. In contrast, Maturin, the true expert of subtle espionage, and Aubrey, the true expert of the sea, demonstrate competence and acceptable pride in their abilities—but not hubris.

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 usually 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. Occasional personal reflections allow for some first-person introspection without destroying the cadence of the overall narrative structure.

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 penurious manners as silly and frugal rather than stingy. The narrative also allows portrayal of characters' life situations as difficult but not pathetic. 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. 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; it is accessible and successful.

Setting

The novel features two primary types of settings. The first and most significant is aboard ships, usually *Surprise* or *HMS Diane*. *Surprise* is owned by Maturin and captained by Aubrey and, later, Pullings, and crewed by a highly proficient but rag-tag assortment of seamen. *Diane* is a Royal Navy vessel and the comparison of the two environments is interesting. 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 hardships endured.

The second setting presented in the novel is diffuse and consists of numerous ports, cities, and islands. Chief among these is Pulo Prabang, a fictional Malaysian state where piracy is economically significant. Pulo Prabang is developed enough that the lay of the land is known and several of the local inhabitants are featured as characters. Other notable locales are Batavia, Lisbon, and the False Natunas. In general, these settings are transient, poorly described, and thought of—at least by Aubrey—as locations to fight, refit, or re-supply. While the action aboard ship is dominated by Aubrey, the action ashore is usually dominated by Maturin. This division of the narrative by locale allows each man to figure prominently within his best environment.



Language and Meaning

The novel's language is generally simple and accessible. Standard 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, Governor Raffles is a fictionalized representation of the historic person Stamford Raffles. 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. 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 319-page novel is divided into ten enumerated chapters of roughly equal length. 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 thirteenth novel in a series which extends to twenty volumes. Many of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories developed in a prior novel. Similarly, events happening prior to the scope of the current novel are often referenced. This structure may prove somewhat difficult for readers unfamiliar with the prior novels. Nevertheless, basic character glosses and event recaps are provided; indeed the first chapter of the novel features much material of this nature.

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, 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 France during the year c. 1813. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically accurate representations.

Note that many of the novels are set in c. 1813 such that the narrative time would consume several years—a problem of chronology acknowledged by the author.



Quotes

The married men on the quarterdeck of the Surprise stepped back from the rail with a sigh and clapped their telescopes to. They were all sincerely attached to their wives, and they all—Jack Aubrey, her commander, Captain Pullings, a volunteer acting as his first lieutenant, Stephen Maturin, her surgeon, and Nathaniel Martin, his assistant—they all regretted the parting extremely. Yet it so happened that from a variety of official delays and other causes they had all had an unusually long spell of domesticity; some had found their consequence much reduced by the coming of a baby; others had suffered from occasional differences of opinion, from relatives by marriage, smoking chimneys, leaks in the roof, rates, taxes, the social round, insubordination; and turning they now looked to the clear south-west, the light-blue sky with a fleet of white rounded clouds marching over it in the right direction, the darker blue sea drawn to a tight line high on the horizon, and beyond that horizon endless possibilities even now, in spite of their late and inauspicious start. (p. 7)

'A lovely young woman indeed, Heaven,' said Jack. 'Mrs Heaven, if I do not mistake?' 'Why, sir, in a manner of speaking: but some might say more on the porcupine-lay, the roving-line, if you understand me.' 'There is a great deal to be said for porcupines, Heaven: Solomon had a thousand, and Solomon knew what o'clock it was, I believe. You will certainly see her again.' (p. 9)

More orders, more piping, more running feet: hands racing aloft. The cry 'Let fall, let fall,' and the topgallant billowed loose; they sheeted it home and the Orkneymen clapped on to the halliards. The sail rose, filling round and taut as the yard moved up and the men sang

Afore the wind, afore the wind
God send, God send
Fair weather, fair weather,
Many prizes, many prizes.'

