Indigo

by jplus

Summary

A young English woman learns her long-dead father may be alive & involved in an ugly venture in the late 1700's conflict between European powers struggling for political and commercial dominance in the Americas. Accompanied by a handsome Spanish captain, who may be either her bodyguard or her jailer (and his very tall & rather violent companion), they search for the mysterious pirate who raised her and wind up rescuing a desperate young Middle Eastern man trying to save people from a cruel fate in the wilderness that is Colonial Florida.

Inspired by (requires less research than "based on") a REAL incident in American History. (This stuff writes its RebelCaptain self. Google it!) Pirates, Storms, Rum, Religion, Philosophy, Ideals of the Enlightenment corrupted by greed and the lust for power, cross-dressing. Spain v England while Portugal gnashes its teeth in the background and the American Revolution gets put on simmer. More than you needed to know about Indigo production, actual bodice-ripping of actual bodices (where appropriate), swords, 18th cen. History is full of angst and pain (and so is my writing) but I am going to try to make this little less. Fantasy. Sexy fun where I can manage it but this is me.
Notes

Probably can't keep up my normal posting pace with this one (aiming for once a week) but keep writing it in the margins of my American History curriculum notebooks and might as well post it in between the on-going Over the Edge saga. Hoping to keep it short. (ok...it may already be too late for that but NOT 84 chapters.) 18th cen. American History is full of angst and pain and cruelty and on-going crimes and actual pirates were pretty awful people but I am going to try to make this a little less so, 'cause Fantasy.

See the end of the work for more notes
He was as silent as if he had had his tongue cut out which for all that she knew, he had. Determined to show no hurry, she bid him to wait just inside the cabin door while she wrote the letter.

HMS Princess's Fortune
Amidala Wharf
London

3rd of August
1769

MASTER Saul GERERRE
c/o the agents of
The Abbey of Lamego
LISBON

SIR,

It seems unlikely that this letter will reach you ahead of my arrival, but since this is the last address at which I knew your agents to be available, I will at least make a venture of sending it ahead on a fast packet.

I expect you will be surprised to hear from me after so much time, perhaps even more surprised to find me still living.

I have attained my majority since we last parted company and consider that if we meet again, it should be with the standing of equals.

Since we parted company, I have made my way independently in the world. Some months ago, a disagreement with agents of the Crown, the details of which would not be expected to hold your interest, resulted in their insistence that I take up residence at Newgate Prison.

While officers of the Court were conveying myself and other individuals to this place, they were abruptly and forcefully interrupted by a party of men who earnestly desired that I accompany them.

I had hoped to find that you had engaged them but found this was not.

Despite some initial reluctance on my part, I was presently brought to a place some miles from London and introduced to several gentlemen and a lady who claimed acquaintance with you.

One was presented to me as a Lady Mary Monmoth, who I recognized from my time under your care in your company, but the others, one Mr. David Draven and Mr. Anthony Merrick, both presented to me as civilians, but with the carriage and demeanor of military men, were unknown to me. They addressed me by name, to my surprise, since I have, of late conducted all my affairs under several aliases, and thought the name of Miss Jane Erso long forgotten by anyone.
living including yourself.

They questioned me at great length about my father, inquiring most insistently about his employment and whereabouts. When I expressed my belief that he was deceased these ten years, they indicated that they had some recent knowledge to the contrary.

They presumed even further upon our former connection, seeming most anxious for news of your current activities and company, clearly disbelieving me when I assured them that I had had no contact with you since.

You found your responsibilities irksome with regards to

my status as your ward became inconvenient to

we parted company some years ago

From their accents I might have assumed them loyal subjects of the British Crown, excepting their unexpected liberation of myself from the custody of His Majesty's officers. Instead, I found them to be agents of your former compatriots in the Alliance.

Mr. Draven disclosed to me their certain belief that my father is presently living and in the service of a clandestine venture, funded by the British Crown, but executed by one Doctor William Tarkin, somewhere in the Provincial territories of Florida, in the Americas.

When I attempted to make plain that it was of equal interest to me whether my father were alive or dead, on the Spanish Main or in Hell, they pointed out that I was now most significantly in their debt.

Also in their company was a young man, introduced to me as an officer. His manners are cool and correct, but his accent betrayed him as a Spaniard. Presenting himself as another Alliance agent, he outlined the nature of this Doctor Tarkin's venture as an attempt to develop an indigo plantation in violation of Spanish and Portuguese treaty.

I politely indicated that, while fond enough of the color blue, I had no fixed attachment to the origins of my dye-stuff, having already resigned myself to a life in cheap prison cloth.

This attempt at levity was unappreciated. Lady Monmoth, whom I now remembered as an ally of yours in an action against the expansion of the vile trade in the Azores, made it clear that they sought your help to gain further intelligence with regards to this "construction" in the jungles of the Americas and my father's connection to it. I formed an impression that, while they were most eager for your assistance, they parted with you on very bad terms, and now feared a violent refusal without the action of an intermediary.

I cannot help but wonder sir, how it was they came to so distrust you and you they?

They have not fully shared sources and intentions with me, and I confess I trust none of them further than the length of my arm, but they firmly propose that I aid in finding you and provide them with introductions. They suppose, for reasons I cannot fathom, that I hold some key to your good graces.

You will understand sir, why it is not in my current interest to disabuse them of this notion.

The "Spanish captain" - who I profess to think may truly be neither of those things - accompanies me, whether as my protector or jailer is unknown to me. We are also attended by one of my "rescuers", a truly terrifying person - a toweringly tall gentlemen of uncertain heritage, with the accent of British gentleman and the aspect of a murderer. I saw him snap the neck of one of my
would-be jailers with his bare hands, and from this expected him to be one of your former associates. After spending time in his company, however, I find that his allegiance seems to be solely and specifically to Captain Andor. Whether as his freeborn servant, chattel slave, bastard half-brother, or fellow assassin, remains unclear.

We are traveling to Lisbon on some intelligence that you are still based there.

I have bought my dear liberty with this venture sir, and hope you will oblige me and at least consent to meet with this "Captain Andor" and his large companion, to hear their proposals.

Having deserted a young woman, barely more than a child, trusted to your care, who rendered you the duty owed a parent.

Is it true, as they say sir, that you have intelligence from my father? Are his whereabouts known to you?

Can it be true that you knew that he was alive and in the service of Crown agents all these years and yet did not tell me?

She stared at the paper, for several moments, then methodically tore it onto shreds. Taking a fresh sheet, she wiped the pen, dipped it again in the ink pot and wrote:

Expected Arrival at English Wharf in Lisbon aboard the Princess's Fortune sometime between August 13 -17.

S. Gerrere

SIR, I would speak with you.
Jane Erso

She folded the paper, sealed it, and handed the envelop to the grey-cloaked, grey-faced man who waited. He in turn nodded and departed without a word, out of the cabin and down the gangway to the wharf. She wiped the pen and laid it aside on the table. Wrapping the brown short cape around herself, she walked out onto the quarter deck and to the rail. The Portuguese agent had already disappeared into the dusky shadows of the warehouses.

When she turned back she saw Captain Andor standing with his back against the cabin doorway she had just quit. Silent as a cat.

"Will it reach him?" He asked, carelessly, as if the answer were of little concern to him.

"Perhaps " she said, with a shrug. "We will find out when we reach Lisbon."

He nodded, and walked back up to the front of the ship where his tall companion was keeping watch.

What will be my fate if he is not there? Jen wondered.

How long have you been told to allot me for this search before you cut my throat with one of the
knives you keep in your jacket and your boot? Or will you pass that task on to Master Kay?

She wrapped the brown wool more firmly around her and pressed a hand against the front pinning of her gown, finding reassurance in the thin sharp steel slid between the boning of her stays. He had surely noticed by now that he had only one knife in the sleeve of that good-quality-but-strategically-worn blue greatcoat, not the two that had been there formerly. But, if he had, he had clearly not thought it worth mentioning.

They sailed with the tide the next day.

Looking for the notorious pirate who had once called her his daughter, and now, to her fury, seemed to hold her life in his hand again.
The Falcon's Rest

Chapter Summary

Three men of shadowy purpose meet in a pub and discuss the trustworthiness of Miss Jane Erso, a woman that two of them must accompany on a journey to find the notorious Saul Gerrerre

The Falcon's Rest

Port of London

August 4 1769

It was extremely vexing to find that he had lost the game again, just as he nearly always had, ever since they were boys of scarcely twelve, carrying messages for Captain Reikken, dodging in and out on the wharves of Amsterdam and Southampton and London like underfed rats.

He checked all the tavern’s rooms twice and asked that a bottle of decent Madeira be brought up to the second floor parlor that he had previously engaged. He then placed one of his men at the door to the street and another in the taproom, with an eye to the stairwell. All these precautions were for naught. When the landlord unbolted the door to the small chamber upstairs, Andor was already to be found inside, leaning back dangerously in a chair, with his black boots propped on the fender of the unlit fireplace and hat pulled low over his eyes.

"Damn you, sir," Ruescott Melshi said.

"My apologies" his fellow agent said, as the startled landlord fled downstairs, growing yet more discomfited as Melshi insisted on relieving him of the bottle and glasses. "I nearly dozed off waiting for you."

"I confess, Andor, I was almost hopeful of winning for once, thinking that a dagger between the shoulder blades might be enough to defeat even your skill."

That merited a rare, dry laugh.

The bottle was already opened, so Melshi poured two glasses and seated himself in the second of the three chairs.

"You considered that likely? That a girl of scarcely 19 should get the drop on me?" Andor shook his head, reaching out to take the glass he was now offered. "Do you think my edge worn so dull?"

"My optimism was not founded on a poor estimate of your keeness, my friend, but a rich one of
hers." Melshi took out his pouch and fixed one of the reed stems the landlord had brought him to the small stone pipe bowl he kept within. For politeness’ sake he lifted both pipe and the bag toward Andor, as indication that he was more than willing to share his store of tobacco.

As he expected, the dark-haired man shook his head, refusing the offer.

If Captain Cassian Andor had even small vices, he kept them starved and out of sight.

"I am not jesting, Andor," Melshi lit the pipe from his own tinderbox and took a draw. "Do not think of her as a girl of 19, consider rather that you have been given the management of an 8 stone Hell cat. No sooner did we have the shackles off of her than she snatched up the constable’s club, knocked Rice and myself to the floor and struck Lennon a blow that broke his arm cleanly. Had you not made us a loan of Kay, she'd have been off like a hare."

"So Kay tells me." Andor took a small sip of the Madeira.

"He knows full well that she has obtained a knife," came a voice from the doorway. Mr. Kay had joined them.

"Yet he has refused to allow me to relieve her of it." The giant ducked his head through the doorway and entered, maneuvering himself carefully onto the third chair. He removed a small silver folding cup from his coat pocket, poured a thimble-full of the Madeira in and wet his lips with it. "If she cuts his throat in the night, as he sleeps, it will be no more than he deserves," the man intoned solemnly, with a disapproving glare at the Captain.

"In the name of God, Andor," Melshi found himself genuinely alarmed, "surely you did not leave her alone? I may have seemed to speak lightly before, but I am in earnest when I tell you this is not a woman, this is the Devil himself gone mumming in disguise as a woman."

"He wouldn't even let me chain the cabin door shut," Kay said, morosely.

"There is no need for such measures. She will not try to take leave of our company just yet." Andor insisted, calmly.

Melshi rubbed the shoulder and elbow still bruised and smarting from when young “Leah Hallick” kicked a delicate foot against his ribs and toppled him to the street.

“Confidently spoken, Andor. Pray, what gives you such assurance?”

“Her own face,” his friend said. “At this moment she burns to speak to Gerrere as much as we do. Whatever else she has been all her years,……whether hardened pirate, cutpurse, whore, murderess, or all in turn……she has known herself an orphan. Now Draven has told her Mr. Galen Erso may still live. The foundation beneath her shifted in that hour. It was plain in her eyes. There is a chance that she has family yet living and I think she would risk anything to know if such a chance could be possibly hold true.”

Andor looked appraisingly at the last drop in the glass, then finished it off.

“I know I would, Rue, and so would you.”
They reached the Port of Lisbon on the morning tide, coming up the Tagus as the sun rose.

He had dressed and readied their equipment in the main cabin hours before dawn. They would need to travel lightly, but many dire scenarios were possible and must be prepared against, to the best degree possible.

Kay lifted the smaller pistol from the table and checked the flint, before holding it out to Andor, tilting his head as if in inquiry. The Captain shook his own head in the negative, having already decided that the encumbrance of shot and powder, would be far more trouble than gain in the crowded streets. There was the sword, mostly for show, admittedly, but still quite serviceable, the three knives already concealed on his person, and the wire-thin cord of the garrote in his sleeve. These would need to be enough.

The chief "loose end" that remained to be tied was Miss Erso herself.

Assuming no enlightening messages awaited them at the dock, it was necessary to go out into the city to gain news of Gerrere or make contact with his people. Against Kay's strongest recommendations, Andor determined it was now additionally necessary to take the woman into their confidence with regards to at least the first part of their plans.

"Please tell me that you have some reason for this course, that you have perceived some heretofore concealed virtue in this girl, one of a more positive character than merely her temporary inactivity with regard to the matter of cutting your throat in the night," his friend had grumbled sourly.

Thus it was that Miss Erso was called to be present as they laid out the day’s strategy.
There had been no need to wake her. Miss Erso had been up on the deck already in the dim hours before they turned in to approach the Harbor. He had gone out for a breath of air before dawn only to find her standing at the rail beneath such stars as still shone, in her shift and bare feet, wrapped in one of Kay’s more threadbare greatcoats. She had been staring fixedly toward the dark indistinct silhouette of the city across the water as if she could burn it down with the fire of her eye alone. The coat reached past her ankles and dragged on the deck. Her chestnut hair was loosely braided back and covered only with what looked to be a sailor’s scarf.

My God, the thought came to him, she does not hesitate to steal openly from any of us, even the crew.

The sailors of the Princess’s Fortune had, no doubt, seen far stranger sights than a woman in her nightclothes pacing the deck and so they paid her no mind.

She cast him nothing more than a sideways glance as he approached her at the rail.

“I am anxious for daylight,” he said as if she were merely a lady he had struck up a conversation with in a carriage. “When last I was in Lisbon, more than half the city was still in blackened ruins after the Great Earthquake. I am told that the Marquis, whatever else one thinks of him, has rebuilt the Harbor and the docks magnificently. Whatever rot she may suffer within, Lisbon is said to present a pretty face to the world again.”

She turned toward him with a look of flat disdain in her green eyes, lifting one eyebrow as if to ask, “Truly sir? Is this the petty best you can manage?”

Without a word she left him at the rail and walked back toward the quarter deck.

“Miss Erso,” he called after her.

She halted, her back still to him but did not turn.

“We must meet to discuss what awaits in the city before we dock. Please join us in the main cabin in two hours.”

She nodded in silence and still without turning a backward glance walked on toward the steps.

He had been cut less cleanly by duchesses in drawing rooms.

And please, bella dona, he thought of calling after her, put some clothes on or I shall never hear the end of it with Kay.

At the appointed time she joined them in the main cabin. To his relief...and if it must be admitted, amusement... she had in partial concession to propriety dressed in the jumps and wrapper from the trunk Lady Monmoth had provided. Kay was still shocked but civil conversation was at least now rendered possible.

"I had but one reliable contact amongst Gererre’s trusted circle,” Andor said, “It was he who told me that, despite the dangers, the Lion was lingering in Lisbon. The reasons for this he could not or would not elaborate. He also indicated that Gerrere had received urgent messages from his vast
network in the West Indies and Spanish territories originating from one Galen Erso, a secretive engineer of legendary skill, long supposed deceased, who had the distinction of being employed by both the Spanish AND the British in the late wars.”

“We need to know the nature of these messages, their origins, and what light they can shed on the nature of the current project being undertaken by Tarkin in the jungles of Florida.”

“Where is this ‘reliable contact’ now?” Miss Erso asked, “If I could meet with him, he might be able to…”

“I last had contact with him in Havana,” Andor heard his own voice lie smoothly, “and he has since vanished. Since Gererre’s policy is to assume any operative delayed or missing to be captured and turned informant, they are treated as dead and quickly made so if seen again at liberty. Using his name will gain us nothing.”

Come, he thought, surely you know the reason why we moved heaven and earth to gain your company for this enterprise, niña? I myself heard Mr. Draven clearly explain to you. There is a possibility that a foster parent's affection will slow the old mad pirate’s murderous hand long enough to let us deliver the Lady’s message. We’d have left you walled up in Newgate otherwise.

The woman nodded. She no doubt knew full well of Gererre’s harsh policies, having grown up under their strictures.

Andor continued, “He has, or had, a sister, a nun living in one of the convents within the city, who may still be in contact with some of Gererre’s people. I have arranged to meet with her, in the hopes of her passing your name and desire to meet, on to his cadre.”

I can also try to put her mind at rest by assuring her, in some disguised fashion, that your earthly sufferings are over, Tivik. I ceased to believe in the efficacy of such things long, ago, but who is to say? Perhaps her prayers for your soul will give some comfort. When we meet again in Hell,...soon, I do not doubt,...you can tell me if I was right.

“Hopes?” Miss Erso asked, as if amused by his choice of words. “Agents in the employ of the Alliance, one of them a Spaniard, no less, are going seeking one of the most wanted pirates on the Atlantic, in a city tightly held in the gloved hand of the Marquis of Pombal, with no better plan than a name, a cloistered nun and a thin chain of hopes?”

He met her gaze solemnly. “What else is the Alliance but a chain of hopes?” he asked, “What else have the likes of we to hold onto?”

She looked up and across the table at him, quite openly then, as if suddenly re-considering some previous assessment, taking some new measure of him. In that instant he felt a shock, and realized that this was the first time she had met his eyes clearly, with no veil of concealment or distrust.

“The problem,” Kay intoned. “Is what Miss Erso is going to wear.”

Chapter End Notes

next up....cross-dressing. I am so looking forward to this.
("jumps" are a less rigid form of "stays", which were usually stiffened with whalebone/baleen. Much later the French adaptation was called a "corset" and that name is usually what people know today)

(A "wrapper" was an informal stay-at-home garment for women.....sort of like a caftan....think one step up from your bathrobe. It was usually worn over the shift and "jumps" or loosened stays)
The Blind Beggar

Chapter Summary

In which Jen must dress to go to Lisbon and Captain Andor gives some insight into his companion Mr. Kay. Jen encounters a mysterious beggar and recalls an incident in her youth in its connection to an ornament she wears. Captain Andor is concerned he may have made an insufficient number of escape plans. Objects explode.

Chapter Notes

irmãozinhos = "little brothers"
"Jovem senhora!" = Young woman!
"Rosas, rosas frescas!" = Roses, fresh roses!
"Fragmentos da cruz verdadeira!" = Fragments of the true cross!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Santa Maria Maior de Lisboa
August 15, 1769

The Se’, as the great Cathedral was called, was one of the few buildings within the city not totally rebuilt. The mighty earthquake and fire of the previous decade had largely spared it. A miracle, no doubt. The King had fled the capitol and in the years since, the "enlightened" despotism of the Marquis d’Pombal had swept away the remnants of the Church’s political power, much as it swept away the rubble of death and disaster. The politically involved Orders had been banned outright, while the more contemplative adherents either remained behind their crumbling walls in prayer, like the sister of Captain Andor's missing informant, or thronged the steps of the last great Cathedral, begging for alms or lay preaching...depending on the strictures of their cloth.

It was all one to Jen.

She leaned against one of the fat Roman inner pillars of front portico, as the crowds of the city moved and swirled about. Street cries carried from the gleaming new plaza, crowds of the "devout" of all classes moved through the Gothic ambulatory, eager to see and be seen. Wealthy ladies gowned and veiled in lace, walked on the arms of peacock-like men. Nuns in grey habits, dogs, rosary sellers, praying monks, beggars, and street urchins picking pockets, all filled the spaces between the pillars.

Her interest was only piqued by the pickpockets.....

*Good hunting, irmãozinhos*, she thought.

.....and the considerable number of soldiers. Many armed men were in the red and gold of the Royal Army, but a nearly equal number wore the gold-trimmed black of Pombal's personal guard. She could not help but notice that their swords gave the appearance of being the lighter, sharper, and
better used.

The cries of the street sellers mingled with the prayers of the mendicants.
"Jovem senhora!"
"Rosas, rosas frescas!"
"Fragmentos da cruz verdadeira!"

"Wait for me here," Captain Andor had said, "my interview at the Monastery di Odivelas has been granted for but one hour and only one man at a time is permitted in the interview chamber."

"How very inconvenient," she observed, "perhaps there is still time for Mr. Kay to bring you your razor? I am sure between the two of us we could manage you into stays."

How she should be garbed for this venture had been the object of much strategy.

More than a fortnight ago, when she was directly and roughly brought from the hands of her jailers to a pleasant small house on the outskirts of London.....where precisely was still unclear to her, as she had been blindfolded for the duration of the journey.....she had been presented with a trunk of women's clothing and toiletries. Two English gowns, one of brown stuff, fit for a better sort of house servant and one of blue chintz. Petticoats....one of quilted Matillaise.....chemises, kerchiefs and caps appropriate to each, one set of serviceable front-laced jumps and another set of fashionable stays and two pairs of shoes- one sturdy leather with pattens and one finer, with very good buckles. All of these had fitted her most exactly. She had been quite torn between a certain tactile happiness.....it had been long since she had had any but the roughest clothing....and a profound unease that her precise dimensions were so well known to persons of whom she had no previous knowledge. Her feelings had been equally divided about the steaming tub of hot water, combs, brushes and fine quality soap.....most profoundly welcome.....and the two rather phlegmatic maidservants there to ensure her rigorous use of the same.....considerably less welcome.

This treasure trove, to her, of clothing had been eclipsed by the contents of three trunks that the dour Mr. Kay had brought out into the main cabin of the Princess's Fortune shortly after they docked.

*Dear God,* she thought, *how many women have you had aboard this wretched ship and how many of them swam away naked?*

There were fine gowns and plain ones, a changeable silk polinaise in shimmering colors, jackets, ribbons, jewelry, French panniers, stays and rumps of various fashions, what looked to be a nun's habit and more. She thought she saw a faint smile on Andor's face as he observed her clear discomfiture.

"No," she said, flatly.

In the end, another trunk was brought, containing clothes suitable to a boy of roughly her size. There were sufficient long binding cloths to render stays or jumps unnecessary, decent moleskin breeches, a lined waistcoat, good jacket with pressed buttons, a cravat and trimmed hat. With the addition of clocked stockings and low-heeled shoes, with good but not fine buckles, she made a fine servant boy of the better sort, fit to work for a ships captain, which seemed to be Andor's guise.

"Will you dress yourself here, Miss Erso, or do you require more privacy?" the towering Kay asked,
blandly.

Damn you.

"Pray, how much privacy, am I to be allotted on this venture sir?" she snarled, "being unaccustomed to it, I should dislike to overspend my account."

"Kay!" Andor reprimanded the man sharply. "Miss Erso can make use of my cabin."...it adjoined....."to prepare herself, and we will wait for her here."

The giant shrugged, as if the matter were of no further concern, and excused himself to consult the dockmaster.

Andor unlocked the cabin door and held it for her.

"My apologies," he said. "You must believe me when I tell you, though it will often seem otherwise, he quite genuinely means no insult."

Must I sir? I should hate then to hear how he speaks when offense is his goal, she thought.

Feigned indifference seemed by far the wisest course, so she merely shrugged and gathered the garments up, intending to pass into the cabin without further conversation.

"Please have patience," the Captain said, dropping his arm to slow her way, as if her understanding of the matter was somehow of great importance to him, "Kay is a unique man. He cannot, I think, measure as the rest of humanity does. Matters of...distinction..." he spoke, pausing often, as if to search for the right word to convey his thoughts, "niceties of rank and..... preference between persons, have almost no meaning for him. This can make him seem very harsh in his manners but....there is...... an equality of regard in him that is...can be.... almost admirable ...once understood."

What an odd pairing they were, this smooth and careful assassin and his violent, blunt and tactless companion.

Attempting to pass him in the doorway, she found herself looking up at eyes both dark and utterly serious, and felt obliged to be serious in turn. "Tell me, do you find this “equality of regard” to be an advantage in a servant, Captain?"

"He is not my servant," Andor said, "Advantage or no, he is my friend. Kay, is exactly as Nature has made him to be.....no more , no less. How many people can say so? You and I cannot, certainly, Miss Erso. We are what a wicked world has made of us."

He moved aside then to let her pass and closed the door, giving her the time and solitude to transform herself.

Less than an hour later Jen met him on the deck and they disembarked, to present themselves as a British merchant captain and his servant boy.

Despite his protestations, the natural Mr. Kay was to remain aboard, lest his unique appearance draw attention.
"Jovem senhora!"
"Jovem senhora!"
"Young woman!"

Among the cacophony of voices, one impressed itself, cutting through her thoughts.

"Young woman! Shall I bless your necklace?"

She turned, startled, seeking the source of the voice.

Her eyes now fell upon a figure she had seen before, but had hardly marked among the crowd of beggars sitting in the shade of the inner portico. A bowl lay on the stones in front of him, with a few coins inside, while a battered staff lay alongside it. The man was dressed in the robes of a Franciscan but belted with the soldiers red sash, and presented both a beardless face and head close-shorn of peppered dark hair. He faced up at her now with a wide, pleasant smile and eyes silvered white with cataracts, sightless.

*How had he known her English?*
*How did he know a woman?*
*How could he have perceived her necklace?*

She glanced around herself, alert to danger, but no one else seemed to mark the beggar's words. The blind man gestured for her to approach.

"The cross you wear has many tales to tell, young lady, do you know them?"

She stepped close to him, telling herself later that it was only to forstall further revelation of her disguise, but in truth out of sheer fascination. Involuntarily she laid her hand against the pendant concealed beneath the linen of the borrowed shirt.

She had preserved this ornament, on a waxed leather cord around her neck, through every trial and torment that had befallen her. Had it seemed made from any material more valuable than wood, it would have been taken from her long ago, had it had any form other than that of a religious character, being carved into a rounded cross roughly the size of a gold sovereign, it would have been questioned. As it was, the flat diamond-shaped stone within the center was hardly to be seen anymore, so carefully had she kept the precious thing varnished with wax to preserve it from damp and misadventure. It was her only talisman, her sole memento.

*Once they had lived in a fine house in an English city. She could no longer distinctly remember which city. One dark night, arms had lifted her up from her bed, and all of her dolls were left behind. She recalled traveling on boats and a miserable succession of carriages before arriving at a new and strange “home” on the Cornish coast. It was near a small village they only seldom walked out to. What work her father had obtained in such a strange and isolated spot she could no longer recall, even had she ever truly known it. Her memory contained sketched recollection of a small isolated farmhouse, a garden that she and her father had planted together, a view of the seacoast that both thrilled and terrified her and the books her mother read her. It had been a child’s paradise. There must have been more servants, but she recalled only one tall thin girl who helped with the laundry and a cook who sang beautifully in English of such an odd accent that Jen thought it another language. An old man brought letters and newspapers with regularity from town, but she*
recalled only because he had a dappled pony she fed carrots to. Her father and mother took it in turns to wait by the road for his coming, in all weathers. They played odd games. She and her mother would sometimes take a small lantern to play “Pixies-in-the-mound.” The game entailed dashing as quickly as possible out of the house, while Papa tried to spy them from various vantage points, out to an old cistern, hardly to be seen behind the hill mounds at the far end of the gardens. There were child-high grey stones that stood around the mounds, and the laundry girl always crossed herself when passing them, as Jen recalled. Child and mother would lift a grass-covered wooden tray that covered the mouth of the dry stone well, climb down a ladder within and sit. Mama always brought a great bag of beads, which was the “hoard” in the game, and they would blow out the lantern and name all the stones by touch alone, in the dark. After a time, sometimes a very long time, Papa would “discover” them. They must not come out before he did, or the sun would melt them. By the time she was seven she had sensed, by some means, that this was not in any sense merely a childish game, but being a self-possessed and obedient little girl, she did as her mother asked without question.

On a particularly stormy afternoon, as she had been gathering sticks on the high hill above the road, for some infantile building project, she saw a group of men riding on horses, not up from the town but on the steep winding track from the shoreline. Most were cloaked in black or blue against the wind, but one wore a white scarf and hat. A number of other men below were disembarking from dinghies, tossing on the rough shore. Additional horses were being held by other men who seemed to be there waiting for them. It occurred to her in later years that her father had no doubt chosen the house because of this vantage of both the road and the shore. She ran toward her home. Her father must have already seen the men, for he was walking, mist-dampened and hatless from the direction of the cliff. Without a word, he had swept her up in his arms and carried her into the house.

Her mother had been standing at the foot of the stairs. “Lara,” he said, “He is here, he has found us.” Her mother, pale but resolute, had gathered the cloaks and a leather case that, she later recalled had always lain folded and ready by that door. Her father set her down on her feet and kissed her fondly.

“My Star,” he said, for so he always called her, “Everything I do, I do to protect you. Say you understand.”

“I understand,” she answered and embraced him, for she had always been an obedient child.

Her mother seized her hand then, and they ran, as always before, out the back garden toward the mounded hill, beyond the circle and the cistern. This time, however, her mother altered the game. She stopped and knelt beside Jen, just as they reached the grey stones that tilted and leaned at the end of the yard. Removing the the wooden cross she always wore on a chain, from off her own neck she kissed it and then placed the necklace around her daughter’s. “Trust in God, my darling, trust in the truth.” Jen had tried to cling to her then, but her mother held her hands away. “You know where to go, brave girl. Wait until I come, it will not be long.”

“It belonged to my mother,” Jen found herself saying to the blind man, as she drew the ornament out from beneath the folds of her neck scarf and shirt. The man, whether monk, or beggar, held up a hand as if bidding her to keep it concealed.

“The stone is rare and came from the East Indies, or so my father told me,” she said, most startled to find herself speaking remembrances that she had never before uttered aloud, even to Saul. “He said that the marks in it were like writing, and contained prayers and stories in some language that people
had forgotten how to read.”

The beggar nodded approvingly.

She became aware, in that moment, that a large, broad-shouldered and swarthy man, roughly dressed, had stepped into the archway beside the beggar and was eyeing her with suspicion.

She stepped away slightly, only to find that Captain Andor had returned and was standing directly behind her.

“What are you doing?” he said, in the tone of one reprimanding a wayward servant, “You were not sent out here to make friends.” Grasping her elbow, none too gently, he steered her back and away from the beggar, who only smiled and lowered his head, as if returning to prayer.

As the Captain directed her, with a degree of urgency, away from the crowds in the portico and back toward the plaza, she heard the blind man call, “There are words written in the heart of every star that shines.”

“Move!” Andor fairly hissed in her ear. His previously polished manner seemed quite ruffled now.

She looked back to see the swarthy man laying a hand on the blind beggar’s shoulder, and gazing after her darkly.

“Who were they?” Jen enquired, now hurrying her steps to keep pace with the Captain as he maneuvered against the movement of the crowds, away from the bright plaza and toward the shadows of the narrow alleyways beyond it.

Her companion was clearly agitated, looking over his shoulder as if anxious about pursuit. “The city is full of, monks, priests, half-mad missionaries from the colonies, hermits from the hill. With all the abbeys and most of the shrines destroyed, and the Maquiss Guard arresting anyone suspected of being loyal to Rome, or inciting discord of any kind, they cluster around the cathedral, causing difficulties for everyone.”

How? Jen could not help but wonder. We came here to look for Baba Saul, sir. Surely you know that “difficulties” draw him like a flame draws a moth?

“You seem most anxious,” she said, breathless as he hurried them through the back streets. “Did your cloistered novice give you news that disturbed you?”

“We must return to the ship,” he said, brusquely, “Lisbon may find itself shaking again soon.

They had circled around the Plaza by the less-gleaming back ways, but as Jen glanced down a new, straight, avenue she was provided a glimpse across the bright open courtyard and of the classical splendor of the newly built Palacio do Governo. A movement on the ornate cornice of the top story caught her eye. A flicker of a red scarf in one spot, a thin whisp, as if of smoke, there then gone at another.

Gerrere’s men, her heart told her.

“Captain Andor,” she said. His eye had followed hers and his mystified expression indicated that he might be less familiar than she with what was about to occur. “I earnestly hope, sir, that you have prepared some additional plan of escape.”

The Palacio exploded with a deafening roar.
up next, sword fighting.
Taken

Chapter Summary

In which Jane Erso and Captain Andor attempt to escape a violent conflict, between parties unknown, meet with officers of both the King of Portugal and the Marquis di Pombal and fight with both. They meet again with the blind beggar and his companion and are captured by the agents of the notorious Saul Gererre.

Chapter Notes

well, my......a sword fight scene. Haven't tried one of those since the 8th grade.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Santa Maria Maior de Lisboa and environs

August 15, 1769

In written report later, he made the point to Mr. Draven thus:

*A crowded city in which a greater number than half the adult population have experienced the worst natural disaster of modern Europe, most of whom still wake nights in dreams of screaming terror at the memory of heaving earth, collapsing stone, and man-high rivers of fire ignited as vast tanks of oil and brandy collapsed onto the broken street torches, to be fanned by roaring winds through the streets, and were reported by survivors to shriek with the wails of the damned....is not a city which will respond calmly to the resound of a massive explosion of gunpowder.*

It was instinct rather than the force of the blast that flung him to the ground. He reached for the woman but she had already echoed his action.

Lighter than he, quicker of recovery, she was up on her feet at an instant clutching at his coat and pulling him back from the crush. Death by trampling crowds would quickly become the nearest danger.

*Up. Run*, was his sole thought.

They bolted together back down the narrower way.

The shopkeepers, workmen and whores who had frequented the little intersection of streets but a moment before, were now fleeing, running from the buildings. Many were screaming. Some men dropped to their knees, caught up in the memory of the earthquake and unable to bear more. Others
wailed and called upon God for salvation lying in the street already like corpses and blocking the escape of those in flight from the Plaza.

Looking back over his shoulder a gust struck his eyes and he was blinded of an instant by stinging powder smoke.

¡Joder!

Her hand pulled him back from a stumble as a fat man on the ground crashed against his legs and would have downed him.

The woman pressed near his ear and, as a cat might, hissed “Back now! Guards!” pressing him toward the gutter-side wall. Eyes clearing, he stumbled forward. Assured of his motion she released her grip on his coat and moved behind him.

Out away from the plaza was their best course, and pressed to the wall was painful but lessened the risks of being swept into the center and crushed. Black boots and red coats thundered past them.

Royal Guard were among the throng moving up behind. Trying to shove the shrieking crowds aside with bayonets now in their haste to reach the Palacio.

*The direct path to the docks was impossible. Away, was the only goal now. All else must wait.*

Another smaller blast rocked, this time from nearer, perhaps the Cathedral courtyard?

*Diablos! How many were there? Where they trying to bring down the Palacio or the whole Cathedral quarter? Or was it mostly smoke and thunder designed to panic? He could not see.*

There was further action erupting in the Plaza, but the smoke and press of bodies covered it from his sight. Guards began to form ranks to fill the street and were firing musket at adversaries unseen.

Ears ringing, he felt something give beneath his hand...the narrow wooden door into a blank passageway between the buildings. As he pushed through, the woman fairly dove beneath his feet to reach the way that opened.

Fully upright now and at last able to breathe they ran through a paved gap between the walls in places barely the width of his shoulders.

*They were safe in this instant for the crowd feared earthquake by reflex. Most would run FROM buildings till they knew better or came at least to fear the guns more.*

She was ahead of him but their eyes saw the barrier of black and gold at the same instant. She stopped herself, shoes skidding for purchase on the fresh gravel.

Heart pounding, he twisted, scraping his back against the brick to halt himself lest he crash into the woman and knock her further into the street.

Now facing into one of the avenues at the back of the Cathedral they halted, frozen.

Ahead a volley of muskets fired.

Screams. Shouted commands. The reek of smoke.

They had emerged from the gap in the walls behind a squad of the Maquis di Pombal’s Men. Rows of the Kings Guard lay ahead in the street, dead or struggling to rise, shot in the back. The Men in black were setting for a second volley.
The only safe way was behind.. back into the passageway.

She pressed back against him, sharing his instinct. *They must not be seen here.*

The percussion of a second volley filled the air with smoke but before it stunned him deaf he had heard the screaming and noise of bodies behind them. The panicked crowd of the street they’d escaped had found the passageway and was rushing toward them like a thin torrent of flood water. Retreat was blocked. They had but seconds before they would be trampled or pushed into the armed column.

Digging fingers into her now coatless shoulder, he shoved her sideways.

Sliding now with backs pressed against the brick wall they moved parallel to the fixed column of soldiers.

*Riflemen, well-trained and firing in formation would be focused like greyhounds on the forward line of their shot, rendered almost incapable to look neither right or left, he knew.*

*God! how he knew.*

He and the woman might glide like shadows, flat to the wall, inches away but unseen…in the smoke between those shots.

They did so, managing a few....feet, yards.... just as a line of panicked souls poured out the gap they had quit and crashed like a forced stream of water into formation of black-clad riflemen.

Line broken then by the unexpected force of bodies, muskets knocked aside from hands of those in the center shoved by the inrushing crowd, Pombals Men in their black turned now, striking about with rifle butts and bayonets, some fired even into the passageway.

All was a chaos of white smoke and screaming as more bodies fell.

He and the woman reached the end of a wall,...nearly free, nearly to a clear passage behind the West facade,...just as five black-clad officers rounding the building.

These new men stood rooted, appalled at the scene before them.

*In such moments, time slowed, he knew the sensation.*

*Don’t see us, we are not your target.* Captain Andor beseeched inwardly.

*What must they look like he could not fathom. Hats lost, the boy/woman’s coat was gone, his was torn, her cheek bloodied, his hands scraped and bleeding.*

Evev in such a narrow space they might have stumbled by unseen in such tumult had God or the Devil smiled. They did not.

“Você aí!” one of the Marquis's Men turned to them, as if seeing them in that very instant and drew sword with his right hand while reaching for the “boy” with his left.

¡Joder!

Within the span of his hearts beat the woman dropped flat to the cobblestones, turning quick, with both hands out flat to break her fall. Then pushing herself up from the street leaped to her feet swift as a cat and dashed away.
His saber was out and struck the man's extended arm, cutting to bone. The effect of surprise on the others bought him nearly a second to prepare.

Pulling back from the screaming soldier whose arm he’d cut, he slashed the underside of another’s forearm.

Four turned, drew on him.

The woman was there again crouched on the ground.

She launched herself low against the knees of one, rolling away from a down-cutting blow the man aimed even as he fell.

Three were on him. One edging to his left side, two in front. He slashed left, dodging a blow and falling back. Pulling them toward him. Focused on him.

*Win or lose they would have him now surely but it would purchase her time to run.*

One officer lunged ahead. He parried but the steps were close now.

*Damn. Their swords were good.*

The taller one was the better.

Another powder blast, from the Plaza, unseen in the smoke, shook the air.

The woman had the musket off the man she’d downed and swung it to his head before he could rise. A skull cracked.

The West passage was emptying as fast as people ran past them.

He fell back, up toward the Cathedral steps.

*Get them back around the corner, out of sight of the melee on the street in front of them.*

Fell back again.

*Sooner or later one would get behind him.*

*Run! Madwoman!*  

*Where was she?*

He back-dodged a thrust that nicked through his coat sleeve. Not deep.

*There. ¡Tonto!*

She had something in hand... a piece of broken pike... and slid behind trying to flank the short one, who swung his blade at her, startled. Dropping to the side she struck the man in the kneecap, crunching bone.

*Two.*

One lunged for him, undeterred as the other tried to flank to the right. *Open.* Cassian fell back and left, switched hands and took the man in the chest.

*Jesu, this was a good blade after all, flexible.*
But to pull from a dropping body took time, a precious half-second. The last was on him now. The tall one.

The woman was out of sight.

Tall had a dagger in the right hand and the saber in the left.

His own cutting blade lay in his boot. *No time.*

The fellow stepped forward to close just as Cassian saw a blood-grimed, striped waistcoat emerge from the portico pillar a bare span behind and over the man’s gold-braided shoulder, pistol raised.

He dropped as she fired and the tall soldier pitched face forward onto the street.

Miss Erso threw the now-useless pistol from her and ran to his side.

The West street was emptied now. The sound of musket fire still echoed in the Plaza beyond. They ran up and away from the sound. Red-coated bodies littered the Cathedral entrance.

*Pombal’s Men were shooting the King’s Guard.* ¿Joder! Por qué?

Up past the West Porch an abutting street ran along the North side.

His thought ran to attaining the shelter of a building, out of sight.

To be cornered was bad, but he needed safety, to orient himself, to draw breath and try to form a plan.

That narrow street to the left...if they could but reach it.

*God clearly hated him, as he had long suspected.*

From the street they moved toward emerged a squad of five in red, Kings Guard.

Panicked and unsure of who or where their enemies were, they had likely been cut off from their regiment on the Plaza.

Under other circumstances he might have tried deception to gain some advantage.... *Pombal’s Men were the greater devils here all in all*.....but the sight of a bloody man with a sword slash across his arm and a battered coatless boy spattered with gore was a poor foundation for confidence.

Muskets were aimed at them.

“Deixe estes passarem,” a voice said from above them. A beggar in tattered robes,.... *Franciscan? Cistercian?* ...came walking down from the North portico, above the Guardsmen. He tapped ahead of him with a long silver-tipped staff. His hair was close shorn and eyes pearled white, blind.

“Deixe estes passarem. Let them go,” the man repeated. The Guards stood as though confused while the beggar calmly passed, placing himself between Cassian and the woman and the muskets of the Guards.

“Deus está com eles, and they walk where truth sends them.”

“Ele é cego,” said one Guard, sounding uncertain.
There is no time for this, Cassian thought. Either musket fire had finally taken his hearing or the echoing of blasts had faded from the Plaza beyond.

There was groaning and shouting from the streets behind them but no sound of gunfire. Whisps of white smoke still lingered as a haze from black powder ....cannon perhaps? Could that second blast have been cannon? Whose?

The streets for a strange instant seemed almost empty of the living.

They will be here soon....and who "they" are hardly matters at present.

“No,” the woman at his side whispered, her hand gripping his uncut arm. “He is blind, don’t....”

“Ele é louco,” barked another, an officer by his coat. He raised a saber as if to strike the blind man away like a fly.

A number of things happened before Cassian Andor had the presence of mind to do more than grasp the woman to prevent her launching herself forward into the fray in the blind man’s defense.

The beggar swung his stick like a pike, tripping the Guard attacking him. Faster than thought he leaped up and struck another behind him in the head, jumped briskly onto the body of the man he had tripped, kicking him in the head as he passed and striking yet another in the back.

One of the remaining Guards fled. The other made the mistake of raising his musket barrel toward the blind man. He fell backwards with a bolt in his throat.

Another man, large and dark, with rough hat pulled low with a small black beard in the Portuguese style and long braided hair tied back, emerged from the shadow of the portico.

He held a well-used crossbow of Italian military make.

“I could have managed him,” the blind man said, clearly piqued.

“Your gratitude is touching,” snarled the dark fellow, walking out to meet them.

“God protects me,” the beggar laughed as if this banter were a common matter with them. He stood straight now and leaned smilingly upon his support.

“I am sure God will thank me for my help when he next sees me,” his protector grumbled. He turned a dark eye to Cassian and Miss Erso. Scooping up one of the fallen sabers, he eyed its length and tucked it, sans scabbard, into his belt.

“You should go now,” he said to Cassian, as if he were a market town Nightwatch and they were errant boys out after curfew.

The blind man turned toward them. One of the fallen Guards attempted to rise, groaning, and the beggar struck him a quick negligent blow with his staff as he passed, rendering him senseless again.

Cassian felt as if a hand had passed lightly over his heart.
“¿Eres de la Orden Bendita?”

Stupid! What had come over him? If he was so bemused as to let Spanish slip from him on a Lisbon street he fully deserved death by nightfall.

The dark man cast his eyes heavenward, as if begging for mercy, “The Order is dead, all that remains are madmen and moonstruck gulls like this one.”

His sightless friend chuckled, “Yet here I stand, true heart.”

To counterpoint his words he seated himself upon the Cathedral stair between two red-coated corpses.

They might have squabbled on in this way, in the midst of death and danger, but Miss Erso spoke then, desperately, stepping towards the beggar, “Can you assist us? We must find Saul Gererre?”

Whatever the blind man might have answered they had no occasion to hear.

Men of a sudden appeared from the pillars behind them, and from the buildings at their backs. Cassian spied more on the roof above them. All wore rough garb, with red-brown scarves tied across their faces concealing their features. They were Gererre’s men beyond certainty, at least twenty.

Cassian felt a pistol pressed against the back of his head. The woman was pulled from beneath the hand he had reached toward her. All four, beggar and dark warrior as well, were forced to their knees and their arms well bound before.

One tall brigand loomed over him, resting a second pistol against his chest lightly. “Não se mexa, soldado da Espanha” a muffled voice spoke, with unconcealed venom.

Cassian made return only with his most charming and defiant smile, which earned a hard cuff to the cheek in return.

“Why do you bother us?” The blind man could be heard to say as they took his staff away and bound him. “Do we look as if we are in favor with either King or Marquis?”

The woman spoke,”You will not harm me or any of my friends, not even a hair. I swear by my life.... Any who do will answer to Gerrere for it with the loss of a hand.”

One of the men laughed roughly, “And who are you that the Commander will take such tender care for you?”

She looked round at them all then, with the bold smile of a queen returned from exile, and her green eyes were shining. “I am Jane Erso. Take me to the Commander. Ômọbinrin mi ni mi.”

His eyes were bound with a rough cloth and he was forced to his feet and half-dragged, half-pushed forward some distance, then dragged through a door way, and down many stairs.

Behind, he could hear the others. The blind beggar was saying, “You fools can see that I am blind, can you not?”
Omọbinrin mi ni mi = (Yoruba dialect) I am his daughter.

Não se mexa, soldado da Espanha = (Portuguese) Don’t move, soldier of Spain.

Eres de la Orden Bendita? = (Span.) Are they of the Blessed Order?

Ele é cego/Ele é louco = (Por.) Is he blind/Is he crazy?

Deixe estes passarem = (Por.) Let them pass.
The Commander

Chapter Summary

In which a small glimpse is seen of the notorious pirate Saul Gerrere, cornered yet still dangerous in his hiding place on the Portuguese coast, South of Lisbon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alfonso was resolute in his loyalty to the Commander. When the sea rose up to smite the Islands everyone ran...slave and master, priest and sinner....when the vultures came to pick through the shattered bones of the sugar plantations and great houses of the governors of the Azores... pirates and vandals...... none had marked an albino youth clinging to a raft of wreckage nor would have done more than crush him for amusement if they had. Only one, a towering black man with the voice of a lion and the carriage of a king had swept him up...."Go free at the next port or stay and fight with us," the man had roared. "Make your choice."

Alfonso was nearly blind, he could not fight but he had served the old physician on the plantation and he would serve the lion who saved him until he died. At sea, on land, after battles, he had healed and patched. It was the only fight that he could make in a cause that he truly believed in and he loved the old man with a worshipful heart. It would not be long now.

Lady Mary Monmoth

Somewhere in England

August 1769

My dearest Mary,

I will address you as I once did. There was a time you cared not who knew of our regard for each other. If that time has passed, you need simply burn this letter.