The naval Surprises might not hold with shanties in general but they thoroughly approved of this one, above all its sentiment; and with ship swinging to the true south-west by west and gathering speed, all those forward of the quarterdeck repeated May prizes, many prizes. (pp. 35-36)

John Foley, the Shelmerston fiddler, skipped on to the capstan-head; at his first notes the men at the bars stepped out, and after the first turns that brought on the strain, three deep voices and one clear tenor sang
Yeo heave ho, round the capstan go,
Heave men with a will
Tramp and tramp it still
The anchor must be weighed, the anchor must be weighed
Joined by all in a roaring
Yeo heave ho



Yeo heave ho
Five times repeated before the three struck it again
Yeo heave ho, raise her from below
Heave men with a will
Tramp and tramp it still
The anchor's off the ground, the anchor's off the ground (p. 65)

'He did it as handsomely as the thing could be done,' he said. 'No humming and whoreing, no barking about the wrong bush, no God-damned morality: just shook my hand, said "Captain Aubrey, let me be the first to congratulate you" and showed me these.' Then, having chuckled over the Gazette again, observing that it would make poor Oldham, the post-captain who had stepped into his seniority, look pretty blank tomorrow, he gave Stephen a minute account of the conversation, the subsequent dinner—it went down remarkably well, considering; but I believe I could have ate a hippopotamus in my relief—and the truly affecting behavior of Heneage Dundas. 'He sends his very kindest wishes, by the way, and will look in tomorrow in case you have a free moment while he is in town. Lord, how pleased I was with the whole thing, and how pleased Sophie will be. I shall send an express. But,' he went on after a hesitant pause, 'I do rather wish Melville had not asked me for a vote, not just at that time.' (p. 96)

'A very sensible precaution too. I wonder why everyone does not adopt it.'
'Why, Stephen, some people are in a hurry: men-of-war, for instance. It is no good carrying your pig to market and finding...'. He paused, frowning.
'It will not drink?'
'No, it ain't that neither.
'That there are no pokes to be had?'
'Oh well, be damned to literary airs and graces—it is no good hurrying as we have been hurrying these last few days and carrying your ship half way round the world, cracking on to make all sneer again, if you are going to balance your mizen all night once you are past Java Head. Lord, Stephen, I am quite fagged with running about London so. Pillar and post ain't in it.' He yawned, made some indistinct remarks about time and tide, and went to sleep in his corner, going out like a light—his usual habit. (p. 114)

'Perhaps your unwilling mind had already perceived the signs but refused to acknowledge them. How often have I not said "Ha, it is six months since I had a cold", only to wake up the next day streaming and incapable of coherent speech?'
'What an unfailing source of cheer and encouragement you are, upon my word, Stephen. A true Job's muffler if ever there was one. And since you have now drained the pot I shall go on deck and change course. At least we shall be able to shake out a reef or two.' (p. 156)

Speaking to young Fleming about his journal he said, 'Well, it is wrote quite pretty, but I am afraid your father would scarcely be pleased with the style.' Mr Fleming was an eminent natural philosopher, a fellow member of the Royal Society, renowned for the



elegance of his prose. 'For example, I am not sure that me and my messmates overhauled the burton-tackle is grammar. However, we will leave that... What do you know about the last American war?'

'Not very much, sir, except that the French and Spaniards joined in and were finely served out for doing so.'

'Very true. Do you know how it began?'

'Yes, sir. It was about tea, which they did not choose to pay duty on. They called out No reproduction without copulation and tossed it into Boston harbor.'

Jack frowned, considered, and said, 'Well, in any event they accomplished little or nothing at sea, that bout.' He passed on to the necessary allowance for dip and refraction to be made in working lunars, matters with which he was deeply familiar; but as he tuned his fiddle that evening he said, 'Stephen, what was the Americans' cry in 1775?'

'no representation, no taxation.'

'Nothing about copulation?'

'Nothing at all. At that point the mass of Americans were in favour of copulation.'

'So it could not have been No reproduction without copulation?'

'Why, my dear, that is the old natural philosopher's watchword, as old as Aristotle, and quite erroneous. Do but consider how the hydra and her kind multiply without any sexual commerce of any sort. Leeuenhoek proved it long ago, but still the more obstinate repeat the cry, like so many parrots.'