I write to you now, knowing that my end is nigh, whether by the hand of man, or God is not revealed to me, but I hear footsteps and it drives me to fight the more fiercely for whatever can yet be forestalled or achieved in the time this broken boat can still sail. I gave up long ago the dream that you or I would ever live to see Justice rendered, or the eyes of men opened, but I swore to fight while hope lasted and now that it is gone I will fight on still without it.

You and the blind and cautious net-casters you have thrown your lot with fear England and watch Spain though neither enough and they forget Portugal.
I saw Steela last night Mary, and not for the first time. It is never in my sleep that she comes, nor in the hours I am in motion, but I have seen her many times when talking to others. Oft times, when I consult my lieutenants or question a prisoner, or take my meals.

.....there have been too many attempts by poison of late, what taster could I trust when so many would forfeit their own lives to take mine? I have a small she-goat ever with me that I milk myself, and bid them bring me fish alive, so that I may see them swim, before I cut them with my own knife and eat them. I eat them raw with salt most often, adding much to my fearsome reputation, so many of them murmur me a monster, but I do laugh and remember who first taught me the trick of it. Do you remember Mary? When we were in hiding on the coast nigh to the Faroes and I thought the cold would kill me? That ancient woman who hid us in her house of stone and driftwood sliced fish and fed it to us raw with seaweed broth. Ah! When she handed you that small bloody fish and you took it in your trembling hand and thanked her as if she were a great lady serving you from her own silver plate. I never loved you more than when you ate that fish with grateful relish.

Do they yet name me a monster Mary? Do you?

Is this a trap? Has the Alliance sold me to the Enemy to purchase time? They lie Mary.

They are only men, you said to me, when we parted. You were wrong, for the darkness they serve is beyond imagining. I have stood at the fortress of Elmina, Mary. What men are capable of shames the gods, all of them, yours and mine….there is no need for Devils.

Is it worth your soul Saul? you said to me. Aye, I said then and aye I say still.

It is a price worth paying, one mind and body, one soul, a handful of lives, to inconvenience Hell, to tear one small corner off Evil's blanket.

I trained her my falcon, Lara's child and Galen's but then I set her free. Did I do wrong? It haunts me.

Do they offer me what I most long for to trap the lion one last time? Do they stake my own lamb to draw me out!

Merrick was a man once, and Akbar, I would not think it of them….but foolishness is also treason.

Have you betrayed me? Has she?

There is no bond like that of twins. In my mother’s country the old people considered all twin-born children creatures of magic, creatures of prophecy and I believe it, though I hold faith in nothing else but my own hand now. My sister never speaks. She stands and looks out at windows or watches me with a knowing patient smile. She holds a hand up when I reach for her. “Not yet,” she signs to me. My hour draws close but it is not here yet.

If this Turkish boy tells truth I will bring him to you….you will believe me then, as to how far this blight reaches. If he lies I will have his skull tucked in with the first shot I fire at them and use his hide to wad it.

Is it truly her?

How did you find her?

All may be lost, but nothing is forgotten.
The way one falls matters.

Saul Gerrere

The Commander slept seldom and then only fitfully. The false leg chafed at him now and the wounds remained raw. Alfonso did what little was in his power. Tincture of poppy brought ease for the pain but the old man shunned more than a few drops and then only at direst need. He had been prevailed upon to take a few this night, as they had brought a prisoner, taken from a ship at Porto and the Commander had excited himself greatly in questioning the captive. He had then written at the desk, most wildly for nearly an hour, crumpling papers and flinging them aside, as was often his wont these days whenever he was penned up on land, in his cave and cliffside hiding places on a score of coasts, and whenever his mind was perturbed. It was unsafe to approach him at such times, but now the physic had taken some effect and he dozed at last upon the battered chaise. He kept a knife beside his pillowed head always. Alfonso, though only he, was permitted to approach him then, to unstrap the steel and wooden leg bound to the stump below his right knee and bathe the swollen flesh there. In a few hours the men would return from Lisbon, with messages and appraisals of the raids success. Then the broken old lion would rise and Saul Gerrere would roar again. Alfonso righted the fallen ink stand and picked up the crumpled, half-written and blotched missives from the floor around his captain's couch. As he had been instructed to do always, he collected and burnt them all unread.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry kids, angst is my way of saying I care.
The Messenger

Chapter Summary

In which a young man finds himself
brought before a fearsome pirate and is much abused.

Chapter Notes

Did I mention I loved Treasure Island as a child!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Amongst his earliest recollections were his mother's remembrances and tales of Agra, the city of her birth. She regaled him with stories of a golden old Fortress and white sparkling palace of a tomb that some prince whose name she could not recall had built in honor of a wife that died young.

"And that, my wise boy, is why he mourned for her so mightily, and raised for her a memorial that would rival the moons light. Had Allah willed it that she live to grow old, to be battered by time and fail of her bright promise, perhaps he would have forgotten her." Batur considered, when hearing her speak thus, that she was perhaps not speaking only of some long-dead Maharani when she said, "It is hope that drives great deeds and makings, not grief, or vengeance."

"Why did you leave Agra, dear Ana?" his young self would ask, as was always his part, and her answer would always be to pat the corner of the blue robe she wore, or touch a blue curtain or cup, or any other object of a blue color. "Civit" she would say. "Indigo." Her father had been a merchant, who had taken them to Goa where she had been married to a merchant who had taken her to Oman and then to Greece.

He had come so very far, and spoken nothing but the truth, yet not a living soul seemed to believe him.

Erso Bey had told him to find this Saul Gerrere, no matter how and at any cost. "He will be an old warrior...but men like him fight even death. He knows. He alone will not hesitate."

The English ship had found him on the dinghy and brought him to Barbados. The captain clearly disbelieved his tale, but proved so fearful of the names he spoke that he did not press or kill him, but only tossed him ashore. The vilest of men seized him there, but when he cried out that they must take him to Saul Gerrere, that Galen Erso had sent him, even they had stood back as if he were a plague victim. He knew enough French to understand when one said to the other. "Qui chercherait le diable avant sa mort?" Many had heard of Gerrere. Some seemed to imagine him a phantom, while a few admitted him real but claimed that he was long dead. Most disputed that assertion, claiming in hushed voices and in many tongues that the Commander could never die until the fires of Hell itself claimed
him. No one, it seemed, knew where he was. For two precious days the young man who had been Batur Farouk and was now called Bodi Rook, wandered that hideous port, shunned by all. Then, on the third day two African men, dressed in ragged grey with red kerchiefs, one old and one young, both with hands covered in heathen tattoos, came and found him weeping in frustration on the docks. "The innocent are dying," he begged of them, "and there is no time. I have a message for Saul Gerrere, from Galen Erso. He must stop them." They gave him water and food and put him to a working passage, on a leaking wine ship called The Wookiee, bound back to Porto. The crew onboard abused him no worse than any of the other sailors, but his sufferings came at night when he dreamed all through of the men hacking stone from the ground with knives, of the little Minorcan girl who fell in the vat and how her mother wailed, of Erso's face, filled with pain yet shedding no tears, as he had slowly related his message and Sefla wrote the letters. His mother came to him at the end of these visions and, it seemed to him, laid a cool hand upon his forehead. *Be brave my son,* she whispered, *you are the messenger.*

When they reached Porto, there had been several grey and red clad Portuguese men there waiting, but without a word and as heedless of his protests as beasts, they had bound and blindfolded him.

He had been afraid when he pushed off onto the Atlantic, afraid at sea for the day and night until he was picked up, afraid of the knives at his throat. It had not been fear of death, only fear of failure that shook him.

Now he found after all these desperate weeks that he was done with fear, and that its place had been supplanted by anger.

"What is the matter with you people?" He shouted, as they dragged him from the ship and threw him over a ponies back, "I am begging to be taken to the most dreaded pirate between Istanbul and the coast of Mexico! Is this such a common request that you fear overcrowding!? Take me to Saul Gerrere!"

Erso Bey had described Saul Gerrere to him as a tall personage, dark-skinned and broad shouldered, with a shaven head, imperious voice and stern eye.

The man who who ordered the blindfold pulled from his eyes, after he was dragged roughly up steep pathways and flung down on a stone floor, might have been truthfully described so once, but no longer. The young pilot called Bodi Rook now faced a scarred and battered wreck of a man. A patch of leather covered one eye and scars upon the dark forehead testified to its loss. Wild grey hair might have recalled the lion Rook had oft heard him called, but his aspect now seemed more wolf-like. His right hand was gone at the wrist and a crutch was braced beneath that shoulder drawing the eye to a carved wooden stump that took the place of the right leg, dressed in ragged blue sailors trousers tucked around and bound with leather straps.

Galen Erso had told him that Saul Gerrere would be fearsome even in old age. He had not told him that he would also be quite mad.

He trembled but freely told them of Erso Bey's message which they took from him, but the old wolf was dissatisfied with himself or his answers, or perhaps with some demon in his own mind. Before he would even read the written words he ordered Rook beaten, demanding again and again to know who had truly sent him, despite the constantly repeated truth given in answer, and asking over and over, until the pilot fell senseless, a question that he could neither understand or answer.

"Where is she? Have they driven even the child, my Ṣọmọbinrin, to betray me?"

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Chapter End Notes
Qui chercherait le diable avant sa mort? = Who looks for the Devil before he is dead?

ọmọbinrin = daughter
Chapter Summary

In which Captain Cassian Andor finds himself a prisoner and reflects on how he has come to this pass.

Chapter Notes

De qué diablos estás hablando?= What the hell are you talking about? (Spanish)
Omo= child (Yoruba)
Não se preocupe. Nós não feriremos seu amante= Do not worry. We will not hurt your lover. (Portuguese)
Bem-vindo ao inferno, espanhol = Welcome to Hell, Spaniard.

It had been a source of no small professional pride to him that he had seldom, since boyhood at least.....which he supposed might have ended earlier for him than for some men.....been taken completely unawares.

The circumstance of the explosions, the action of the crowd, and the revelation of their flawed intelligence regarding the loyalty of Pombal's personal guard.....the Marquis was moving directly against the Royal forces, no doubt using the actions of Gerrere's brigands as a cover. The Princess Juana must be warned. This might be the lever to trip her sympathies to the Alliance....these factors alone, combined with the unsettling presence and actions of two outlandish gentlemen who might or might not be survivors of one of the outlawed Orders, might have more than accounted for his current unacceptable position.

He knew better than to flatter himself impervious to capture. "Overconfidence is the last and most dangerous trap. Not even the most skilled juggler can catch every time," Draven had told them long ago.

"Especially if someone sets fire to the stage," Senora Tano had muttered as an aside. The first and the most skilled of them all, she had vanished in Venice two years ago and was now assumed dead.

Even the best could be taken down by circumstance, but the knowledge did not lessen his self-chastisement.

His current predicament felt to him directly related to the effect of Miss Jane Erso. The woman seemed to throw his game off at every turn.
In his experience Saul Gerrere's people all fit a mold as being ruthless, direct and desperate. Those who remained in his rapidly shrinking band were personally...some said fanatically...devoted to the man, by necessity perhaps. Many wanted Gerrere dead, and the price on his head was legend. The Spanish sought him most of all and they had gold enough to hunt down God himself. He had endured a dozen attempts at assassination over the years and word circulated that he was now grown nearly mad with suspicion and fears of treason, seeing enemies everywhere.

How was it then that his "child" had come to leave him?

Old reports had made reference to a "son" always at the pirate's side, but Alliance sources had confirmed several years ago that the Commander's OmOm was in fact a European girl, the daughter of a promising young Swedish military engineer, and an impoverished British lord's clever and wayward third daughter.

Jane Erso's whole existence was an improbability although this in itself was not the cause of his perturbation. Cassian Andor knew himself to also be a fairly improbable creature. Further he was a true agent of the Alliance none of whom were supposed to exist. They were all of them in their own several ways the stuff of fairy tales.

No, the most nagging mystery of the woman to Andor's mind lay in her wardship and subsequent leave-taking of the "Commander." She had said in her interview with Draven and Lady Monmoth that Gerrere had "grown weary of her upkeep" some four years previously, leaving her to her own devices in Sardinia. It was one of the few times her mask of sullen bravado had slipped. A child's hurt had shone in her eyes like a scar glimpsed before being quickly hidden again beneath a sleeve.

This had not sounded like Gerrere, at least as Andor imagined him. Those the Lion wearied of usually found their heads decorating the rigging of his dreaded flagship the Onderean.

Even had he not been witness to the troubled glances that passed between Mr. Merrick, Draven and the Lady at that point in the interview, Andor should have suspected some missing chapter. Draven had been most forthright in his warning that, in this matter of Gerrere, the young woman and intelligence from the Florida territories, Captain Andor was being sent to sail in dangerous channels but poorly charted.

They had provided him a dossier of information regarding her, slim though it was, and he had read it so thoroughly as to commit it to memory. Although confident about her motives in agreeing to the venture, since leaving England he had come to find her personally more and more of a cypher. Her actions in Lisbon had proved entirely unpredictable. Given ample opportunities for escape and she had availed herself of none. Even in the face of grave danger she had stubbornly remained to assist him at every turn. It had not seemed a matter of strategy, but as if she had pulled him up from the street by the same instinct he now recalled seeing her scoop up a fallen child as they ran, thrusting the terrified little girl without a glance into an open doorway to protect her from trampling feet. She had struck fatally when threatened but reacted equally without thought in risking herself to protect others. These were not the actions of one lost to conscience. She confused him.

Kay, of all persons the most unlikely, had spotted his weakness first. "You have a developed an appreciation for her," his friend had pronounced a few days into the voyage, with the expression of a surgeon announcing that he had found a suspicious lump, as they had been going over the maps of Lisbon in the main cabin. "De qué diablos estás hablando?" Andor had protested. "I appreciate the skills of a thief who can steal a coat from your twice-locked trunk and I profess a certain gratitude for the lastingly delightful image of a girl of barely eight stone dropping Lt. Ruescott Melshi to the street, nothing more."
Kay had only shaken his head. "I can hardly credit it myself," he said, closing up the document cases, "I have known you to be not unresponsive to the charms of women, but in the past you have always remained aware and sensible enough to compensate for the distraction. I hope that you will do so now."

He heartily detested these occasions when his friend's judgement was correct in opposition to his own.

Kay and Captain Rostok would have responded to the crisis and their late return appropriately. The Alliances operatives in Lisbon had been alerted. He must trust to the plan.

Andor and his three unwilling companions had been taken down and through low tunnels for a considerable distance before being shoved up ladders into what smelled like a stable. There Miss Erso's voice came to him for the first time since their capture, growling "Damn you, that man was hurt as well!" Water and something that stung like brandy was splashed over his scraped palms and they were covered with what he could only hope was clean cloth. After a short time in silence their captors guided them none too gently to mount ponies, their hands were re-bound to the pommels of rough saddles and the beasts led outdoors onto rutted roads. The journey took several hours and their blindfolds were not removed until the sun was well set and they were long miles from the city. Through the ordeal he listened carefully. Amidst the sounds of the beasts and the grunts and arguments of their captors, all in Portuguese, could hear the beggar's large protector occasionally rumble what were clearly oaths, although in a language unknown to him. The beggar/monk alone seemed to be in good spirits, chatting with the ponies in Portuguese and addressing them as "brother," all while periodically chanting prayers in what sounded to Andor's ear like a dialect of Greek. The woman was largely silent. His ears strained for any sound of her but except for a short burst of Portuguese invective during a brief pause to answer the requirements of nature, a few coughs were all that he could confidently assign to her.

When the cloth was finally taken from his eyes, the sun had set and he was being pulled, aching bitterly, from the pony and set on his unsteady feet. They were up in the hills now, down the coast and well south of the city. Bonds were cut and they were all taken at pistol and knife point into some sort of shelters carved into the hillsides, some ancient hermitage now converted to smugglers caves it seemed.

As his eyes became accustomed he caught sight of Miss Erso, pale and battered, being lifted from the pony nearest him. The bandits seemed to take slightly more care with her, one even reaching out a tentative hand to steady her when her legs seemed to give for a moment. Shrugging the man off impatiently as the cord that bound her hands was cut, Andor saw her eyes searching avidly around her. She was looking for Gerrere and the rest of them had almost ceased to matter to her.

They were separating her from the rest of them now, clearly moving to take her out another doorway up some stone stairs, and into a tunnel dimly lit by several flickering fat lamps. Hoping to gain her attention he called out her Christian name "Jane!"

She turned, startled, as though suddenly remembering his existence. Her green eyes widened as if considering some impropriety, clearly as cognizant as he that he had never before addressed her so intimately. She met his look and gravely nodded.

Their rough captors laughed.
"Não se preocupe. Nós não feriremos seu amante," a yellow bearded man barked, and with that they
pushed her up the stairway and out of his sight.

He found himself left with the two strangers as they were moved, at the point of three pistols, into a dark adjoining cell gated with iron bars and a lock. Their captors kept well back from the large dark-bearded man, who kept a hand upon his sightless companion's shoulder. Clearly he was their greatest concern. Another crowd of eight assorted men came up from an inner passageway to join the ten that had accompanied them. A fight with such odds could only prove disastrous. The large fellow met Andor's eye and shrugged, clearly having come to a similar conclusion. He and his blind fellow-traveller walked into the cell with an enviable degree of weary dignity.

He noticed that they had taken the beggars staff. *Clearly some of the men accompanying them had witnessed the combat at the West porch of the Cathedral.*

Finding no other choice available, Andor followed both men into the cell. As he entered one of Gerrere's thugs aimed a kick at his back that he was only partially able to dodge.

"Bem-vindo ao inferno, espanhol," the pirate snarled as Andor sprawled to the floor, barely catching himself before striking his head against the dank stone wall opposite.

*Gracias,* he considered replying, but thought better of it.

The blind man was already seated on the floor, his back against the wall. His companion stood, leaning, his head brushing the low soot stained roof.

"They do not like you, Captain," the beggar said with a laugh. "My name is Churrit Imwe. Rest if you can. My friend and I have been in many prisons. I assure you this is not the worst." His brooding friend grunted, but seemed to smile with some amusement at Andor's discomfort.

He did not find either of them remotely reassuring.

"This is," he said, climbing to his feet, and rubbing his bruised elbow, "I must admit, my first time in such circumstances."

He felt sure the beggar would now feel compelled to offer advice and in this he was not mistaken.

"Captain," the man who called himself Chirrut Imwe said, almostSadly, "you seem to me the sort of man who carries a cage with him wherever he goes."

The large dark man laughed wryly at this as if much amused by his friends wit.

Andor suspected he would grow heartily weary of both of them if he remained in this cell much longer.

His captors had relieved him of sword and knives, even taking the small blade hidden in his boot. They had however left him still in possession of said boots, and had apparently not discovered the small set of lock-picks hidden in the false heel of the left.

He peered between the bars at the ten or so guards, some playing cards in the dim light on a bench near the entrance, and others sitting smoking tobacco pipes against the wall. His options were constrained but he kept watch and waited.

*Where had they taken her?* was his chief thought.

It was only much later that he realized that there had been no point at which the blind man could
have been apprised of his military rank.
Daughter

Chapter Summary

In which Jen confronts Cmdr. Saul Gerrere, recalls the loss of her mother and hears a message from her long-lost father.

Chapter Notes

àşádì = child (Yoruba)
olori = Captain/leader
Tremor de terra = earthquake (Portuguese)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They brought her in silence up a torchlit passage. This was not a shelter she recognized from her own time, but she had seen enough like it on other coasts to find it recognizable. Not a home, it was but a hiding place, an osprey’s perch. She had spent the better part of her girlhood in such places. Pale Alfonso sat as always on a stool by the door but if he recognized her he made no sign of it. He only looked up, and then stood silently to part the curtain that served as a door over the old anchorite cell that served here as the Commanders quarters.

The chamber was filled with bright lamps of whale oil and wax candles. He had always hated darkness, an aversion they both shared. Within the room a figure stood with back to her, indistinct but turning as she entered and the curtain slipped back.

She had imagined this confrontation a thousand times but all the bitter words she had practiced in her heart vanished when she saw again the man she once loved as a parent, the much-feared Saul Gerrere.

There was nothing left of him now. The figure before her appeared as only a scarecrow hung with familiar clothes. There were parts here of a man she had once known and loved and cursed but only when the wind filled might it even look human again. There was no wind now.

Olori, she thought, Baba Saul. What have they done to you?

The thin and wild-haired figure seemed aware of her now, towering even when leaning on his crutch and took a few limping steps toward her.

No. No pity. He would not want it. He did not deserve it.


She had prepared herself for battle with the cruel and imperious Commander of five years ago. A
man who might kill her but not before she said her piece.

No, she told herself. *Not this. This would break her. She must remember what she came for.* This was a ghost before her, a shade of the Olori whose praise she had once lived for. This was a broken old man who looked almost happy, smiling as if welcoming home a favored child long lost and feared dead.

“Are you surprised, Sir?” She hoped her voice sounded contemptuous, but feared it shook and that she merely sounded like an angry child. “Did you never wonder what became of me?”

The aged pirate turned his head, as if the remaining eye could take her in only from a certain angle. His look was one of surprise. “What? Are you angry Jen? You sound angry.” There was a chair beside him and he laid his last good hand upon it. “Have I offended you? Speak freely.”

The hand? Oh God. When had this occurred? She recalled the leg wound now….a ball struck the bone at Tripoli, but he had sworn that it was mending…nothing but a matter of poultices and a few weeks rest.

He drew himself very tall then, "Speak!” he barked as if it were an order, "Tell me who has sent you?” and she found that if she looked obliquely she could see her old Commander now as he had appeared in his chosen masquerade of the bloodthirsty brigand.

*How old had she been when it ceased to be a masquerade?*

She found her anger again, clutched it to her.

“Freely? The last time I spoke freely, Sir, you left me in a Spanish tower ten miles from Porto Torres and told me you would return for me by nightfall. Do you recall my age at the time, Sir?”

He shrugged, smiling indulgently as if this were a thing of no consequence, her fear, her despair, the days she waited.

"I knew you would be well. You were the most fearless, the strongest and best of my hawk-chicks.”

*There was a time she would have relished such praise as water in the desert. It was ashes to her now.*

“I was three days from sixteen. I fought for you from the age of eleven. I would have gladly died for you. Olori Baba,” she said, “And you left me to die. Was it a punishment or a test, sir? Did you think I would come back chastened, or forgive such a betrayal? Would you have done so?”

*Why? This was the question her soul burned to ask, but she could not. Was it because I confronted you about the burning of the fort? Was it because I was no longer an unquestioning child?*

He hobbled toward her, then paused distracted, looking up over her shoulder toward an empty corner of the chamber as if he saw someone there that she could not perceive, “Is this the place?” He asked of some person unseen, "Is this the time? Have you….is it her hand I wait for?"

*She had come to do battle, but it was already too late, all the answers she had sought were no longer here.*
“The Alliance sent me,” she said, “Your old compatriots, all still standing at the shore and trying to stop the tide. They say you have word from my father sir, from Galen Erso, of some plot involving the British, or some other crowned head, in the West Indies. I bought my liberty by promising them an interview to make their proposal. Had your men not nearly blown us all to hell we might have been more civilized about it but as it is there is an agent of theirs in your dungeon now who will no doubt tell you more, The fellow may or may not be Spanish, like most of them I suspect he has no nation. You will like him sir. He is a very handsome youth and quite good with a sword. I suggest you take up your business now with him and give me leave to go.”

There. She had gotten most of it out in a torrent, but it was done. All she could think to do was flee, escape the sight of this scarecrow in the shape of her once mighty hero before she screamed or wept. She turned as if searching for the door. Would his men hold her? Stop her? Let them try.

“Jen. Do you give up the fight my falcon?” he said, and now his voice sounded more like himself, in his diplomatic vein, the voice he used to argue terms of surrender and ransom, "What can we do but try. Would you drown without struggle? See all men drown?"

She turned back. "A message from Galen Erso? The same Galen Erso whose name we found upon those crates of mercury in the wrecks off Tortuga? Whom you assured me was long dead?"

“Jen. I could not watch you die for me, I….I forgot my bargain until it was almost too late but I swore an oath,”

Damn you, old man!

“An oath to whom sir? For surely you did not keep the one you swore to me.”

“To your mother Jen. To Lara and Galen. If it is not a trap….and yet it might be….” He looked at her, distracted now, as if she were bringing him news of some vital engagement, a movement of ships, the approach of an enemy.

“Jen!” he said, his voice growing strong again.

It was as if he suddenly saw her for the first time since she had entered, or had abruptly decided she was real and not a phantom of his own mind.

The wind had filled the scarecrow. “I have something you must see.”

“Alfonso!” he roared, “Bring me what the Turkish spy carried!”

He hobbled swiftly over to a wide table on the far side of the cavern all surrounded by lit candles and oil lamps and waved his one good hand for her to follow, as if she were still under his command, “Come my child, see your legacy!”

Alfonso came running with what looked to be a bundle of cloth in his hands.

She considered that she should run. She desired to and yet….the habit of obedience remained stronger in her than she had credited.

She followed.

Leaning heavily upon the mahogany surface, Her Olori laid out what she now saw to be a man’s linen shirt. Every seam was cut open and as it was laid flat she could see that it was covered with
script. Written in a fair hand in clear blue-black ink

It was not in English and she could recognize only a name written in another hand, across what would have been the garments hem.

Something rang like a bell in her heart.

GALEN ERSO the letters said.

“Alfonso!” Commander Saul Gerrere ordered, “Read her what it says”

هل تصدقني ميت؟
أنت ليست مخطئا في اعتقادك

إذا كنت تستطيع قراءة هذا ربما هناك فرصة لمجربة واحدة كبيرة
أحرجو على الأمل في أن تكون هناك فرصة لإبقاء طفلك.
بلدي جبن. بلدي النجم الحقيقي
أقول لها أنتي أحبها. الحقيقة مريرة ولكن ابتغت. يخبرني عدو أنها ميتة لكنني أعلم أنها كذبة. هل أنتي آمنة؟ هل أنتي حرر؟
K هو الشيطان. هو كما كنت تخشى ولكن أسوأ، أسوأ بكثير. إذا كنت أحاول أن أموت، أو هرب. ويمكن
يتأوها دون مساعدة. إنهم خدعوا وهم لا يعرفون ذلك.
هناك 400 النفوس هنا. الأطفال هنا. سوف يموت عدد لا يحصى من الآلاف. جعلت الجبراء الصفقة لأنها
الجشع. 29.0258 ° شمالا، 80.9270 درجة غربا. أخبر ماري. أخبر الآخرين. لا يزال هناك وقت لتدميره.
وسوف تحمل طالما أستطيع.
قلبي يبكي لها كل يوم. أنا لا أسألها أن يغفر لي. هل هي سعيدة؟

The albino flattened down the cloth with pale hands. Holding his weak eyes close to it he read, clearly and without expression, as if he recited a text he had already memorized.

Saul
Do you believe me dead?

You are not mistaken in your belief
If you can read this maybe there is a chance to prevent one last great crime
I dare to hope.
There is a chance to save my child.
My Jen. My star
I tell her that I love her. The truth is bitter but swallowed. An enemy tells me she is dead but I know it a lie. Is my daughter safe? Is my daughter free?
K is the devil. It is as you feared but worse. Much worse. If I try to die, or run away. It can be built without my help. They were deceived and they did not know that.
There are 400 souls here. Children here. Will die countless thousands. England made the deal because it was greedy. 29.0258 ° north, 80.9270 degrees west. Tell Mary. Tell the others. There is still time to destroy it. I will carry as long as I can.

My heart weeps for her every day. I do not ask her to forgive me. Is she happy?
The voice went on, the words went on:

**Spain has made a bargain with England.**

**England has made a bargain with men who seek to build a fortress, unbreakable.**

**There is stone here of the kind Lara had found, so long ago, at Madagascar.**

Her tears had begun upon the words “My Jen. My star,” but her knees had not given way beneath her until she heard her mother’s name.

*She had always been an obedient child but on this occasion she had disobeyed. Upon reaching the covered well she had turned and run back to follow the way her mother had gone. Unable to see her, Jen had run around to the side of the house nearest the sea and concealed herself in a thicket by the garden’s edge. It had always been her favored hiding spot to watch the ponys come up the road. The dark-cloaked men had dismounted from their several horses and, while two or three stood to hold the reins, a party of eight approached her father as he stood statue-still by the edge of the cliff, hatless, the heavy mist soaking his hair and coat. The Man in the white scarf and hat came at the front of the party.*

“Galen,” the man said, his accent pleasant but odd, “You have proved exceedingly difficult to find. Even the oldest of friends must take offense.” He laughed but it had not sounded a sincere laugh and her father’s grim expression had remained unchanged.

“I know you desired a ‘peaceful life’ as you poetically termed it but Galen, this place beggars belief.” The man raised a white-gloved hand to wipe the dew from his brow. It had begun to rain in earnest now, although her Papa remained still as stone. The man continued, laughing, “When we came around and passed a village, most genuinely called “Worlds End” I finally saw the humor in it and…”

*Her father interrupted the man. “What do you want, Mr. Krennik?”*

“There is trouble with the work.” The Man said, no longer feigning pleasantries. “Extracting the stone has proved far more difficult than expected and the English…” he paused again to wipe the rain from his brow, and smile, “…the English have upped their price for silence. The prices for indigo have made them quite mad with avarice. Since it is has proved impossible to find another man with your genius for the materials involved, Galen. I have come to take you back.*

“No.” Her father was soaked with the rain but seemed to register it not at all. “I find I am no longer fit for the work. I…” he paused, as if to shake the rain from his eyes, or gesture back toward the house. “Grief has left me a shadow. Our child was taken by fever last summer and Lara followed her soon after.” He lowered his head as if overcome.

“How very tragic,” said the man, “Let me be the first to…”
“You will not take him!” came a voice from the doorway of the house. It was Mama, wrapped in a large hooded oil-cloth. She was striding quickly down the slope.

“Ah…” said the Man as if to himself, “As always, defying God and Nature, dear Lara.” Seemingly to gather himself then he called “Come now! There is no need for unpleasantness.” His men, as if on this signal, drew back their cloaks. They carried both swords and daggers that they unsheathed now.

The white-hatted Man held up a hand, as if to calm them.

“You shall all live in great comfort,” he said, “The jungles are somewhat strenuous, I admit, but while Galen works a fine home can be prepared for you and your child in Jamaica, dear Lara. He may join you regularly. Every proper English child there has half a dozen slaves of their very own, or so I have heard. What could be more delightful?”

“Go back to hell,” Mama said, “And tell the Devil he shall never win.” She lifted the oil-cloth before her and whatever was concealed beneath caused the men to step back.

The Man kept his eyes on Mama but raised a hand, toward one of this clocked companions, saying “Stay calm.” At the same moment Papa had cried, “Lara, No!”

Mama fired a pistol and the ball struck the Man in the upper arm.

One of the black-cloaked men threw a knife and it struck Mama in the head.

It was the first time, although it would prove far from the last, that Jen saw a body fall lifeless before it even struck the ground. Yet somehow she knew by instinct that her mother was gone.

She did not scream, pressing her small fist into her mouth to stifle the cry. Lifting her head she caught her last glimpse of her father as he knelt over her mother’s prone form, weeping. Carefully and quietly, she crawled backwards out of the thicket and ran like the brave little hare whose part she acted in her favorite game. Running with all her strength back to the well she pushed back the cover and crawled inside.

Recalling her practice with her mother, she climbed down the ladder into the dark and found the lantern and tinderbox hidden inside by touch alone. With some difficulty she managed to strike the tow and light the small candle lamp. At times she fancied she could hear shouting and feet running above the ground but after some while all fell silent. Curling up like a dormouse against the cold she held her mother’s wooden ornament and waited.

The candle lasted for several hours. How much time passed after it flickered out and darkness descended she never knew but it was long, two days at least, perhaps three. She drank from the little bottle of water and when that was gone she held her hands up to catch the thin trickle she felt dripping down the stones by the curved wall and licked her fingers.

It was night when the lid was finally pulled back but even the light of the moon dazzled her dark-acccustomed eyes.

The man who came for her was not her Papa. Standing there instead was a large brown-skinned person, utterly strange to her, with a bald head and grey-black trimmed beard. Fearsome in demeanor, his face nevertheless wore an expression of pity mixed with immense sadness.

“Child,” he said, “Dear child, come with me. We must take a long journey.” He reached down a scarred and mighty hand, decorated on the back with an image in bluish-black of a bird with wings spread. She had taken it without hesitation.
Old Alfonso’s voice read on but though Jen marked the words they all seemed to slip over her like water.

*Jasper….Indigo….kidnapped and held in slavery….no escape…..liquid explosive….trap. Saul. I have set a trap….Fire upon any of the outward canals….black powder….destroy everything.*

It seemed to her that she was now trapped blind and unfeeling in a vision that had tortured her since childhood, one of dark stone walls closing her round in blackness as she struggled for breath. Kneeling and blind to all around, she was insensible of the shaking of the floor beneath her.

Though unable to assign sense to any of the words, she heard distant voices crying, “Tremor de terra!”

Chapter End Notes

Stuff’s going to have to happen more slowly at some junctures because: sea-going ships. Apologies to anyone actually familiar with the calendar logistics of West-East 18th cen. sea travel.

on the other hand....think of all the things that could have happened if only these sweet folks had had more TIME together.
Chains

Chapter Summary

In which Mr. Kay reflects upon his unease with Miss Jane Erso, and his first meeting with Cassian Andor.

Chapter Notes

Ik heb een slecht gevoel hierover = I have a bad feeling about this (Dutch)
Él debería venir con nosotros = He should come with us (Spanish)
verdomme = damn (Dutch)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HMS Princess's Fortune

Port of Lisbon

August 1769

In general, he found Captain Rostok to be unobjectionable company.

Aside from being a highly skilled mariner, Rostok excelled in calculation and management skills. These were essential, Kay had found, in the success of any ships captain especially given the diverse character and eccentric interactions of a sailing crew. Many commanders maintained order through the liberal use of brutality, as Timothy Samson Kay could verify by personal experience, but Captain Rostok did not.

Three years previously, on a voyage out of Marseilles, there had been some difficulty originating with two or more crew members personal disagreement regarding wagers on the result of a cribbage game. Daggers had apparently been produced and nearly half of the crew of the Queen Amidala (as the ship was then named) seemed to have become involved in the altercation that erupted in the forward crew cabin.

“Should I go down and intervene?” he had asked Cassian, largely because the sound of the argument could be clearly heard all the way up and over to their rooms in the quarterdeck, in at least six
languages. “There are a concerning number of threats of physical violence being made.”

This observation seemed useful since Kay was verbally fluent in nine languages, while Andor was fluent in only four and as such might lack understanding of the finer points of the conversations.

“No,” Andor had replied.

“A number of them are commenting on the physical attributes of each others female relatives and referencing bestiality,” Kay felt obliged to point out, “This often leads to escalation in conflicts.”

Andor only sighed, “No, Kay.” He had been lying on his bunk at this juncture, his leg elevated on several pillows for ease and to prevent swelling.

The pistol ball had gone cleanly through the shin, well clear of the bone, and since Kay had seen to the cleaning and bandaging of the wound himself he had been quite confident that the risk of infection was slight.

“Does Rostok appear concerned?” Andor inquired wearily, one arm raised, bent and resting over his eyes.

“Not at all,” Kay admitted. Captain Rostok had been up on the foredeck at that point, appearing altogether unconcerned though surely aware of the ruckus and vile language erupting below decks.

“Don’t worry about it until Rostok does,” his friend had said, then he had fallen silent, clearly asleep.

The operation at Marsailles had been exhausting and taken quite an ugly turn despite Kay and Andor’s best efforts. In the end Andor had been able to fatally dispatch the French merchant before he could board the ship back to Louisiana but his escape had been a near thing, involving a pursuit across rooftops and a pistol shot to the leg.

Despite misgivings, Kay had let the matter rest. Even when uninjured, Andor often suffered unpleasant after-effects from missions that involved strategic murder and assassination. Sleep was the best medicine in such cases.

As it was, Andor had proved correct on that occasion The crew had indeed eventually settled the matter of their own accord and Rostok had not even had to flog anyone.

Now Kay found himself standing beside Rostok, at the rail of the Princess’s Fortune, looking out at the new wharf, gazing up at the fair and orderly face of Lisbon reborn. The towers of the cathedral of Santa Maria Maior were visible partway up the hillside of the city.
“Ik heb een slecht gevoel hierover,” Rostok said.

Kay was inclined to agree. He also did not have optimistic feelings about this venture.

He had strongly urged that he be permitted to accompany Andor into the city.

“We have already discussed this, Kay,” his friend had said, as he had been choosing carefully from among his coats for the one best suited to project the impression of an English merchant of respectable and ambitious but not-yet wealthy status. “The authorities at the convent are most strict. It is also highly likely that the Odivelas are being watched by Pombal’s men and you, my good friend, unlike Miss Erso and myself, present too remarkable and memorable an appearance to blend into such a landscape unmarked.”

“I concur, insofar as the meeting goes,” Kay said, sorting through the neck stocks and cravats, and handing Andor one of appropriate quality. “My concern is with the woman.”

“The plan is for ‘Captain Andrews’ to leave his servant boy John at the cathedral,” Andor said, “It will be for two or three hours at the most. Besides,” he smiled lightly, “one capable of dispatching Sargent Ruescott Melshi and Mr. Bisten Rice with nothing but a truncheon can surely manage unmolested by the footpads of the Plaza di Government for a morning. If Irmã Angelina gives us a lead about Gerrere’s agents I will have Miss Erso available to present as an earnest of good will, if not, her face may at least be recognized and some word filter back to the old man, leading him to approach us. Either way we will send word or return to the ship before the first hour past noon. You know what to do should we fail to do so.”

“Miss Erso’s safety is not what concerns me, as you well know, Andor.”

“She will not run,” Andor said, with a confidence Kay could not share, “not yet.”

The woman made him quite uneasy. The fact that she did not seem to make Andor sufficiently uneasy only added to his concern.

The morning stretched toward noon. If all was proceeding according to plan, they would know soon. Captain Rostok, perhaps bored, perhaps merely curious, then surprised him by asking an
uncharacteristically personal question.

“Tell me, Mr. Kay,” he inquired, “how did you come to meet Captain Andor?”

_This was not the sort of thing persons in the employ of the Alliance normally did. Those recruited to the cause were of almost every nation and creed, and came to it through many routes, but the most common were pain and loss._

“We serve Light, they serve Darkness,” Señora Tano had put it, long ago. Which had seemed confusingly poetic to him. Kay preferred to frame it in his own mind as Mr. Draven had once put it to them “Conscience and Reason standing against their opposite.”

He possessed but dim memories of the place where he had been born and those mainly involved landscape and a River he later learned to identify as the Esk. He had somewhat clearer memories of living in a small farmhouse with a woman he had every reason to believe was his mother. One could never be absolutely sure of such things in childhood recall, but his supposition was supported by the fact that he had always addressed her as “Mother.” She treated him well and spoke to him with great kindness. Also, while most overt forms of direct physical affection were quite distressing to him, he recalled that when she had embraced or kissed him he had been far less distressed, and sometimes even comforted by the contact. Also she had been, to his recollection, significantly taller than most women.

The land they lived on was not their own, nor did it belong to the black-bearded man to whom they paid the rent, and perhaps not even to the unknown man to whom he paid rent. As he was later to learn, this reflected a complex and often brutally exploited legal peculiarity regarding property ownership in Scotland. Soldiers came one day to forcibly evict all the tenant farmers prior to a transfer of the land. When some of the people protested, the soldiers shot them and burned their houses. The woman he recalled as his mother killed two of the soldiers, one by pulling him directly from his horse and breaking his neck with her hands, before she was overpowered. “You run away now, my clever Tim,” she had said to him, “You grow up and fight the bastards.” At least five soldiers struggled to hold her and she might well have escaped them even so, but one of them fired a pistol and killed her. It had been an instantly fatal shot at that range and she had died without further suffering. Kay ran away as the other people from the farms fled, but he did not run far. He followed the soldiers and when the band the made camp that night that night and for two after he had gone in while they slept and killed a number of them, mostly with a knife he had obtained. Immature as he had been in his thinking, he knew that there were many more soldiers throughout the countryside and that there was no possibility of killing them all. It seemed to him very important however to kill those particular soldiers. The neighbors gave him food and a very small amount of money, which was exceedingly generous as they had quite little to spare and their own situation was likely quite dire. With this he eventually made his way to the city of Montrose on the coast and obtained work there on boats. He calculated that he had been perhaps ten at this point in his life, but because of his uncommon height and quick capacity for language and learning he was conveniently mistaken for older.

Listening in through windows to lessons offered at a dockside kirk school he soon learned to read and this enabled him greatly.

He read and listened and watched. His size protected him from most common predations and direct injuries, but he spent a number of years pondering what his mother had meant by “the bastards.” In time he had come down to Edinburgh and had occasion to see a group of wealthy men gathered around some ships recently docked from the West Indies, they were taking perhaps a dozen small
dark-skinned children off the ships and he learned from the conversations of passers-by that these children had been actually “purchased” and were being taken home as slaves to serve in the rich mens houses. He put this knowledge together with accounts he had heard from a merchant seaman named Holden who had found himself on a ship carrying slaves to Jamaica, considered it in light of the treatment he had seen inflicted on women especially and poor persons generally in the cities he had visited and put that information together with other stories he had read and heard and decided that he was able to form a working idea now of what his mother had meant.

This analysis had an effect on him that he later realized was perhaps a sign of some lingering immaturity, although he was never able to regret his actions in retrospect, only their lack of broader consequence. When the captain of one of the tobacco ships elaborated to the customs official upon his intention to seek increased profits in subsequent voyages by expanding his activities in the slave trade, Kay walked up to the man then and there upon the wharf and snapped his neck.

He spent a number of weeks afterward imprisoned in a “Tolhouse” that served as a holding gaol for the city at that time, awaiting execution. They chained his leg to the wall after he injured a number of the guards who attempted to restrain him.

Then came a night when a commotion wakened himself and the several other prisoners in the cell. A dark-skinned woman dressed in a man’s coat and trousers entered, accompanied by a tall red-haired man in an English military uniform and a dark-haired boy whom he judged to be some years younger than himself. They were looking for one particular prisoner, an older white-bearded man who had fallen unconscious after a beating some days before. Finding the gentleman lying near the wall, the red-haired man and the woman made shift together to carry the man out. It seemed clear to him that the guards must have been disabled somehow and that these persons were not connected with the local authorities.

The boy had remained behind holding the lantern and now approached Kay. “What is all this?” he said, swinging the light over to the walls and floor upon which Kay, in order to pass the time until they came for him, had scratched various diagrams, of sails and rigging, the streets of various cities he had visited, water-wheel designs, the words of Holden’s story of the ships and Jamaica, and mathematical formulae, covering all the space as far as the length of his arms and the chain would let him reach.

“Things that interest me.” Timothy Samson Kay said.

The boy looked at him for a moment most fixedly, then he put down the lantern and ran back out the doorway, returning a moment later with keys.

“Cassian!” The dark woman called from the hallway, “there is no time.”

“Señora Tano!” the boy said, “Él debería venir con nosotros!” He unlocked the chain on Kay’s leg. They were leaving the doors unlocked, and all the other prisoners who had the presence of mind where escaping.

“I may have some difficulty walking,” Timothy Kay said,”circulation to my legs has been impaired for several days.”

“Lean on me,” the boy said, “I will help you.”

Kay was reasonably certain that he had been approximately 15 at the time and that Cassian Andor had been twelve or thirteen.
“He unlocked my chains,” Kay told Captain Rostok.

Roughly two minutes after he said this, there was a rumble as of thunder and black cloud of smoke rose in the general direction of the cathedral and the Praça de Governo

“Verdomme,” said the Captain.

There immediately followed another explosion and the sound of musket fire, and possible light cannon.

*This seems to be far too many explosions for two people”blending in,”* Kay thought.

“Captain Rostok, he said, “please prepare the ship to sail, and lower the dinghy, I will proceed to the emergency rendezvous at Setúbal.”

Chapter End Notes

oh gosh, just realized that all the mothers are getting killed off tragically....this must be a Disney franchise.
The Death of the Pirate Saul Gerrere

Chapter Summary

In Which Captain Cassian Andor reports to his superiors about his escape from Mr. Saul Gerrere, the subsequent death of that Gentleman and their rescue of Miss Jane Erso and Mr. Bodhi Rook, who reveals his connection to Mr. Galen Erso, and the entire parties reunion with Mr. Kay.

Chapter Notes

“Lütfen. Artık yok.” = Please, there is no more. (Turkish)

O ti duro de mi. Olufẹ, Mo nbọ. = You have waited for me. Dear one, I am coming. (Yoruba)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HMS Princess’s Fortune
near Setúbal
off the Portuguese Coast

August 31, 1769

Mr. David Draven
4 Tavin Park
London, England

Sir.

You will have received reports under separate cover from Mr. Kay and Captain Rostok. I will place into your hand this account to be shared at the nearest convenience with Lady Monmouth and the rest of the Council as you see fit.

“Cassian. Do you want the notes I prepared about the chemicals and the evidence of their peculiar actions?”

“I have your notes Kay, I am including them under a separate cover, to be sent on to Señor Dodonna and Mr. Merrick, this report is for Draven.”
“They have stabilized it as both a liquid and a solid, this seems very clear, the potential effects are orders of magnitude greater than anything heretofore available. Please stress this.”

“Yes, Kay.”

Mr. Saul Gerrere is dead. This is confirmed by eyewitness account. I myself have seen the body. Before his death he passed on a cryptic but alarming message sent from Mr. Galen Erso via an escaped conscript from the Tarkin plantation. His accounts of the situation at the fortification being constructed in Florida are alarming in the extreme. A partial transcript of Mr. Erso’s message is enclosed, the original having been destroyed with Gerrere’s base. Miss Erso was read the message in its entirety and can confirm the contents.

“There is no reason for them to believe that. Her account is less credible owing to her state of distress when the image was read. Also she is….”

“Damn it Kay! What have I told you about reading over my shoulder?”

“That it interrupts the course of your thinking and increases the likelihood of error. You have blotted the paper, should I fetch you a fresh sheet?”

“No. You should bloody well leave my cabin and allow me to finish this in peace.”

Our initial theories seem verified by the accounts enclosed but the courier, one Mr. Rook, originally of Ottoman-controlled Cyprus, has provided us with horrific and alarming details.

He confirms that the indigo plantation is a cover, albeit an extremely profitable one, and forms the foundation of the bribe to those British authorities participating in the conspiracy. The weapon manufactory is some short distance inland from the indigo fields and vats and is being prepared for the production of the long-suspected explosive. Tarkin and his agents have clearly succeeded far far beyond the previous efforts of the French and Italians. I believe the the fatal attack on Gerrere’s base to have actually been a test of the explosive. Mr. Kay’s detailed report of ship movements in the area and the scope of the explosions support this assessment.

Mr. Rook further reports that Mr. Galen Erso has been secretly attempting to sabotage and delay the project but is becoming limited in his scope to do so. More than 1000 souls, innocent workers conscripted unknowing to the project, are held as both enslaved labor in hellish conditions on the indigo plantation and as hostages against the behavior of men such as Erso who might balk at Tarkin’s aims or have been late overcome by conscience into refusal or sabotage. If his efforts are discovered these will be killed, and likely himself. He has provided us with a description of a flaw in the defenses of the plantation and potential access to the manufactory itself.