'Well, be damned to taxation, in any case. Shall we attack the andante?' (pp. 162-163)

Stephen wandered with it; he had some time to spare before his appointment with Van Buren and he looked with more than ordinary attention at the orchids in the trees along the water or on the ground between them, an extraordinary variety of flowers and vegetation. He took specimens of those he could not recall having seen in Raffles' garden or dried collection, and he gathered up some beetles for Sir Joseph—beetles that in some cases he could not even assign to a family, so far were they removed from his experience. By the time he reached van Buren's door he was somewhat encumbered, but in that house burdens of this kind were taken for granted. Mevrouw van Buren relieved him of the flowers and her husband brought insect-jars. 'Shall we carry on directly with our viscera?' he asked. 'I have reserved the spleen especially for you.' (p. 188)

On the way back to his bawdy-house he decided that in decency he must alas ask Fox to join him in the expedition; by the time he entered the lower, coarser hall he had composed a civil but not unduly pressing message, and as he was walking through to reach the upper, quieter regions where he could write it he noticed Reade and Harper sitting with a group of middle-aged women. Their short legs were resting on other chairs; each had a cheroot in one hand and a glass, probably of arrack, in the other; Reade's pretty, smooth, round, choirboy face was bright scarlet, Harper's something between grey and green. The sight puzzled him for a moment, but then he remembered they had been sent ashore so that their morals should not be damaged when girls were allowed on board. They did not see him, their gaze being fixed on a lascivious dance in the middle of the room, and he passed through to the stairs. Having written his note he



came to their table and when their eyes had at last focused on him they started to their feet. Harper flushed red; little Reade turned deathly pale and pitched forward. Stephen caught him as he fell and said, 'Mr Harper, you are all right, are you not? Then be so good as to deliver this note into His Excellency's hands as soon as possible. Halim Shah'—to the man of the house—'pray have the other young gentleman carried to Mr Fox's residence without delay.' (pp. 215-216)

'We have been rousing out the Sultan's subsidy,' said Edwards, joy radiating from him.

'You have heard the news of course, sir?'

'You were so kind as to bring it yourself,' said Stephen, nodding at the letter.

'So I did,' said Edwards, laughing happily. 'I am growing as forgetful as an old mole, or a bat.'

At five bells Jack stood up. 'Come, Mr Edwards,' he said. 'You and I and the Doctor must scrub ourselves from clew to earing and put on our birthday suits. Killick! Killick, there. You and Ahmed will help the Doctor to get ready to go to court: he will wear his scarlet robe.' (p. 257)

'Pass the word for Mr Fielding,' said Jack: and to his first lieutenant, 'Mr Fielding, pray sit down. I have a damned awkward request to make of you and the gunroom. The position is this: I had invited the envoy and his colleagues to dine with me tomorrow: foolishly I took their consent for granted and here is poor Killick in a cloud of powdered chalk, while my cook is working double tides t two or even three courses and God knows how many removes. But this morning I find that I had counted by geese without laying their eggs—that I had killed my geese—that is to say, pressure of work prevents Mr Fox and his people from dining with me tomorrow. So what I should like to do, with your permission, is to invade the gunroom and feast among friends. It is a damned left-handed kind of an invitation, yet...' (p. 277)



Topics for Discussion

Consider the overall narrative structure in the novel and describe the basic plot—that is, what happens in the novel? Most of the novels in the series feature nautical combat. Is the lack of a naval combat scene damaging to the narrative?

Consider the character of Edward Fox. He comes highly recommended and proves capable enough, but he is marred by a gross excess of pride and arrogance. What things appear to exacerbate Fox's arrogance? Could such a man ever be successful at a life at sea? Why or why not?

The opening chapters of the novel introduce the character of Standish, who briefly serves as Surprise's purser. In another scene Robert Gough is introduced at considerable length. Both men quickly vanish from the narrative and are apparently insignificant characters. Why are the men presented in the novel? How do they reflect or support seemingly unrelated narrative developments?

Ledward approaches the political negotiations with abandon. Is he overconfident? Or is he simply desperate?

Maturin befriends the naturalist van Buren, and receives extensive assistance from him. Discuss van Buren's motivation for assisting Maturin.

Toward the end of the novel Ledward and Wray are assassinated. Maturin obviously is involved somehow in the murder, but the exact details are somewhat lacking. Who do you think killed Ledward and Wray?

If you had the choice of serving aboard Surprise or HMS Diane, which ship would you choose? Why?

The novel is the thirteenth novel in a series that extends to twenty volumes. Is the novel successful as a standalone novel? Or, must it be read as part of a series to be fully understood? Discuss.