We cannot know how much time remains for us to attempt an Atlantic crossing sir, but speed is of the essence and some hope lies in that storms in the area during the past summer and autumn months may have impeded the projects’ progress. Additionally, Rook’s reports combined with information I have previously gathered from my West Indian and Spanish sources support my belief that Tarkin focussed most of his attention on Gerrere as an adversary and believing himself now safe from Alliance interference and may let down his guard. Swift action is our only hope of
disrupting this evil project.

I await your instructions sir.

He signed the document and folded it together with the other sheet.

Being my Report specific to the actions in Lisbon 29/30 of August 1769 and specific to the Death of the Pirate and former operative of the Alliance, Commander Saul Gerrere

For the eyes of Lady Monmoth, Mr.s; Anthony Merrick, and David Draven, Captain Carl Reikken and Cmndr. Gael Akbar.

My confidential informant proved to no longer be reliable due to direct coercion by agents of the Marquis di Pombal and I was forced to leave the rendezvous point in order to avoid exposure.

He had been able to see Angelina’s face only through the screen…..what greater challenge for an operative was there than to assess the motives of a veiled woman glimpsed only through a pierced copper mesh?

Her brother had been a good fighter once, he knew. Tivik had been packed off to the army and his little sister Angelina to the convent. He had been sturdy, and no doubt she had been clever. Stationed to Madiera, what he saw there was too much for his decent heart and he was recruited to Gerrere’s cause, but to face down the devil in a hopeless place, day after day broke even the strong of mind and Tivik was not strong. He turned to drink. How long before Gerrere himself would have dispatched him as a risk? He had been like a hare cornered by a dozen dogs when Andor met him last at Funchal, clever enough to know that Gerrere’s madness was blinding him, still sensible enough to see that the ships moving Peruvian guano North toward British territories instead of East to Spain must mean something, soldier enough to recognize the stink of saltpeter in bales of hemp marked from the English Carolinas. Cassian had persuaded him to share information with the Alliance, although he had known full well how fragile the man's state was. Then somehow, somewhere, Tivik had met a man who met a man who saw the name Galen Erse on a crate and panicked. Drunk, wounded, Tivik had probably already been deserted by Gerrere’s people as a loss. Answering a scrawled message left at the tavern Andor had found him cowering in an alley and, in those moments, raked every stratagem he possessed for a way to get the man out, to get him to a ship unseen by either pirate or Guard. All came to nothing. The Governor’s men cornered them and his choices had suddenly condensed.

Andor could scale the wall and escape. Tivik with his shattered arm could not.

He had been a soldier once, and had feared death nowhere near so much as the rack.

Cassian had time to spare him one but not the other.

Did he die at peace with God? The disembodied voice had asked him.
Your brother died without fear, he had told her.

*That at least was true. He had made sure of it.*

Pombal’s men had been waiting outside of the Monastery gates. He evaded them but only barely.

*Who had betrayed him? Angelina or the Abbess? In a way he hoped it was Angelina. There was a certain justice to that at least.*

**While in the city Miss Erso and I were witness to an attack by Gerrere’s men upon Pombal’s headquarters. It is my belief that Gerrere was tricked into staging the attack, possibly even deceived into thinking he could assassinate the Marquis, in order to provide cover for a slaughter of the King’s remaining forces in the city by Pombal’s men.**

**In the chaos we were captured by Gerrere’s men and taken to a fastness of his several miles south and west from the city, overlooking a straight of the Tagus. Two gentlemen who may be refugees from the Order’s missions in the East assisted us greatly and were also captured.**

**On our arrival, Miss Erso was separated from us, to be interviewed privately by Gerrere. Myself and the Easterners found ourselves detained in the same cell as Mr. Rook.**

It had been an anxious hour. Andor had been staring fruitlessly through the barred wooden door. Imwe had seated himself against a back wall of the unlit cell and begun chanting in a language unknown to him. For some reason these actions annoyed his large companion.

“Praying? Do you joke with me? Listen to him Captain, Perhaps he thinks if he asks his God nicely enough the door will open.”

The blind man, to whom at least the darkness was no distraction, laughed, “Oh listen to him. It angers him so because he knows all too well that such things occur.” He smiled beatifically. “Would you believe it? Baze Malbus was once the the most devout of monks, held up as a model to us all.”

*Oh God. They were like an old married couple, appealing to strangers in the street to take sides in some argument between them. He might well go mad before Gerrere’s men even got to him.*

Suddenly the beggar turned his head, as if looking toward the near pitch dark at the back of their cave-like cell “What is wrong with him?”

“Who?” said his fellow.

“The man at the back.”

The large fellow edged back toward the moldy recesses with greater confidence than Andor could have done. Time spent in the company of the blind must have some benefit to the sighted.

“Hey!” he said, “Hey! There is someone back here. Hey fellow what is wrong with you? Spanish boy, help me get him up here where we can see him.”

Cassian edged back toward the man’s voice. The former monk took his wrist and guided it down to
the shoulder of someone, a man huddled at the back of the chamber, still breathing, but trembling in the dark. When they touched him, he whimpered and tried to pull back but it seemed the cell went no further in.

“Bring him up here,” said the blind man.

Malbus needed no assistance it seemed. He slid arms beneath the prisoner and lifted him easily, carrying him forward to the light by the barred door.

Barefoot, the stranger wore a sailors torn smock, far too big for him, and filthy breeches. Hiding his face in his arms, he seemed young but broken with long dark hair and a patchy beard. His eyes were dark and frightened and filled with tears. “Lüften. Artik yok.” he whispered,

“Oh this is the limit,” growled the big man, as if mightily inconvenienced “An infidel. This day cannot get worse.”

“Oh please,” the man said, in English now. “I am not lying. Galen Erso sent me. Please….. They are dying. I am the messenger.”

Andor knelt on the dirt floor. The man flinched back toward the shadows. His arms and legs seemed unbroken. They had not pulled or hung him at least. Something that looked like dried blood was crusted around his ears and he clutched at his upper arms. In the poor light he thought he could make out the punctures and spots of blood.

Oh sweet Mother of God.

Calm. Calm.

He waved Malbus away from the man. The renegade monk was a terrifying figuire under the best of circumstances. “Quiet,” he said.

“It’s alright,” he told the prisoner, in as soothing a tone as he could manage. “What is your name?”

The man shook his head, as if he could no longer remember.

Oh God. Damn you to hell, Gerrere. What have you done?

“Come on,” Andor said, “You said Galen Erso. Do you know him? Did he send you?”

The man looked up at the mention of that name. He looked back at him now, still trembling but reached a hand toward Andor’s shoulder as if grasping at a rope while drowning. “Galen Erso sent me. Do you believe me?

“Where,” Andor “Where is he? Where have you come from?”

“Indigo,” said the man, “They hide it in the indigo.”
This stronghold, built within the remains of a former coastal guard house, well fortified and concealed by the pirates, was rocked by a mighty explosion. Mr Kay had described the situation in greater detail than I could gain from my disadvantaged view, but I assure you that the blast was such that it did destroy not only the fortification itself but the hillside above it. It was perceived by myself and those inside as a sizable earthquake. A repeated bombardment might, and I stress MIGHT have caused such damage over a course of hours or days, this was accomplished in but a fraction of an hour.

“Tremor de terra!” Most of Gerrere’s men here were Portuguese…..or from the Azores…..he had heard that the ocean had risen as far away as Brazil in 1755….. No words could have struck more terror.

The guards, the Commander’s last most hardened favorites, clearly feared only one thing more than their master’s holy wrath. They fled in utter panic.

Where was she?

Andor had his arm out the barred door and the lock opened in seconds. The ground trembled beneath his feet. He had been in earthquakes before.

He remembered the pictures of the saints sliding from the walls in the orphan house at San Miguel.

This was different, a strange thought came to him that he felt it through the air not his feet, a slow rolling, as if there were a rhythm to it.

It did not matter. They must get outside before this place came down on them.

The door was open. “Bring him!” he shouted to Malbus. “We have to get out of here.”

“Where are you going?” called the blind man.

“Jane!” He had said, with no thought in his mind beyond getting up the tunnel the men had taken her through.

Over his shoulder he heard the monks voice, booming, “Come then, infidel, we will go!”

Gerrere’s men had run past him, some saner portion of his mind had marked the way they had run, down and to the right. There must be an exit that way. Had the tunnel branched he would surely have lost his way, but there was only one way up. Gerrere’s lair was in what what must have once been the guard room above a gate in the place. The lurching of the floor paused but the walls still
trembled. As he half-ran- half-stumbled into the room, his eyes were almost dazzled. It had been filled with lamps and candles, but now several had fallen to the floor, and a pool of oil was lighting the corner of a carpet on the far side of the chamber. A candle had fallen against a bed in the corner and the flames were curling across the coverings.

“Welcome to hell, Spaniard” the man had said to him.

*Dear God, the place would burn even before it fell.*

A small white skinned, white haired man in yellow sat motionless on a stool by the door,…*a statue perhaps?*…. But the scene was commanded by the terrible apparition of tall dark-skinned man standing silhouetted against flames blooming on a curtain behind him. Wild-haired and with one eye covered by a bandage…. *So might the Devil look enthroned in fire*…. The single dark eye regarded him with as if surprised, the man's eft arm knocking aside a stick that seemed to support him as he reached across with his right and drew a short blade. By instinct Andor reached for a sword he found he no longer carried. The old man tottered then, and Andor saw that he looked down toward the floor at his feet. As he did so his fierce expression faded, replaced by a look both pitying and sad. As Andor followed his gaze he saw her, crouched, half hidden by a fallen chair at Gerrere's feet.

Jane Erso was on the floor, on her knees, in the boys clothes they had dressed her in, her hands over her face.

*My God, did he stab her?* he thought, his heart cold in the middle of all this madness.

She looked wounded, stricken, bent.

“Miss Erso!” he shouted, but she made no sign that she heard him. Keeping his eye on the unmoving man,…*Gerrere, it must but a ruin, a shadow*… he crouched down to grasp her arm. The vibration grew in the air and the floor began to tremble again. “Jane,” his head was almost level with hers now and he pulled her hands away from her face with his own. “Look at me,” he said, “Jane, we must go.”

“Go with him,” the old pirate said, quietly at first then, with greater power “Go Jen! I order you to go with him!”

She turned at this, moved by the voice. Andor had her arm and was pulling her to her feet, but she reached her other hand across to Gerrere.

“Olori! No!” she cried, reaching for him, “come with us!”

“Go my àşádì, my hunting falcon, I will run no more, but you must fight on.”

Another lamp had fallen and flames now raced across the floor between themselves and Gerrere. He was pulling at her, urgent.

The old man could not run and there was no time.

The Commander looked above and past them, to a wall of flame that now bloomed where the bed had stood, as if he saw someone in the corner. He had said his farewells and now seemed to speak to one they could not see.

“O ti duro de mi. Olufẹ, Mo nbo,” he said, opening his arms.
Only at that instant did Andor recall the unmoving person, the ghostly man in a yellow coat, who still sat silently beside the door of the now collapsing tunnel. Flames had spilled across the table and a written cloth upon it was burning. The pale man beat the flames out with his hands as if insensible to the pain and stepped toward them. Andor had Jane Erso on her feet and the man walked over the burning rug and thrust the smoking rag into her hands.

“Go Jen. Find the truth. I will stay with him now.”

The room was half in flames by then, and the walls were shaking as the the albino pointed toward a small covered opening at the back. Then he returned to sit upon his stool, as if content die with his Commander.

The woman’s face turned toward Andor then, aware and grim, as if seeing him at last. “This way,” Miss Erso said, she pulling at him now.

The small doorway took them out to a narrow wooden platform that jutted from the hillside. Flames licked at the beams, but they made their way out and across onto the crest of the slope, No sooner did they feel firm ground beneath their feet and hands than the part of the hill they had just quit slid down. The ruin of old hill fort, the burning chamber, the cells and tunnels they had walked through, all fell away, crashing toward the sea below. The ground shook beneath them still but they were on a part of the bluff that held.

The sun had not yet risen, but as he looked up the half fallen cliff, Cassian Andor could see all the hilltop that had sloped above it for more than a mile leveled and gaping as if a great crater had opened in it, curls of flame still burned upon the edges.

Miss Erso pulled at his arm as they scrambled down the remaining slope and as he looked down at her he saw the shape of a masted ship. A dark sillouette against the storm clouded West, it lingered at the mouth of the Tago, rigged and moving away.

It took them an hour or more, scorched, bruised and shaken as they were, to reach the beach below. If any of Gerrere’s men had escaped the disaster, they had, like all those who remembered the calamity of Lisbon clearly feared the wrath of the sea as much as the earthquake and sought safety on some other higher ground. The only living souls at the water’s edge were Mr. Baze Malbus, Mr. Chirrut Imwe, and the Turkish prisoner, standing on trembling legs, who was finally to give them his name as Mr. Bodhi Rook.

They remained on the shore despite it's exposure, partly at Mr. Imwe's instance and partly because they were too shocked and injured to move far at first. Miss Erso, with his help, shredded what was left of her neckerchief and made shift to bathe Mr. Rook's wounds in seawater. As the sun rose the sails of a six man dinghy came into sight. It was Kay, coming to investigate the site of the disaster. They signaled him and to his tall friend's profound disgruntlement Andor insisted that they fit all four of the "extra" persons aboard.

We were able to escape our cell during the confusion of the attack and further to locate Miss Erso and salvage a portion of her father's message. The pirates fled and Gerrere, unable to escape due to his injuries died. Upon making our way to the shores of the Tagus, we were located by Mr. Kay, who in taking a separate way to the rendezvous point we had set in case of emergency, had
had the presence of mind to track the ship, sailing under no recognizable colors or flag, long enough to witness the firing of the incendiaries. He located us there and thus enabled us to rejoin Captain Rostok and the Princess’s Fortune at Setúbal. We sail for Gibraltar to await further re-fit and orders.

Captain. Cassian Andor

He sealed the packet, and went out to give it to Mr. Maddel, the fresh-faced sailor Rostok had assigned to row their bulletins ashore to Portimão and pass them on to an Alliance ship held there that could swiftly get them to England.

They would proceed on to Gibraltar and wait. It was all they could do now.

As he passed out of the great cabin he found himself lingering by the closed door to the room Miss Erso occupied. He raised a hand to knock lightly, but stopped himself, reconsidered that action and proceeded on out to the deck.
Losing it for sure.

A lot of plot boiling. Lots of historical fantasy elements rearing their little bunny-like heads as I move the avarice and heartlessness of the 18th cen. thirst for commodities, lingering alchemy meets the Age of Reason meets the development of armaments (some of which I've moved ahead a couple of generations) and making salad out of all kinds of wacky.

Dressed lightly with a little Assassins Creed? Sprinkled with a few crumbs of Phillip Pullman. All of this to get two pirate-rebel/assassin -captain kids to having sex on a sailing ship and because Kay as a human is wild fun.
In which Miss Erso writes a letter, the survivors join the crew of the Princess's Fortune and Captain Andor and Miss Erso have the first of many conversations.

Within the cabin, she folded down the lid of the desk, laid flat a sheet of paper and prized the cork stopper from the small bottle of ink. Dipping a fresh pen she wrote, while the light lasted.

Off the coast of Portugal,

Sir,
Father,

I hardly know what to say to you, nor how you should even regard me after all this time.

I hope that you can forgive me,

The man into whose care you entrusted me

Mr. Saul Gerrere has died, murdered by his enemies and yours,

I have wasted many years in bitterness although I now know that he tried to

After a life at war I hope he has at last found peace, but I know that he has at least found rest.

In time I hope I can perhaps

Before his death he passed to me the gift of your message.

The young man in whom you placed your trust, Mr. Rook, has proved both brave and true.

I can remember now how you

There is no point in speaking further of the past. Put your mind at ease in this at least, and know that I am alive, and free. Be assured that I am provided with skills and resources most women my age do not possess, enough to make my way in circumstances that might daunt others.

We have endeavored to gain assistance from agents of the Alliance, and others sympathetic to your pleas, our purpose. We have passed your message on to to them. This hideous venture will be thwarted and our loved ones avenged.

It may be that this letter will never reach your hand. But I will send it, by hands in which I have
some trust, to wait for you, sealed, in hope at the fort of St. Augustine, which lies in British hands now. If you by some miracle reach the fort in safety and hold this in your hands I will know that Providence is indeed merciful.

Dearest Papa, do not despair. I am coming for you. Stars are constant, even when hidden from sight.

Your Jen.

She copied it again, more neatly, folded and sealed the envelope and went out to place it in his hands. He would read it, of a certainty. She knew most clearly whose agent he was, and that she must steel her heart against any weakness in thinking otherwise.

Let him read it, she thought, I have no secrets left.

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HMS The Princess’s Fortune

Port of Gibraltar

September 1769

Captain Rostock had brought them in close enough to Portimeo to send a dinghy ashore with reports and messages to be sent swiftly to those of the Council waiting in England. Now their aim was to sail onward to Gibraltar, where orders might reach them.

Captain Cassian Andor was well out of his depth, by any possible measure.

The two "monks" had proved apt and experienced sailors and settled in quickly with the crew. Any reservations First Mate Monsbee might have had about taking on a blind crewman vanished when Chirrut dashed nimbly up the mast to tie sail. Mr. Rook professed to have been a ships pilot of some
experience in Mediterranean and Black Sea waters.

“Where do you wish to go, Mr Rook?” Andor had asked him.

It was after a long afternoon of listening to the man’s heart-rending account. Rook had grown perilously exhausted and Andor felt it best to stop the interviews for a time, and seek air up on deck. “I have no means now to return you to Cyprus, but it seems likely that, once you have satisfied the Alliances agents at Gibraltar with a repetition of your testimony, we may find you some passage back.”

The haunted expression in Rook’s eyes had faded over the few days voyage. As if he had regained or found anew some strength or purpose. Perhaps he was simply one of those men more at ease at sea. Whatever the reason, he, like Miss Erso, seemed to dread the thought of shore at present.

“There is nothing for me there,” he said, looking out from the rail in the direction that the Mediterranean lay. “I will go with her.”

*It was unnecessary for him to elaborate on who he meant by “her.”*

Mr. Malbus had pulled off his torn coat when offered a sailors smock to reveal both a sinewy torso and skin well patterned with exotic tattoos. He furthermore refused to part from his crossbow, although he agreed to store it in his trunk until needed.

Rostok merely nodded at this request. No doubt he had seen more exotic hands on his travels.

Andor happened to be present below decks as the large man was being assigned a bunk. He overheard one of the crew, a young Dutchman named Bastteren ask “You are a harpooner then Sir?” The term seemed to confuse the “monk’ but the young man continued, “Whales.” he said, pointing to the crossbow and the outlandish man’s mighty arms, while miming the action of a harpoon gun.

“Oh! Bloody hell, no!” said Mr. Malbus, clearly horrified. “Why would I shoot whales? No whale ever did me any harm. What is the matter with you people? I only shoot men.”

Kay regarded him and their new companions most coolly. He proposed himself to leave the ship first with Rostok when they reached Gibraltar.

“Are you anxious that I was perhaps exposed in Lisbon?” Andor asked him. “Your concern is touching, but it seems most unlikely given the chaos in the city.”

His friend replied tartly in the negative. “My primary concern,” said he,”Is that if allowed to leave the ship, you will return with yet more lost souls and we are running out of bunks.”

As they approached the great fort at Gibraltar he did not know which eventuality he feared more, that he would receive fresh instructions with regard to the woman or that he would not.

Miss Erso had barely spoken to anyone but Rook since their escape from the utter destruction of Gerrere’s stronghold. They two sat together, often near the bow, tucked against the rail, or stood out of the way in the main cabin. The character of their conversations seemed most often to be that Rook spoke quietly and earnestly and she listened.

At all other times she retreated to the cabin provided her and barely left it. Food left outside her door seemed to go largely uneaten. On the second night out after their escape he had heard a sound coming from the closed door of the cabin they had given her, which would have been the surgeon’s
cabin on another ship, and as such across from his own. It had not been the sound of weeping, as might have been expected perhaps of a different woman, only a kind of gasping as if of a child in pain, too stubborn or too afraid to cry out. His hand hovered over the door, but yet again he felt too unsure of what her response might be to pursue any inquiry. The sound ceased after several minutes and the yellow light appearing under the door indicated that she had lit her lamp. He returned then to his own cabin and lay awake for the better part of the hours until dawn.

When they docked at Gibraltar she still remained mostly aboard, at least at first.

Several days, or even weeks, would not be an unexpected time to wait for instructions and support to come from England. His own account of events at Lisbon and of the circumstances of Gerrere’s death could have only just reached London.

On their first evening at the dock, she approached him up on the deck, hair combed and pinned and fully dressed in the stays, better gown and petticoats that Lady Monmoth had given her. It made her look like an ordinary very pretty young woman if one did not look too closely. A most effective disguise.

“Am I yet your prisoner Captain Andor?”

“No, Miss Erso,” he said.

Were you ever? he thought.

“You may go whenever and wherever you wish.”

That he was exceeding his authority in making this offer he was almost certain, but lacking instructions to the contrary he would let her go. She had done what they had asked of her to the best of her ability and suffered in the doing.

She looked at him most steadily. It was a very strange sensation, this feeling of being constantly weighed and judged by an admitted pirate and petty thief, and with it the inescapable anxiety that one would be found wanting.

Kay is right, the thought came to him, it would be better for me, all of us perhaps, if she left now went ashore and vanished again, to make whatever sort of life she could for herself. She has a pleasing face and form, a fierce intelligence and probably the ability pick any lock in Europe. It is not too late for her.

“You know where I will go, Captain, and what I mean to do there,” she said, “The question that remains is whether….your Alliance… will help…us?”

He found himself very conscious of almost imperceptible pauses and the words she substituted for others left unsaid. “Your Alliance” for “You”, “Us” for “Me.”

In the name of God, woman.

“How do you intend to reach the Florida territories?” he asked, “Do you and Mr. Rook even know what you would face there? How you will find friends, allies or resources? Do you have any notion of the nature of what you will need to do?”

“Mr. Rook knows,” she said.
He knows and he is terrified, Andor thought but did not say.

“The fortress at Saint Augustine is in British hands now,” she said.

“At this moment,” he confirmed, “probably. Unless England decides to trade it for some other game-piece on the board, or Spain loses one too many silver galleons on the return route from Mexico and decides she wants it back enough to take it.”

“Does your Alliance have connections there?”

“Miss Erso, I am not privy to every Alliance contact in the West Indies and the Americas, and even if I were I would not…”

“Do YOU have connections there, Captain Andor?” she pressed.

It was growing darker but Gibraltar was a busy port. Lanterns were being lit and lights began to appear on the wharves, the sound and bustle of taverns could be heard even out to where they were docked. Added to all of these, the moon was bright and rising. He could see her face quite clearly.

He did not answer.

“You,” she said, “I mean yourself, personally. Am I wrong in my conjecture that a man in the service of English connections of the Alliance, whom I have heard speak three languages flawlessly, but who swears in the accent of the Spanish colonies….my experience has not been encyclopedic but I am guessing Veracruz. Mexico at the least……and whose familiarity with the West Indies and Americas seems considerable, am I wrong assuming such a person might possess friends in an ancient vital Spanish fortress, currently in the hands of the British Crown but still populated by former subjects of Spain and within spitting distance of the Spanish treasure fleet for fully three months each year?”

She spoke clearly and without anger. Rather after the fashion of a lawyer laying out the terms of contract of trade.

“If I did,” he said, “of what matter would that be, here and now?”

She took a letter from a pocket beneath her petticoat skirts, and put it into his hands.

He turned it over lightly, observing the black wax seal and the written name Mr. GALEN ERSO.

She spoke earnestly. "Can yourself or your Alliance, I do not care which, can Put this letter to trusted hands at the Fort Mark of Saint Augustine? I ask nothing else but that it be held there against some day when he himself or some person in whom he places trust may claim it. From what I am given to understand that fort the closest place spot by land not under direct control of his enemies.”

Captain Cassian Andor was quite astonished. He considered many demands that she might make of him. This had not been one of that number.

Surely you know, he thought but could not find it in himself to say, Surely you know he will never come? That he is almost certainly dead, and if by some chance he is not, I may well be ordered to kill him?

“Miss Erso…” he began.

But she would not permit him time to either lie or prevaricate. “Will you send it Captain?”
He could do so of course, he would meet a Spanish contact before dawn tomorrow. Messages would go out to Havana and he could easily make sure that this reached the hands of a friend who would take it to Old Grafis, who was surely still at St. Augustine. Spanish mails were still allowed, largely unchecked, even to a fort temporarily flying the British flag.

He placed the letter inside his coat and bowed. She left him at the rail and returned to her cabin.

Chapter End Notes

Throwaway Moby Dick reference.....sorry.
Chapter Summary

In which those of the Alliance Council based in England, receive the reports of Gerrere's death and the situation in and near Lisbon. Further actions are discussed and decision to act outlined.

Mr. David Draven considers the various actions under pursuit and the situation of Captain Andor.

Chapter Notes

Obligatory "grown-ups of the Rebellion scene" a little exposition a little world building, a little chance to talk about Lady Mary Monmoth's clothes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tavin Park

outside of London
September 5, 1769

Lady Monmouth wore a white gown, as was ever her habit in company, for such was her authority that she made no concessions to age and but a very few to any fashion that did not suit her taste, a well-cut closed front robe a l’anglaise of flawless white silk, white silk scarf and ribbon. Her ornaments, as always, were few and her luxury, as always, seen most visibly in the quality of the Chinese silk, the ribbon and the fine stitching on the quilted petticoat. Her only jewels were fine pearl earrings and the heavy silver locket and chain she always wore. She commanded attention thus of a kind that showier ladies in their rainbows of changeable silk could never do, or so at least, Mr. David Draven had always found, in the now-long years of their acquaintance.

"In the name of God, Draven, Merrick, sit down," she said as both he and Mr. Merrick rose upon her entrance to the private library, at the same moment she waved a hand in signal as if to dismiss the two young maids who had accompanied her, one in grey riding habit the other in blue. Each dutifully
took a place at either side of the door outside the room. Draven recognized one of them as Mary Jade, once a pickpocket in Newcastle, later numbered among Bishop Kenobi’s protégés....how interesting.... No doubt the other "maid" was a trained assassin as well.

*Lady Monmoth had never been mistaken for a fool, and was never without resources within resources.*

The gentlemen regained their chairs and Lady Mary seated herself at the head of the library table. The usually gleaming mahogany surface was covered now by papers that they three, along with Señor Dodanna and Ackbar had read and reviewed many times throughout the previous night. Included amidst the layers were the reports from Captain Rostok, the voluminous and detailed written accounts, graphs and maps of Mr. Kay, preliminary reports from other agents in Lisbon and the private reports of Captain Cassian Andor.

Saul Gerrere was dead.

His methods had long ago passed beyond the bounds of the Alliance’s code. Ackbar had said it best perhaps, that he had taken the battle upon himself with his whole mind and soul and it had consumed him. "The Angel of Death is feared, and justly so, but he builds nothing."

Gerrere had followed the path of vengeance, and that it was a righteous and just vengeance could not be argued, but by his going their strength was ten times less by one.

"*She never gave up hope for him, I think,*" Merrick had said when they had first read Andor's report of the events at Lisbon. "*That he might return.*"

*No, Mr. Draven thought to himself, she would not.*

"*I have sent emissaries to the Princess Juana,*" Lady Monmoth reported now, "*It is possible that that this information may finally enable her to rally her people openly against Pombal, as she has long worked in secret to support refugees from the Orders and to prevent the Marquis and his allies from expanding their power.*"

*Draven had seen them departing the park before dawn, a short stout naval officer and a foppishly dressed courtier. Odd choices indeed for messengers to a court in exile and a girl of sixteen expected to mitigate generations of her royal families sins, but the Lady no doubt knew her business best and there were even rumors that Kenobi had been seen last on the Spanish frontiers. No doubt miracles were expected.*
Before them now, if Kay and Andor’s reports were to be credited, lay a danger most profound and action requiring the swiftest response.

Ackbar and Dodonna had left hours ago, to set wheels in motion with the French. Mr. Kay’s report in particular had contained much that might motivate their military contacts there.

For his own part, Mr. Dravin had never been able to unravel much sense from the scientific ramblings of Mr. Kay, but others more learned than himself in such matters clearly had and seemed riveted with alarm.

His concern was Tarkin and the plantation. They could hope to delay but not forever prevent the eventual development of more powerful explosives. So be it, delay they must and delay they would, but Tarkin truly served no nation and no state, an Austrian who had lived long in the service of the British crown he here clearly served a power as dark as any deeds of Nations and Princes. The cruel imprisonment and death of a thousand captive Turks, Greeks and Minorcans was a vicious crime…..but Tarkin and his masters hands were steeped in the blood of countless thousands more for mere daily profit…..the fist of their hidden “Empire” well concealed beneath the glove of man’s universal greed and cruelty…..why let it slip into view now?

Andor had written it and underlined it, their code for his attention, “Tarkin focussed most of his attention on Gerrere as an adversary “ What had Gerrere known about this venture?

“Can we move such ships as we have to openly assault the position?” Merrick asked, for Draven had known Anthony Merrick since their days as soldiers. It was Merrick who had saved him at Culloden, hiding him when all their plans had unravelled. Defeat he could bear but inaction was agony to him.

“Dodonna probes Spanish aid,” the Lady said, twisting the silver locket in her fingers, “but that would probably come at a price we would never willingly pay. Ackbar may have greater luck with the French, but in the end we may need to turn to our friends in the West Indies.”

Madame, he thought, but did not say, for he had already spoken his piece upon the subject last night, and she surely knew his views without the necessity of further repetition. The Commander is dead, without his gore-soaked leverage what hope have we of aid from the Pirate’s quarter?

“I propose, ma’am,” Draven said “that we send orders immediately to Andor, ordering him into position with such information as he has derived from this Turkish conscript, releasing funds and personnel that will enable him to fit a ship and crew of his own assemblage with what discretion he may at Gibraltar. i further propose we send instructions and men to meet him at the Cadiz, before he crosses. This will give us time to make what arrangements we can….or cannot….achieve at Jamaica. I hope you will forgive me ma’am, if I restate my distrust of Captain Solo, I fear his entanglements with Jabba and his company have left him compromised, but we shall have at least six or seven weeks with good winds to put wheels in motion. Dependent on the situation that meets him at Kingstontown, he can either pass on his crew and mission or proceed to St. Augustine, where he has lingering connections.”

Lady Mary nodded in assent and looked to Mr. Merrick.
Anthony Merrick sighed, but looked at Draven most shrewdly. “You place great weight on a young
officer of twenty-five, Draven. From what I know of Andor, naval action is not his forte.”

“From what we see here, a conventional naval action might not prove the action to pursue,” Draven said, unwilling to reengage with his friend an argument that had already occupied them for the hours between two and four of the previous night, “but Captain Andor is a man of wide-ranging skills, the most admirable of which is an ability to unhesitatingly find a path to difficult objectives in circumstances that would baffle others.”

“Captain Andor is a young man with equal experience in drawing rooms, villainous seaports and the forests of New Spain. I know, David,” Lady Mary said, laying a hand to her unpowdered brow. He recalled that she had slept no more than they, likely less, since the reports arrived the previous evening.

She seldom made concessions to weariness this way, her appearance never less than perfect save on those occasions when he had known her to dress in men’s clothes on a mission that required her personal action. It had been many years since he had seen her do so, but he did not doubt she still kept shirt, breeches and coat hidden somewhere at hand.

“The word I lay stress upon in my positive assessment of his skills, however,” she continued, directing her gaze now keenly at him, “is young. Andor’s cleverness and dedication are unquestioned, and I concede that his Spanish connections at St. Augustine and Havanna may prove crucial in this venture, but I ask you to consider carefully David, what happens to a fine young horse ridden too hard and too often at post.”

Andor had potential, she was saying, she had her eye upon him for leadership, perhaps even, someday upon the Council. She had spoken of it often before, their Alliance had labored in the shadows, fighting a rising tide of darkness. ‘We cannot think of today only David,’” she had once said to him, “but of those who come after us. We will all fall in time and there must be hands to take the torch when we drop it lest it go out forever.”

He could not face those clear eyes, that he knew had wept for Gerrere, or yet would, when some private moment was at last given her…..Whose picture is in that locket you never part with ma’am?…. and say other than the truth. Tano was dead. Kenobi’s urchins skilled but too prone to religious mania and all too young. Melshi, Mandine, Bridge… were all soldiers of courage, good hands and capable when they knew the mission but without the skill to find a way through the shifting sands here.

Besides, he knew Andor, had known the dark paths he had had to walk since they had found him, a ten-year-old stowaway on a ship out of Veracruz. His heart told him Andor would not live to see thirty, Draven wanted to tell her, Dear lady, The boy is brave and true and clever but I have seen that shadow in men's eyes before.

“He is the best I have left. There is no one else with the faintest hope of success.”

Merrick, to his surprise, supported him, “Captain Andor is the only one who can manage Mr. Kay, ma’am, and if we cannot send this expedition out with the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, the libraries of Oxford College, twenty Grenadiers and a battering ram, Kay is the next best thing.”

The Lady reached across and lifted on of the papers, Andor’s personal report, and read it carefully.

“What of the girl,” she said, “Miss Jane Erso, Saul’s ward, and Mr. Erso’s daughter. What is to be done with her?”
“Ward?” Mr. Draven could not help but think, a strange choice of description.

“I will send orders that Andor use his discretion,” he saw Lady Mary’s eyebrows raise at this and felt a rush almost of anger at some condemnation unspoken… You of all people madam? Do you think I do not know the number of each and every life I have taken with my own hand in this war? Do you think Andor does not?… “Left alive and well with papers, contacts and a sum sufficient to provide at Gibraltar would be my recommendation and no doubt her wish,” he said, “But Andor will have scope to decide if she may be of use in some other aspect of the mission.”

They were all tired, tempers were frayed. He knew her well enough, he hoped and she him, to know she did not think him likely to relish the thought of ordering his agent to needlessly murder a girl of nineteen. No more surely than he would relish ordering that same man to dispatch the girl’s father should it prove necessary.

Lady Monmoth sighed at this, “That perhaps may prove less straightforward than it appears,” she smiled and laid Andor’s report atop the other papers, as if she had read something in it invisible to the rest of them. “In any case, I reluctantly agree, we have less time for reflection than the danger warrants, so we must act as we can. Send your orders Mr. Draven. Mr. Merrick, set out for Southampton as soon as you can and set your wheels in motion. The fates will cast the dice at Jamaica and Spanish Florida. We can only throw the dice we have.”

She turned her head then, “Mary! Pamela!” she called to her Amazon guard outside the door. “Tell Essie to tell Mrs. Yaddle to send up breakfast and coffee! Sit with me gentlemen, starving ourselves will avail nothing.”

Chapter End Notes

Next up, fitting a ship and more sexual tension.
Necessities of the Voyage

Chapter Summary

In which a ship is provisioned for an Atlantic voyage and one of the crew wonders about the mysterious woman who accompanies them.

Also the Alliance is not joking around.

Chapter Notes

Housekeeping, and a limited command of geography. More about Baze's tattoos.

La Fortuna de la Princesa

port of Cadiz

September 1769

- Dried Beef 462 pieces in 6 barrels
- Salted Pork 777 pieces in 5 barrels
- Beer 12 barrels
- Water 60 hogsheads and 30 casks
- Bread and Biscuit in 54 bags
- salted Butter in 20 casks
- Oatmeal 20 bushels
- Pease 16 bushels
- Flower in 4 barrels
- Suet in 1 barrel
- Raisons in 2 barrels
- Rum 4 half hogsheads
- Vinegar 1 hogshead
- Cabbages 10 bushels
- Dried limes 3 casks
- Carrots in Vinegar 1 barrel

“Carrots in vinegar?” some of the the provisioners had puzzled when Quartermaster Forell had set them the lists for the brigantine. The old seaman could do more than shrug in answer

“Rosemont captains her,” he said. “He favors the pickled root as lucky and will not sail without it.”
He knew that this requirement would puzzle many of the suppliers at Cadiz but some handful would know the request for what it was. No words were to be whispered, no names to be mentioned even in private, but separate sets of books bound with white cord would be brought out by those few provisioners who had knowledge and understanding of who it was they served, oftentimes handed from father to son, of whose whose ships it was they stocked

“Pickled Carrots” meant an Alliance ship, which in its turn meant no stinting, no cutting of corners, all water to be fresh and in unused barrels sealed inside and out with wax and caulk, not lead, and no flour to be cut with powdered chalk, no moldy meat and all pease, oats and flour sealed well and well bagged.

The ship to be provisioned was seldom the same, and never showed the same colors twice in turn, one might come a year or none for three, and the captain’s names changed often. The price paid for goods was better than fine and a proper turn out brought repeat custom. Cheat on provision provided for such a ship and you might well find your shop burned in a fire of mysterious origin. Breathe a word to any, including your near and dear, whether of the extra cask of pickled vegetable, or the circular mark of a bird with wings spread that the Quartermasters showed on the back of a forearm as they handed over the list, and you would be found abed with your throat cut no matter how many locks upon the door.

Mr. Kay had accompanied Mr. Forell upon the expedition, while Captain Rostok and Captain Andor had gone out separately to speak with a number of persons in the fort and to other ships at dock about the taking on of crew.

Forell knew Mr. Kay but slightly yet his acquaintance was sufficient for him to appreciate the gentleman's rapid skill in converting currency, unerring eye for the evaluation of weighs and measures and the most arresting effect he had on any pickpockets, thieves or shopkeepers inclined to deception. Such positives, to Mr. Forell's mind, when added to his flawless command of Spanish and the Andalusian dialect, more than compensated for a lack of conversational variety. They had put in at Gibraltar as a British ship and waited some days for news, he was well aware. Some crew had departed there and others been taken on. Mr. Kay and Captain Andor had left the ship several times and gone frequently up to the fort, or out onto other ships at harbor there. After a week they must have received the orders they waited for because Captain Rostok ordered them to set out and make haste for Cadiz to fit there for a journey to the West Indies on account of resources at Gibraltar being too meager for such a venture.

No English ship would have passed unmarked at Cadiz, but that was a small matter of paper, flags, coats and paint. La Fortuna de la Princesa, would be provisioned and ready to sail before the week was out.

Mr. Gustav Forell's Spanish was serviceable but his Dutch was native so he combined the two to worthwhile affect. Cadiz was a fair port and a busy one, having of late taken on much of the American traffic from Seville, whose sand bars had proved too troublesome to those fat-bellied boatloads of gold and silver. Much could be hidden in such a port.

He knew better than to try to bandy gossip with Mr. Kay, but as they stood together to supervise the loading he could not help but make inquiry, his curiosity much piqued by the young woman who stood at the rail of the ship, now watching the harbor with eyes that seemed to be looking further, a blue scarf covering her cap.

The Turkish gentleman, Mr. Rook, was not with her now, having been advised to stay indoors while visitors might board, his Spanish being poor and his nerves less than recovered from his late ordeals. Instead, Forell saw that the Eastern fellow, Mr. Imway was standing beside her.
No doubt that gentleman was not looking at the harbor, being to all appearances quite blind.

Still, he was a most amusing fellow and had already become a great favorite with the crew, most frequently winning at cribbage while equally often losing at cards.

He had his hand upon the young Englishwoman's shoulder an seemed to be speaking quietly to her.

His mighty friend and bedfellow was on the dock loading barrels with three or four of the other crew. Forell half hoped the Port Guard might question him, or ask after his enlistment, if only for the entertainment of seeing the surly fellow drop two or three of them off the dock, but the crew had all been warned to behave most civilly at Cadiz. Speed was needed upon their next venture. It was of no matter, in any case, whatever the fellow's nation might be not even a blind-deaf drunken Jesuit would have suspected him English. He looked as proper and well-papered a pagan as any man the old Dutchman had ever seen.

"Will you ship on with us, sir?" Captain Rostok had asked him at Gibraltar and the large man, Malbus, had only shrugged, "I go with him," had been the reply with a nod toward his blind partner.

"And you then, Mr. Imway?" The Captain had asked in further pursuit of his answer.

"I follow the lady," said Imway with a wide smile, meaning it seemed, Captain Andor's female companion, Miss Erso, "as dawn follows the Morning Star."

Malbus grunted. "Poetry?" he said, "is that what we are doing now?". The fellow sighed then and raised a hand and there beneath his arm, amidst all his other markings, could be seen the bird of the Alliance, not drawn as small or simple as most of them wore it or as the more heathenish members of the crew had it marked upon their skin, but clear and much decorated with a fanciful script.

"Mr. Kay," Forell asked, still he looking up at Miss Erso as she stood upon the deck, "Do you know sir, does the lady follow us on this venture?"

The giant gentleman turned his head slowly. Miss Erso had finished speaking to Imway it seemed and had walked back up to the bow, out of their sight.

"I fear," he said in his usual melancholy tone, "that it is more accurate to say the lady leads us."

Had another man been speaking Forell might have suspected some attempt at wit.

It is not always Morning that follows the Star, he thought, sometimes it is Evening.

They left Cadiz to take the Southern route, as the season and current demanded, to round the Canarie. Once they had done so they would change colors and coats yet again. La Fortuna would be re-christened the Rogue's Venture.
Night/the second part, within the Great Cabin

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Cassian Andor considers his growing attachment to Miss Erso with a certain amount of turmoil of mind.

Chapter Notes

Flagrant unashamed romance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HMS Rogues Venture

off Gran Canarie

September, 1769

It seemed to him as he lay on his bunk in that hour before dawn, eyes fixed upon the planking above his head, as a thing somehow accomplished before he had even seen it's motion begun. The track was traceable by him in hindsight, as if on a map, at least as far back as his panic in the hills above Sertubal.

He understood now that he could have no more left her on that falling hillside then than he could have raised arms and flown as a bird. He still believed it of himself that he would have done anything in his power to have rescued an innocent woman from such a death, but that impulse alone was not what had driven him to run from a crumbling cell up that hallway to confront Gerrere.

The line ran even further back, it seemed, through the moments before Gerrere’s men had thrust him into that gaol, when he had called out to her by her own name.

His self-deception then had been that he had done so wholly by design, to shock her perhaps and focus her thought again upon his presence and the mission at hand. From where he found himself now, he realized that he could give himself no such credit, recognize in fact that he had been moved by an impulse….

The warning signs should have been clear to him, surely, if only by the way in which certain recollections still stuck in his mind with such abnormal clarity.

*Her face framed in the smoke of the pistol shot as she killed the officer of Pombal’s guard who had...
threatened him at the San Maria Major. Her utterly unconsidered lifting and thrusting aside to safety of the fallen child in the thronging street. The uncompromising look in her green eyes as she questioned him about Kay.

Self-knowledge being an accomplishment almost essential to their work, he had fancied he knew at least the rough catalog of his own strengths and weaknesses. The clouding of judgement by...attachment?...what had Kay's term been? "appreciation?"....desire seemed both too crude a word and too poor.....had never been one of his failings.

“Pequeño sacerdote” some of the other boys had teased him, on the docks at Veracruz, partly because of his looks but mostly because he would not bully women or littler boys as they did. Few had ever pressed their advantage of size against him for he both walked and slept with a knife in those days and taking a few pieces of ear usually sent them after weaker prey.

It had always seemed such a stupid taunt to his mind anyway. Where he came from priests were usually the most avid pursuers of women.

Like many of the countless children set so adrift, he supposed now, he had known the outline of what he hated and feared far better than he knew that of what he wanted and might love. Comfort by then had appeared a childish thing anyway, safest left behind in the shared beds of the orphanage he’d fled. To see its memory used to cloak cruelty and abuse of petty power was nothing he could bear.

In the end he had stowed away aboard the right ship and though that choice had come to cost him some part of his soul he still felt it had saved the greater part. He believed even now that bargain the only one worth making.

While never “insensible to women” as Kay so often charmingly put it, he had in truth only ever fancied himself in love on one occasion and then but for a few weeks.

Sick with snakebite he had missed the rendezvous on a darkened beach on Lousiana, and been left behind there on the coast with barely the strength to crawl to a fishing shack, filled with drying nets and traps, that was the only poor cover. Some hours before dawn a black-haired girl found him there. Because she spoke only French Creole and a very little very accented English, while he spoke but Nahuatl and Spanish and English in those days, they had barely ten words in common and he had been too fevered by the time she found him to speak nine of them. When Sabine saw the small bird etched in ink on his swollen ankle, she whispered, “Alliance?” and then dragged him the limping half mile through the forest to her own little house, that she shared with an older woman. There they both of them worked together to hide him under the raised floor from the soldiers who came to search. He had been sixteen although it seemed to him now that he had he surely never told her so.

Once the fever broke at last and his foot resumed the appearance of something better attached to a live human than a dead alligator, she carefully removed the last of the poultices she had applied and assured him in tentative English that all of his toes would remain still attached. She confirmed by counting them, to his not-uncomfortable discomfort.

“Soldat de l’Alliance,” she then said, slowly as if greatly concerned she might not be understood, "I am alone here and would seek your company, pour un peu de temps.” There might be boys of sixteen years somewhere on the earth who would have refused such a request although he could not
imagine that there were many. Most certainly he knew that he was not among their number. While
aquainted well enough what men and women did together he had not until then known how it might
be done with kindness and regard.

The thought often came to him in years after that he might easily have died without knowing so and
that most people probably did.

He remained with her for almost two months before she persuaded some trustworthy fishermen to
lend him clothes and take him with them to New Orleans, where he might find an Alliance ship to
return him to his cadre. Puppy that he was, he would have begged to stay with her or urged her to
come with him but she had told him most clearly, “Vous êtes un homme bon, mais j'aime un autre,”
which was enough like “pero amo a otro” as to be understandable. She had told him about her
lover on nights when they had lain out on the open porch of the unpainted little house. Strange as it
seemed he had not felt any jealousy but listened to her almost happily as she spoke, half in the
French he was slowly learning and half in English. She told how she had “come to love” of this
sweetheart, who worked with her and another small band of L’Alliance pirates upon the Gulf, saving
those they could, striking both the French and the Spanish. She fought with a true heart, but then her
mother had fallen ill and she had had to come ashore. A year had passed she said, but he and her
friends would return for her one day and they would fight the Enemy again. Her eyes shone
almost happily as she told him these stories and what envy he had felt was not for this young man, to whom she remained
faithful even as she lay by another's side, but of her, that she could be so sure and know her own
heart so well. She knew her sweetheart to be still alive, she said, because they were “lié au coeur”,
she placed her hand above her breast as she said this.

“Fight bravely, my friend,” she said as she kissed him goodbye holding his face in her hands. "Your
heart is true and I hope another waits for it."

What could she have been? Not much further from childhood than himself surely. Sixteen,
Seventeen? They took him back to Europe afterwards and by the time he found that part of the coast
again storms had wiped it clean of any landmarks he could recognize. There was nothing to do but
pray that her lover and friends had come back for her but those who fought in the Americas fought
an ugly war. Merrick had great hopes for events there, while Draven, he knew, was less sanguine.
Shamed, he realized that years had probably passed since he had last thought of her.

"Oh brave Sabine," he wondered, "I thought I had no heart left. What advice would you give me
now?"

The basics of seamanship he had learned, and could to a degree skillfully practice but unlike those
few who found in it their vocation, Rostok, Merrick, Veilleuse..... he was not a born sailor, and knew
it. He could read a map or a chart but it was not his gift to take what he saw there and look across a
tossing sea to sense by instinct the path across it. Was this pass he found himself in now because of
some weakness akin to that one? It was as if, unable to recognize the current, he had been caught
fully up in it before he knew.

If this were so, the same condition existed, he now believed, for her. Surprise was a state hard to
feign at such a near distance.....and she had been surprised
Late in the night, through the sounds of the wind and the waves, and the creaking of the ship, he had heard again a sound coming from her cabin. It was the faint but now familiar gasping of breath. It reminded him of nothing so much as the sound of some panicked creature, hunted, forcing themselves to quiet. Opening his door, to see if she had once again wakened herself and lit her light, he had been surprised to find her outside of her room, crouched on the floor in the darkness of the great cabin it adjoined. Wearing only a shift, she was shivering, although he sensed not from some present cold. Her eyes were open but her hands reached out on the wall she huddled against as if she were blind. She ran fingers against the panelling and brought them to her mouth. Taking up the small lamp he had been reading by, he approached her quietly.

She was clearly in the grip of some nightmare and he had no wish to startle her into a fit, as could sometimes occur.

“Miss Erso,” he said very quietly, kneeling beside her and laying the lamp on the deck supported by the wall. The motion of the ship was perceptible though regular and steady against the wind, still, a hard pitch could come at any time.

She seemed utterly insensible of his presence either by sight or sound, so he quietly placed his hand upon her arm. She hid her face still, but reached abruptly toward him then, as if he were but another wall that pressed her now from the other side. Her fingers clutched his shirt hard enough to bruise the skin beneath.

She was not weeping. Even in such a state she did not do the expected thing.

“I am not afraid,” she whispered, perhaps more than once, not to him at all it seemed, but to the wall, probably to the very night itself.

He remained as he was and made no attempt to touch her further or speak to her more.

Some demons must be wrestled alone, he knew. The presence of others was more hurt than balm at such times, so he waited in silence.

He could not simply leave her, for fear that she might injure herself or disturb those sleeping in the other adjoining cabins, Kay, Rostok, Antilles..... He felt sure that to be seen in this state by others would be deeply humiliating to her.

As minutes passed, she seemed to return to herself. Not startled but through a kind of struggle as if slowly bringing her nightmare to heel. Her jaw unclenched, the trembling eased and her eyes focused at first on the lamp he had steadied against the wall, then lifted slowly to his face.

“Andor?” she said as if in some doubt as to his identity, or perhaps his reality.

“Si,” he said, forgetting good sense yet again in her presence and slipping back to Spanish.

She nodded and lowered her eyes. Her fingers loosened their grip upon his shirt. Another few minutes passed until, drawing a breath, she made use of his shoulder as a lever to push against and so stand herself upright again upon bare feet, remaining in this position for a long series of heartbeats while he knelt beside her. She looked down at him but he could not rightly read her expression,
hampered as he was by the poor light that flickered with the motion of the ship. Her eyes, it seemed to him, were open wide as if with astonishment or some other strong emotion held in check.

“I apologize for disturbing you,” she said quietly, as if they were the most ordinary of strangers in some embarrassing but mundane situation, as if he had but retrieved a basket she had dropped in the market, or reached to assist her from a stumble as her shoe heel caught upon a cobble on a busy street. “Thank you for your help.”

He considered in that moment that he might have kissed her hand. He considered in that moment that he might have done a great many other things.

She shivered then and took her eyes away, passed around him unshod across the boards, into the cabin assigned to her and closed the door.

He did not even attempt to return to his bunk immediately but remained sitting upon the floor, extinguishing his own lamp as the light of hers showed, re-lit again beneath her door.

*Santa Madre de Dios, he thought. What have I done?*

It was the creak of the ship that no doubt kept him from hearing another cabin door open, so that when he finally looked up in the dark to find Kay leaning there with his head bowed, *as he of necessity was often required to stand in any interior space*, in silence at the doorway of his own cabin, it was impossible to guess with any degree of certainty how long he had been watching there. His friend stood in this position for several long moments more, without comment or change of expression, before he shook his head and turned to return to his own bunk.

Captain Cassian Andor had no doubt that he was shortly to receive an unwanted lecture upon a subject he had no desire to discuss.

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Chapter End Notes

Pequeño sacerdote= little priest

Vous êtes un homme bon, mais j’aime un autre = You are a good man but I love another.

Did not think I would spend this much time considering our hero’s make-out time with anyone other than our heroine, but our boy had had a complicated life.

Next up: Advice from Mr Kay and Miss Erso's responses.
Quicksilver and Trust

Chapter Summary

In which Miss Erso reviews certain painful aspects of her past life and their echoes in her present and is then subject to a quite odd and revelatory conversation with Mr. Kay.

Chapter Notes

Quicksilver = mercury.

Note: Used in the amalgamation of silver ore and other very nasty processes. Since no sources for liquid mercury were found in the New World until the 1800's it was laboriously and dangerously shipped from Spain TO Mexico.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once she mastered the shaking of her hands sufficiently to light her small lamp and had regained her bunk again, Miss Jane Erso slept for the few hours that remained until the second bell was struck. The lone mercy in the affliction, she had found to her wonderment, lay in that after recovery from these painful dreams she would often sleep inexplicably well.

It was far more cruel when they came upon her while waking. For these last several years she had dared to hope that that particular agony was left far behind in her childhood. At least it had seemed so until poor Alfonso had spoken her father's message aloud.

"I do not ask her to forgive me."

These words it seemed had broken down walls she had fancied herself to have built of iron around her weakness.

_They had been set to take her to Newgate_, she thought, as the light of dawn reached beneath her cabin door from the Great Cabin windows and she rose to put out her little light. _They need hardly have bothered, for it seemed she still carried her own prison within her._

_Baba oliiri, is this what your death has done? Put me back in that well where you found me?_

Her most earnest wish was that she had at least not uttered, within the Spanish captain’s hearing, that cry of accusation she knew herself to have made aloud as a child when the panic had come blind upon her. She remembered waking, holding onto her pillow or Saul Gerrere’s coat often in those first weeks after she had been carried away, first to a sloop and then to a stronghold off the Irish coast by her rescuer, and crying, "You left me! Papa, you knew where I was and you left me!"

It made her bitterly angry. _Had she so lost herself again?_
Only four of them had been in Gerrere’s chamber when the nightmare returned. Of these two were now dead and, though pride seemed pointless, yet she could imagine no way this side of her own grave that she would ever ask the other what he had heard.

*Oh God,* she thought, *twice. Twice he has been there to see me fall so and not spoken of it.*

Captain Cassian Andor had a weapon he could use against her lying at his feet yet he had not, so far as she could see, yet taken it up. She had no notion of what that might mean, so long had it been since she had known any, whether enemy or temporary ally, to forgo an advantage.

The Commander had told her the tale of how her mother had sent a message to him, through men he had set at Penzance, to keep a watch upon their house and begging him to send aid if a noontime ever came when no red apron was hung by the kitchen window. It was the fierce weather that had slowed the watcher’s message for some days, and further delayed Saul Gerrere’s own arrival for another day further. Had the rescue been tardy much beyond that she would likely have died of thirst in that dark place and this fierce-appearing but strangely generous man, then still a stranger to her, would have simply laid her beside her mother in the unmarked grave he had dug in the turf behind the standing stones.

She could blame Saul Gerrere for many omissions but not for dishonesty in this one matter for she had never herself asked of him, in plain words, where is Galen Erso?

*He was dead, she told herself, a condition she took Gerrere’s silence to give assent to.*

_Obedient no more, she had blamed her once-adored father with a child’s unjust judgement as a weak fool who had left she and her mother insufficiently protected from powerful enemies._

It had been well off of Tortuga that they had taken the ship—*claimed her rather for not a shot had even needed to be fired,* …truly a massive galleon, more than a thousand tons. The crew had cheered at the sight of her, wedged hard on a sand bar by the fierce storm of the week preceding, for the pickings of the Caribbean had already begun to grow slim in those days.

She had been up on the mast at watch when the Commander whistled to her and she had scampered down the rigging at his call. "That ship, my Jen," he said, "What ails her?"

_Her Olori’s tone had been off-hand but she knew a test was couched within the question.*

*How came a galleon alone to this coast at this season? Her keel was sunk too deep surely...she was*
heavy...too heavy by half again....Such a battering over a such time should have broken even the fattest treasure barge off the sand or at least turned her sideways. Living men still clung to the masts, the shredded flags of Spain still flew and yet...

"Sir," she said, "she sails for New Spain not from her. What ballast holds her so firm if not gold?"

"What indeed little hawk?"

The galleon’s few remaining officers were a handful of Spaniards, who threw themselves for mercy on the deck and a bare sixty survivors of the hundred or more who should have crewed her. Many had washed away in the storm and those remaining were Africans, Moroccans, Libyans all kidnapped and sold to this fate while a few others showed themselves to be Spaniards and Basques but all branded on hand or face as convicts. Yet these it seemed were all pressed to sea here, not bound and shipped to cruel labor in the sugar fields, in other words, not the usual state of affairs in these waters. They all clung to the rails or the masts and begged to be taken from the ship as if in terror of her very planks. The Commander and what translators he had began to question them.

Jen took a party below decks, as was her standing order in those days, when her Olori still took some care to find her other duties, if wholesale executions seemed at hand.

There were boxes of light goods, cloth and wine mostly, tumbled and broken...to the crews bitter disappointment....but nothing to account for such weight, until they came to some too-small crates stacked lonely in the lowest hold. The sea had leaked in from above and below, but some of these crates had turned and broken, and were still to be seen at the high end. Sand spilled out from those and three had even turned sideways to drop out other even smaller boxes that must have lain packed within the sand. One of these in turn had also broken and squared leather bags had tumbled out from it. Drops of silver liquid oozed from their seams.

Such was her ignorance that she stepped forward across the tilting boards for a closer view, but one of the older pirates seized her shoulder violently, holding her back. "Poison," the fellow warned her, "quicksilver, out of Almedan."

Those who mined it were said to die within weeks, burned with seizures and raving. Prisoners and enslaved captives were the only ones set to handle it and this was clearly the intended fate of those wretches above.

In that instant the men above decks must have communicated the same story for she heard her captain's roar down the hatches, "Out! Out! All hands!"

The whole party moved with great speed toward the ladders, but as they did so the Commander pushed them aside, coming down himself past them. Reaching to take her arm with some ferocity, he demanded, "Se o fó wọ kan o?"

She had not, but that was not what had frozen her in place. She, for the first time in all her loyal service, did not answer him but only pointed back toward the small broken inner crate from which the bag of poisonous metal had spilled, stained dark blue within and marked with letters burned in black: De la mano de: Sr. Galen Erso

Seven years and many a thousand miles had passed but the man in the white scarf and those words of her mothers remained in her memory, ”You will not take him."

Those men had wanted her father alive, even a girl of eight had divined as much.
The Commander had all but seized her by the ear and pulled her up to the decks. The Spanish officers were dead on the boards, throats cut. The bodies were tossed overboard. They stove the wreck and pulled the hull out to deep water to let her sink.

The imprisoned crewmen were all given knives, maps, what water, biscuit and food the Onderean could spare, and a free choice to take their chances dropped on the beaches to try to make their ways on foot to the settlements on the far side of the island or to set sail on their own in the dinghies still clinging to the galleon.

Her Olori had kissed every one of the captive sailors, “Forgive me brothers,” he had said, in the language of each, or through whichever of his crew who spoke their tongues, “that, to my lasting shame, I cannot myself take you to back your homes.” He passed them tokens that might buy their way with his name on other ships if they had strength to reach the right ports. "Go with God.”

Thus was Saul Gerrere, before his mind broke, and for a time even after. Men would have died for the Commander, God knew she would have done so gladly at fifteen, but he would not answer her questions after the quicksilver galleon, ordered her sternly to silence, turning away from her, in what she had taken at the time for disgust at her weakness, when she begged for answers. It was, it seemed to her now, the beginning of the change in him and in his treatment of her.

Now the walls of that dark well claimed her again in her sleep and there was no soul living save herself to pull her out.

Very well then, she must and she would.

Whether some Spanish assassin sat waiting at the top of the ladder was a matter she would deal with as it came.

Rising from her bunk she prepared to dress, putting on stocking and shoes, lacing the jumps over her shift, tying the lesser of the petticoats and pinning a jacket and kerchief. Once they had fully rounded the Canaries and made the Southern currents, with their greater safety from unexpected boarding, she would assay whether dressing in breeches and shirts would outrage Captain Rostock. His was the only opinion she gave credit in the matter at this present time.

A knock at her cabin door called her attention.

“Miss Erso. May I claim a moment to speak with you?” a voice without inquired.
Her heart had faltered with something like anxiety that it might be Captain Andor at her door but, of all the 65 crew and officers aboard the brigantine now re-named the Rogue’s Venture, the one person she would have least anticipated a visit from was Mr. Kay.

By reflex she found her eyes straying toward the narrow ledge above the door where she had concealed a thin-bladed knife some days before, but mastering both her astonishment and her trepidation, she managed to answer, “Certainly, sir” and unseal the door.

Mr. Kay bent his pale close-cropped head to peer within a few inches.

“Before you fully open the door, I should inquire whether you are sufficiently dressed to comfortably converse?” he asked.

“He genuinely means no offense…” Andor had said. Oh dear God….

“I am,” she said, steeling herself. “What is it you wish to discuss, Mr. Kay?”

The door opened the remainder of its span, and the gentleman’s head and shoulders now maneuvered more fully into view.

“I should ask your permission to enter, Miss Erso, as I wish to speak with with some degree of privacy.”

She devotedly hoped that her face did not betray the profound degree of her surprise and confusion….and, were she pressed to admit it, amusement.

“Well, she considered, I suppose it is safe enough. If he wished to strangle me he at least could not do so here. Once the door is closed it seems unlikely he would be able to sufficiently move his arms.

“Sir, I have no objection on principle but were we gambling I would lay even odds that you cannot even get into the room.”

“I can if I am willing to entertain a certain degree of discomfort, which I have prepared myself to do. You would be obliged to sit upon the bunk, however, to facilitate this, if you could so arrange yourself.”

Well, she considered, I suppose it is safe enough. If he wished to strangle me he at least could not do so here. Once the door is closed it seems unlikely he would be able to sufficiently move his arms.

“Where is Captain Andor, Mr. Kay?” she inquired suspiciously.

“He is up on the quarter deck with Captain Rostok discussing our route, Mr. Rook and Mr. Antilles are also on deck, as the watches are changing at present. Thus my request for audience now, since opportunities for private conversation are by necessity much limited in such close quarters and I would wish to speak with you outside his hearing.”

Unable to pass such a novel opportunity by, whether for good or ill, She closed the folding desk, sat far as back on her small bunk as was possible, tucking legs and feet beneath her, reached over to slide her small trunk beneath and then ventured, “Very well Mr. Kay, please come in and speak your piece.”

The gentleman did so, bowing curiously at the shoulders and resting head against the very ceiling, he seemed to fold himself into the small cabin somewhat after the fashion of a long-legged insect, even managing to close the small door behind him. He smoothed his dark grey coat and vest and then,
being somewhat constrained by being unable to straighten his elbows, proceeded to stand for a
moment as if in thought.

“What, sir,” she found herself biting the inside of her cheek to still the impulse to laughter, “What is it
that you wish to speak of that you concurrently do not wish Captain Andor to hear?”

“Are you well, Miss Erso?”

Damn the man, his expression was so fixedly blank it was impossible to tell any motive he might
either possess or lack.

“I am tolerable sir, why do you ask?”

“You walked abroad in the Great Cabin last night and seemed in some distress. This is not an
unknown affliction in times of mental disturbance but I wished to inquire….”

Having no wish to hear more she cut him off, “I apologize for disturbing you Mr. Kay…I assure you
I will take measures not to be abroad again.”

“You did not disturb me, Captain Andor did. He did not return to sleep again afterwards and I
attribute this to anxiety as to your welfare.”

“You may assure Captain Andor that he need not concern himself further on the subject.”

The giant regarded her calmly with over-large grey eyes that seemed to blink at intervals far less
frequent than any person she believed herself to have met previously.

“He is a good man. I refer to Captain Andor.”

What in the devil? was the only thought that came to her.

“I know Captain Andor is your friend,” she said.

The man nodded, seemingly pleased by this neutrality. “The work we do, in attempting to impede
the excesses of forces such as those who oppress for gain and incite cruelty for the furtherance of
their own power. In the support of Reason and Conscience against their opposites….”

“This is very nicely put, Mr. Kay, do you seek to recruit me for the Alliance?”

The fellow blinked again, and paused, but her impulse at sarcastic wit did not disturb him long, and
he merely continued.

“The phraseology is not my own, Miss Erso, so I cannot accept praise for it, and more formal
allegiance to the Alliance is unnecessary since you have undertaken this present mission of your own
volition, against both my and Captain Andor’s advice…”

The Hell you say, sir?

“I do not understand you Miss Erso, but that is only a minor inconvenience, for I am frequently
required to work with people whose motives and actions I cannot fathom, my concern is for Captain
Andor's well-being and continued service. The work we do is, at many junctures, rendered more
painfully difficult for a good man than one of less keen sympathy and less thoughtful morality. It is
strange that it should be so, but it is.” Kay tipped his head, in a way that seemed almost an expression
of concern, almost sadness, but without its more common outward shows.
“As Nature made him”…indeed….

“It is my belief that he has an developed a deep appreciation for you, Miss Erso.”

“The Hell you say?!” burst from her lips.

She wished urgently to stand and leave the room but it was utterly impossible.

“It is quite unaccountable,” Kay said, shaking his head against the ceiling again, “but men and women do pursue attachments to each other for a variety of reasons,” he paused as if parsing some mystery, “It is unlike him to do so, especially under conditions like this, and largely outside my previous experience in his company. I can only conjecture that it is a response particular to your individual person, since he has certainly shown no such connection of feeling or specific carnal attraction for any of the other women aboard.”

She found herself seized with a need to end this conversation as quickly as possible.

“I am glad to learn that you believe, if I understand you correctly, that Captain Andor is a man who can be trusted with regards to women, Mr. Kay, now if you please…”

“You mistake me, Miss Erso. I know Captain Andor to be utterly trustworthy in his care of those placed in his protection and those for whom he has come to feel attachment. It is yourself I do not know to be trustworthy in such regard.”

He appeared to be in deadly earnest, but it was difficult for her to credit what he seemed to be asking her.

Was this terrifying personage telling her that Captain Andor had developed an affection for her? Was he asking her not to break his heart?

“I assure you, Mr. Kay, I have no ill will toward Captain Andor.” It seemed strange to her own ears as she said it.

The giant nodded in a melancholy way then, as if satisfied. This, it seemed was what he had come for and his mission was done.

Another thought came to her most suddenly, “Mr. Kay, exactly how many women are there aboard this ship?”

“Including yourself?” Kay said, “Eleven, but except for Pamlo and Maddell they are all common sailors,” he shrugged as if this explained all.

“Kay? Where the devil are you?” came a call from the Great Room outside, it was Captain Andor’s voice.

“I am in Miss Erso’s cabin at present,” Mr. Kay said quite clearly in reply, “We are having a private conversation.”

He attempted to bow then and mostly failed, but managed to work a bent elbow behind himself to
maneuver the door open, “Thank you for your time and attention, please consider what I have said.”

As he improbably re-folded and backed himself out of the cabin she caught a glimpse behind him of Captain Cassian Andor’s handsome face as utterly undone with confusion as any man's she had ever seen. She rushed to close the door and flung herself back on her bunk laughing harder than ever previously in her memory.

Chapter End Notes

ṣe o fi ọwọ kan o? = Did you touch any of it?
Mr. Rook

Chapter Summary

A brief chapter in which Mr. Bodi Rook recalls his escape from the dungeons of Gerrere's pirates and his first meeting with Miss Erso

Chapter Notes

Wǒ méiyǒu shòushāng. Bāngzhù zhège rén = I am unhurt. Help this other person.
sülük (Turkish) Shuǐzhì (Chinese, more formal Mandarin) = leeches

HMS Rogue's Venture

three days off from the Grand Canaries

late September, 1769

The Rogues Venture beat against the wind most skillfully, but westward took longer than eastward. ‘The world turns one way and no matter how much we need it to turn another,” Captain Rostok said, when Miss Erso chafed at their progress, “As such it is often a fitting metaphor for the life of man, I suppose.”

Rook had taken to standing much up on the deck. Mr. Antilles was the helmsman but seemed now to have taken the Turkish pilot as a kind of unofficial apprentice.

“I do not know these waters well, sir. I have only sailed them once and I was hardly at the helm,” Rook had said the first time Antilles let him take the wheel in fair weather.

“Fairly said, Mr. Rook,” the Scotsman said, ”But you know the sea, sir, and she is everywhere much the same. That’s no simple sailing, the Greek Islands, from what I’ve heard. Take what you know and make it larger. The currents may be wider, and the storms bigger, her water colder, save where it is not, and her winds harder betimes, but if you have the knack of it, a man can learn to sail a new ocean.”

Beneath all his joy at being alive, whole and well-fed, asea again aboard a good ship, and his gratitude for the kindness of these people, insofar as they had sought to aide him, always lay the questions in his mind. How many of them will be left alive by the time I can get there? What will we do to stop them?
Papaz Malbus had put him down upon that path that heaved beneath his feet and said gruffly, but not ungently given the dire situation, "Run if you can now, infidel, stay close behind." So great was his pain and fear that he would have thought himself unable to stand, far less to run, and yet he did so. Staggering, sometimes alone and at other times clutching the back of the big man's coat. The pirates, amongst their number probably even those who had beaten him, stumbled around and past them heedless. After long seconds they escaped out from a tunnel that crumbled into a wide doorway even at their feet. He thought the world about them to be cloaked in a night of choking darkness, but that was only the dirt that filled the air like smoke.

Voices were shouting "Out! Run!" and "Acima! cai fora!"

Someone… the blind man Papaz Imway he knew now… had held his shoulder and said "Come! Young messenger stay with us." He found himself partly pushed and partly dragged onto a windy shore and as his feet touched the wet sand he looked up. It was broad daylight and half the hillside was gone behind them. The path that they had escaped down was no more.

Stumbling beside his new companions he managed some unknown distance before finally falling to his knees in the shallow surf.

Both of the men and himself were much caked in dirt. The sound of the earth rumbling and the shouts, all bound up with a false echo as if of bells in his ears, faded and was slowly replaced by the sound of waves and gulls.

His head ached bitterly.

Padaz Malbus pulled off his coat and waded out into the surf waist deep to wash himself, rinsing head and beard in the cold sea. The blind man stooped ankle-deep and did the same, scooping handfuls of water over his bare head, and rinsing the dirt away. After several handfuls he dried his eyes and ears with a corner of his inner robe. Carefully, with a hand extended he reached out. "Pilot? Messenger? Are you there?"

Rook reached back trembling and guided the blind man’s hand to his arm.

"Rest a short while" Imwe told him, "they will come soon."

Who? He had wondered too weak to speak the word.

Eriso Bey, he asked himself, what do I do now? Oh God help me.

Malbus returned with his scarf and shirt soaked in water, and began to gently wipe the face and neck of his sightless companion, “No. No. Wǒ méiyǒu shǒushāng. Bāngzhù zhège rén.”

The large man grunted, and only after having satisfied himself that his friend was uninjured did he
bend down to Rook.

“Come now, Infidel,” he said, “Let us see what the bastards did you for.”

For reasons he could not credit, likely utter exhaustion and despair, he did not flinch as the man rolled back the ragged sleeves of the shirt the pirates had given him after they took his own away. The fellow hissed behind his teeth at the sight of the triangular punctures.

“They cut me and put…” he searched his mind for the word in English or any language they might speak, “sülük…worms, maggots……on the wounds and said they would get inside my blood and eat the truth out of me…”

The blind man lowered his head as if in pain to hear this and the other, Malbus, lost his scowl and looked at him then shocked almost into pity it seemed.

“Boy,” he said, splashing salt water over the wounds, “Boy, they lied. They lied to frighten you. They put a poison in your arm to make you speak then put the Shuǐzhì on to pull it out again, so you would not die.”

Padaz Imway stepped carefully forward and laid a hand on Rook’s head saying some words quietly, as if in a blessing.

He would have wept but he was past that too now.

“Please,” he said hoarsely, “Whoever you are and whatever God you serve, help me. I must go back. I was sent to carry a message. Someone must stop them before they can kill more.”

The big man looked up, as if his eyes caught something on the hillside above him.

“They are coming,” the blind man said, “The English woman and the Spanish Captain.”

“Ha!” said Malbus, “and how do you know?”

“I know because she shines so that even the blind can see where she goes and he,” Imwe laughed a little, as if to himself, “he will not leave her.

The dark-haired man, whose voice he remembered from the cell climbed down onto the beach some time afterward, also with clothes torn and much spattered in dirt and unshaven. He was accompanied by a bruised and battered looking young boy, pale and just as dirty.

They helped him struggle to the dry sand and he lay down, almost seeming to sleep for some time. Hours may have passed, in which he was at times aware of what passed around him and at others not.
The Spanish man and Malbus seemed to talk and argue for some while, and Padaz Imway appeared to be determined to annoy them both.

The boy came and sat beside him with his head down upon his own knees.

By the time his senses finally returned to him a boat had come, the Spanish captain came and spoke to him then, “Sir, he said, “What is your name?”

What is my name? He wondered. Batur Farouk was dead, he told himself, they had buried him beside his mother. He had been a good man, a merchant ships pilot, a loving son, not as devout as he should have been perhaps but he had tried to serve God.

Someone else it was who had signed that paper in Farouk’s name, who had been a weak fool and fraud, made himself complicit in great crimes for mere pay, let his skills be a tool for wicked men, and had been deluded, telling himself the world was a place of such customary and universal cruelty, where the strong abused the weak as the way and the order of things, that there was nothing one weak sinner could do against it.

He would not be that man anymore either. He would use the name Sefla had called him by and Erso Bey had used when they embraced him and set him out on the current that dark night with a message on his back.

“I am called Bodi Rook,” he told them.

The man who stood beside the sailing dinghy could have walked directly out of one of his Ana’s most fanciful stories. He was seven feet tall at least, but broad-shouldered, pale and smooth-skinned with shorn hair so fair as to seem white when he removed his hat. His expression was as blank as the moon, if the moon could be irritated.

“If the entire party is to accompany us, we should go now, while the tide suits,” the gigantic man said, in English….he could have whistled like a bird and Rook would not have been surprised, so supernatural did he appear….. “Now, Captain Andor, or we risk regaining the ship.”

“Miss Erso?” said the Captain, his hair still wet with the sea-water he too had washed in, had turned and was speaking to the boy, “You should come with us.” He proffered a hand.

The “boy” was a woman. There was a time such a thing would have shocked him, perhaps, but that was long ago and in another man’s life, in any event, it was but a trifling surprise now.

The woman’s eyes had lifted to Rook when he had spoken, filled with what might have been sadness,…shame?….but now she looked at the Captain with a small smile as of grim defiance.

“I will indeed, sir.”

She ignored the extended hand and climbed to her feet

Erso? Oh God. Was this she? The daughter?
They pulled him up, and they all crowded into the small craft.

“Are you she?” he asked, as they huddled on the bottom of the dinghy and the tall man worked the sails and rudder, with Captain Andor’s help moving them skillfully into the wind and away from the broken shore. “Galen Erso’s daughter?”

She looked across at him then, huddled between the curve of the starboard side and the bulk of Padaz Malbus, who appeared to be snoring.

_Erso Bey had not said how old his daughter was, somehow he had pictured her in his mind as a child. This woman must be grown, nineteen or twenty. It was hard to tell in such garb. It was a miracle. The man had spoken in agony of his longed-for daughter, in that cabin where they few had met always in danger, in the dark of the night, to plan his escape. Was this the beautiful child that his friend Gerrere was to have found and taken to safety? The fearless and clever girl with her mother’s green eyes who had captained armies of small lead soldiers?_

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I am so very sorry.”

She was looking at his arms, and self-conscious, he covered them with the rags of the sleeves. That was not important now.

“You know my father? You have seen him?” she asked him eagerly.

“Yes,” he said, “It was your father who showed me the truth, who told me that if I used the heart that I was given….if I was brave enough and had faith …I could help the people I had harmed, fight for what was right…."

She was looking at him, pale and serious, her expression almost avid, as if she had been in some desert place and his broken words were as water to her.

She resembled Erso Bey in many aspects of her expression. It seemed to him so foolish that he had not known her at once.

“Do you know where he is? Can you take me to him?” she said.

She held out her small hand. Clutched within it was a scrap of cloth, scorched at the edges and written in blue. He knew it at once. It was the message he had carried all the way across the sea upon his own back. Most of it was gone, but the numbers and the script were still visible.

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He laid his hand across hers. “Yes,” he said, as if he swore thereby an oath, which indeed he did.
At the Mast

Chapter Summary

In which Miss Erso and Captain Andor discuss chain of command. Captain Andor shows her orders he has received from the Council and an argument ensues in which harsh words are exchanged and various regrettable things said.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

HMS Rogues Venture

October 1769

Back again at last in sailors shirt and breeches, she stood atop the cross trees on the mainmast, feet upon the yard, with the clear and open view around her. She watched the horizon, breathed the air as God had made it, and tried to clear both her heart and mind.

In her girlhood, of all work aboard ship, she had loved most to climb the mast. From those first days, after Baba Saul had brought her aboard the Onderean, she had taken to it as if born to be a Rigging Monkey.

In fair weather, when the sky showed blue and perfect above and the horizon without flaw in every direction, it was truly the only Paradise her mind could encompass.

Even the foulest weather had never caused her real fear. The danger at such times had seemed at least clean, formed as it was by a direct and immediate task requiring only strength and will to master. One knew that one should hold fast, reach out with hands, move, tie or untie sail in the proscribed order, moving up and down at need. The adversary at such times was God’s wind and rain, which neither knew nor cared for name, nation, faith or history. She found peace in a task so dependent upon the action of the body alone. Hold on and live or fall and die. There was no other deliberation or negotiation to be made.

God, how she had missed this.

As she now found to be true of many things, she had not permitted herself to feel the bounds of it’s loss until it was restored to her.

Captain Rostock would not let her take another’s place on the rigging crew at present, which she knew to be no insult of itself, for each ship was different. They knew their order of sail and she did not, but he agreed after waiting to consult with Captain Andor that she might take turns at the watch.
She had bristled at Rostocks “consultation”, indeed, more and more as she thought on it. Was Captain Andor yet her keeper or was he not? She had assumed this matter resolved at Gibraltar.

Determine to go and confront Captain Andor on the matter, she found him in the Great Room into which the greater number of the officers and passenger cabins opened, standing at the table with Mr. Melshi, one of her “rescuers” at London.

He had joined them at Cadiz and Jen had felt a certain shock when he tipped his hat to her on the foredeck that first morning out. “Miss Erso,” he had said, in utter insincerity, bowing slightly, “We meet again.” She had been truly taken aback, as if meeting again some person she had known but seen only far away in some other decade. The prison transport, Newcastle, London, the shackles around her ankles, all these seemed a lifetime ago.

As she entered she saw that the gentlemen had been looking together over a number of maps showing various renderings of the Florida coast and that these now lay spread across the table. To her incalculable relief, Mr. Kay was absent, being on the upper decks on watch with Mr.s Rook and Antilles. Mr. Melshi had sensed the wind's direction, or perhaps being warned by a glance from Captain Andor, excused himself.

“Captain Rostock makes all decisions with regard to the service of personnel aboard ship,” the Captain replied to her evenly, when she confronted him about her dislike of the assumption of his retaining authority over her. “I have only made clear to him that when we arrive at Jamaica, and…. he paused here, perhaps because the phrase ‘God willing’ seemed so inappropriate to their situation, “…dependent upon the situation we find there, on to East Florida, I will likely need you alive and unbroken. At that point, you may well find me acting as your officer, dependent on the perimeters of the mission.”

“Dependent upon the situation” indeed. God damn the man.

“I have known what it is to serve under command without question, sir, but I do not do so now, save at only sea and then I answer to Captain Rostock, as is right, and not, I hope you understand, to yourself. I had hoped to have made it clear that I do not participate in this venture as an underling to your authority but as a full partner.”

Captain Andor’s eyebrows raised and his shoulders set, but he smoothly answered, “Miss Erso, this is an Alliance ship, with an Alliance crew. I am the senior Alliance officer appointed to this action. To my knowledge the only man aboard who has sworn you personal allegiance is Mr. Rook, and I should hope you will not put him at further hazard by proposing mutiny this early in the voyage?”

An interesting conjecture sir, she thought. Though I cannot help but wonder, what consultation you have actually made with Mr.s Imway and Malbus on that score?

In truth she wondered herself what mission the two monks pursued here, for they clearly sought some end of their own. She had difficulty imagining either of them reliably submitting to a military
order of command.

She had spoken to him at Gibraltar...although, she realized now, only in general terms. He had then offered her a “last chance” to depart at Cadiz with resources and when she had refused this taken her answer coolly. Indeed, she had been unable to gauge his where his response measured between the poles of displeasure or relief. If they sailed to Florida, she sailed with them, had been her firm assertion at that time and she had taken his nod before turning away as assent.

Skirting the Canaries they had not put in at Santa Cruz but a small packet had come out to them from the Spanish port with provisions the previous day….and letters? Had his orders been changed with regard to her?

Very well, she would make herself clear again. “My father has given us the location of this dreadful plantation and proposed a way and means to attack it. I mean to do so. I mean further to free my father and the other captives who are held in bondage there and kill each and every one of those devils who have tried to conceal both their own cruel ambition and the manufacture of vile weapons through kidnapping and murder. Do our aims now differ in this, Captain?”

As she spoke she had crossed close and now found that her hands were gripping the polished edge. He, in his turn, had leaned down with palms flat upon the maps, equally tense.

“This is not a pirate crew, Miss Erso,” he said sharply. “Some of us cannot strike as we wish and when we wish."

Something was amiss here, the thought came to her. His manner had indeed changed. He drew a breath, seeming to wrestle some strong emotion back into check in order to present himself again as the cold officer she had met in London. At the end of the table lay a leather message case, half-hidden under some of the flattened maps. He took it in hand and slid it toward her.

‘A full partner do you say, Miss Erso?, read our orders then.”

Astonished, but unwilling to yield ground, she kept eyes on him even as she took the untied case and slid the document inside out with the fingers of one hand.

He stood back two or three steps then, turning toward the windows, away from her. Perhaps his intention was to give her some measure of privacy, although it seemed equally likely that his intention was to show he did not give a damn whether she ultimately determined to stab him in the back or not.

She lifted the first paper and read.

_Tavin Park_

_London_

28th of September, 1769
Captain Andor

You have received the best of maps we have available. Proceed to Jamaica and Kingston. There make contact with Captain Solo. Messages have already been sent to the West Indies and further reports to the British ports in which our agents have scope. Changes of order or additional instructions may await you with that Gentleman. Do not pay him until he had produced them to your satisfaction.

The reports you and Mr. Kay have sent us give us reason to believe that the explosive being developed is indeed many times more dangerous than the advanced powder substitutes pursued by the French and the Italians.

We know from your reports that prior to his disappearance twelve years ago Mr. Galen Erso was in the employ of Britain and other European Courts and seems to have greatly advanced upon the work of Count Dukoy at Brescia.

The Turkish escapee's report indicates that they are preparing to move the materials concealed through British transportation of dye-stuffs. It is possible that the current political unrest in the Americas will thus be used as cover for some major action.

At present the operation is still experimental and full production may have not yet begun. It must not be allowed to.

In Tarkin's own subturfuge lies the best hope we have. If this is the sole manufacture and the difficulty of procurement and preparation of the components in secrecy leads us to hope that it is, it must be destroyed utterly.

If the Turkish escapee and Miss Erso’s accounts are to be fully credited - and we must prepare for the likelihood that they are faulty either by accident or design - Mr. Erso is himself attempting to delay the project. Your comment that this may correspond with his previous attempts to escape Tarkin’s employ and hide his wife and child in order to render them useless as leverage to enforce his cooperation, has been noted, but we must prepare for all contingencies.

Mr. Galen Erso is clearly the key to the weapon’s sudden advancement.

If the gentleman is alive it may be possible to extract him, but if this proves impractical, your orders are to dispatch him directly.

Should this prove neccessary or if Erso is already dead, it is imperative that all his records be destroyed and any other persons associated with the project who might have practical knowledge of the explosive’s techniques of production also be eliminated.

Barring further orders proceed with best haste and discretion,

Mr. Davits Draven

Council of the Alliance
Another small note was included, this one written in a fine hand upon good quality of whitest paper.

London,

September 29, 1769

Captain Andor,

It is a terrible task we set you.

But we are all soldiers and know all of us too well how the possession of such an explosive of such devastating power rendered stable would transform warfare irrevocably. That such a substance would be in the hands of an organization more brutal and less answerable than any single nation at this hour must further spur us.

That such horrors and greater will come in time is inevitable, the dike which we defend leaks in many places, but if we can hold back that tide for a year, or ten, or fifty we give the world some hope yet that truth and justice will have time to advance against the Dark and one day triumph. At least we will save the countless lives that would fall within those years if we do nothing.

Delay them here Captain, for it lies with you and those you sail with. We cannot know how long the dike will hold but we know what will happen if it breaks now.

May God’s blessings be with you

Lady Mary Monmoth

The deck remained fairly steady. There had been no hard roll, either to port or starboard. Their motion had been ten knots South and west and she was sure it had not markedly changed in the few minutes required for her to read the documents.

Why did it feel as if the deck had fallen beneath her feet?

Captain Andor remained with his back to her as she refolded the papers, placed them back inside the case, all without any clear consciousness of doing so, and tossed the leather enclosure back onto the table.

Face me, damn you!

She could not speak so. If she began she would not be able to stop and they were in the middle of the Atlantic, there was no where to go.

Very well then, if she could not run, he could not hide from her.

“He said you were a good man,” she said to his back, with a small bitter laugh, Her own voice sounded tight and false, even to her own ears.
“Who?” he asked.

“Mr. Kay. He made particular point of telling me so….that you were a good and trustworthy man….I hardly thought to credit it even at the time. In my experience “good” men carry far fewer knives.”

His head bowed a little and his shoulders as well, though he remained looking out the windows at the stern. He seemed to laugh mirthlessly in his turn.

“He is wrong, then” his posture straightened and he turned then, finally, to face her, “If I was ever good I assure you I was forced by circumstance to yield that virtue up, by my own calculation, at roughly the age of eight. Still, I would think, with regards to your “experience” Miss Erso, that the trustworthiness of a soldier who held to the duty of an oath he swore, might still hold its color well against that of pirates and thieves, who fight when impulse serves and hide when it does not.”

“You faithless bastard.”

Both their voices were rising now.

“I trusted you sir! My father, a prisoner, risked his life to send this message, Mr. Rook has endured danger and torture to bring it to you and your Alliance. What kind of man betrays those who have put their lives at such hazard?”

She had, in blazing anger, already crossed the distance between them and they stood now inches apart.

He stood a good head taller than she but by instinct she found the calculations already made, her balance shifted …forward and to the side, bone and muscle prepared to either strike first or return a blow.

The glared at each other like combatants barely held in check for long heartbeats, then he mastered his temper first, with most visible effort, although still standing close, now as if unconcerned that she might strike him.

“I have not broken faith with either you or Mr. Rook, Miss Erso,” he said cooly,”and I have no intention of doing so, whatever these orders say and whatever awaits us in Kingston. I believe you both and will act according to that belief when we reach Jamaica. Although," he turned carefully and walked past her around the table, "I freely admit that, in respect to the rest of your assessment of me, you are quite correct."

A tall figure now loomed in the doorway coming in from the deck. Mr. Kay, no doubt, fully prepared to toss her overboard.

“"Kay!” Andor said sharply, “Out!”

The giant withdrew and the Captain went into his cabin and closed the door.
Jen took a moment only to compose herself, then strode purposefully out onto the deck and requested that she be permitted to begin the next watch early.

No doubt half the crew had heard she and Captain Andor loudly arguing, and near to blows. No doubt there had been wagering on the outcome, Captain Rostock however, answered her request with his usual unflappability calling Dinnes down from the mast.

Jen swiftly climbed up the ratlines and perched herself atop the rail.

It was there that Mr. Imway found her at the end of her watch, and they spoke at length.

Chapter End Notes

Somebody is going to kiss somebody soon, I swear.
Night/the Third part, within the Officer's cabins

Chapter Summary

In which Miss Jane Erso considers some of the lessons learned in her past, finds herself attending a meeting of the officers and answers for herself a question she has long harbored regarding a certain matter pertaining to Captain Andor

Chapter Notes

Buroda mi = My Brother (Yoruba)

Lying in her bunk, as she had done over the last seven nights since her tense argument with Captain Andor, Jen repeated again and again within in her own mind Marie's lectures about the foolishness of attachments of any kind. She found they lacked their former virtue.

"Do you know why they do not nail the boards on bridges? Because when the flood waters come, the riven board twists and splits. Peg yourself to others but lightly, cher, so you will not break in the deluge."

She had taken such words as gospel upon a time, coming as they did from that bold older girl whom she had so devotedly admired. Marie had been one of the Commander's chosen fighters at sea and keenest agents ashore. As one of the few females near her age, Gerrere had let Jen take much worshipful instruction from Marie, in both combat and pickpocketing.

"There are mostly two kinds of women in the world, sweet Jen, the smart ones are like steel that the world breaks and foolish ones like clay that the world grinds to dust."

The other women in the tavern their crew had taken over at Billingsgate had laughed heartily at this. "And what of men Bold Maria?" said Ayasha, egging her on.

"Halt!" Marie said, "The Lords and Sons of Earth? There is really only one type. For every rare jewel formed of some virtue, you will the find in the rest ten thousand painted millstones born to break and grind."

"Oooooh!" laughed old Suki, "such foolish youngsters! Never lie beneath a millstone if you fear being crushed, far far safer to be on top!" Jen had laughed along, although she had only the most general idea then of what they talked of.

She could recall now, what in girlish devotion she had noticed then but never marked, Marie’s brittle too-ready wit, the lash marks that bespoke a harsh past never spoken of, the way the older girl had sought out danger so very recklessly, captaining every boarding party, begging for a place in every
raid. What Jen's youthful eyes had seen as a fiery spirit to be emulated, she now, from this battered perch of twenty, had to temper with the memory of the haunted looks upon Marie's beautiful face whenever she thought herself alone, her anxious spurning of any comfort, any tender feeling, even the embrace of friends.

Fear is the nurse to a certain kind of bravery where there can never be rest nor pause in battle, for any lowering of guard might leave one prey to losses feared worse than death.

Marie never saw the end of nineteen, but had died shot through the heart at Tripoli.

Before they stitched the hammock closed over her pale face, she had looked so young, so lonely, that Jen had on a grieving impulse tucked a small cloth doll inside the shroud before they dropped her body over the side. It had been one of the dozens of crude minuscule toys she secretly fashioned for herself, a lingering childish habit in those days, made out of tied scraps of cloth or twists of hemp with knots of thread for eyes. Tiny things they had been, most no bigger than her little finger.

Sailors are a superstitious lot and pirates the worst of all, so when a scarred and bald old midshipman saw what she was doing he eyed her with distrust, clearly thinking her to be attempting some witchcraft or spell. When she told him "Buroda mi, it is only so she will not wait alone," he had then nodded and even helped her with the stitching.

She had been no better than Marie, she knew now. The Commander, in shame or strategy or belated loyalty to conscience, had turned her loose to the wind and she had spent the years since cutting away at every tie, even the ropes that might have saved her. The sole thing she had held onto was her mother's little charm, though she could not have told herself why, almost as a memory of a memory. How long could she have lived so?

Oh Marie, how many weeks would it have been before some stranger at Newgate would have sewn my shroud shut and simply tossed me into a pit instead of into the sea?

Now she was bound back toward the past at ten knots or better. Toward Papa and her Oloiri's enemies. Toward the Man in the white hat and scarf who had killed her mother, he or men of his same cut and mold. Bound with her were sixty men and women, strangers all, sworn to the Alliance yet sailing with her. By strongest bounds she found herself tied to the brave Mr. Rook who spoke of her Papa with the devotion of a son and sought his own redemption along with that of herself, the guilt-ridden and disloyal daughter. Among the number were also the tactless and truthful giant, Mr. Kay, wandering monks, Mr. Imway and Mr. Baze, who followed a path that only they could see against their same enemies, a brigantine master in Rostock of the smoothest temper and broadest mind she had ever known, and lastly Captain Andor, the riddle that most discomfited her now, her former guard and rescuer.

Why had he come back for her? Mr. Rook knew her Father's message by heart, why risk death and failure to save a mad pirate's cast-off brat? Why had he shown her those orders? Would it not have been simpler, safer to his purposes to conceal them? She had been already beguiled half to trusting him, as he surely knew. Why not wait until they reached Jamaica or even Florida, with the situation before him more clearly ordered, before he dealt with the bloody business of betraying her?

Why had she not bolted in Lisbon when he gave her ample openings, nay even instruction to do so?

As comical as Mr. Kay's interview had been, it's subject lay under her skin like a thorn.

Spanish, by birth at least, surely he had been raised Catholic.

Did they teach you what an "occasion of sin" is in New Spain, Captain Andor? She had been
among a dozen of the youngest crew left for two months of winter to be sheltered by the nuns on that rocky little Island one year and it was, strangely, the only lesson of their muddled catechism she could still call to mind: “a thing or person—which either because of their special nature, or the frailty peculiar to some individual, can incite or entice that one to error.”

_I cannot say if I am yours, sir, but I think, God help me, that you are mine._

Before the Commander’s Portuguese men had shoved them into the passageways below the streets of Lisbon one had laid a pistol square against his heart and snarled as a curse, “Soldado da Espanha,” while another spit as if the Devil had been named. He had smiled then, sunny and amused, his message clear. “Amateur,” it said, “Your little insults mean nothing and your little threats even less.”

_Her heart still pounding from the fight and her outrage still burning high, she had wondered, as if in a lightning flash, what it might feel like to kiss such a beautiful mouth._

It was a thought which despite all the anger and fear, weariness and confusion endured since, had never quite left her.

When her watch at mast ended, she was called from the deck by Mr. Melshi to a meeting of the officers in Great Room. Many maps were again laid out upon the table and Mr. Rook was there showing Andor and Kay a number of newly drawn maps he had been working on, corresponding his own skilled memory of the plantation itself and the waters surrounding and approaching it. Captain Rostock and Mr. Antilles also stood nearby.

“Miss Erso,” Captain Andor had said with a curt nod, as she entered, the rest of the gentleman also addressed her by looking up, and nodding heads in greeting, her garb rendering them perhaps uncertain of polite address. Mr. Rook smiled and Mr. Kay, unsurprisingly responded to her entrance not at all.

“We are compiling our knowledge of the area and setting up maps both to assist us in our preparation for any necessary actions of our own and to provide to our agents at Jamaica and Saint Augustine at need. Captain Rostock has knowledge of the Atlantic currents on the Treasure routes and Mr. Rook, of course, has knowledge particular to our target. It is my understanding that you also have some experience on the coasts of East Florida.”

Five men looked at her, or rather four, since after a quick glance in her direction Captain Andor moved his gaze coolly back to the charts on the table and kept it there.

“I have,” she said, “For several miles inland of the Saint Johns River and the along the coasts of the Amelia Islands, which the British call the Edgmont. I was not the helmsman on either voyage but I accompanied several shore parties and have some notion of the countryside thereabouts.”

It may have been her imagination but she thought she saw some glimmer of respect in Mr. Melshi’s eye at her speech.

Andor’s eyes remained fixed downward upon the charts “Very well,” he said with dispassionate clarity, “I have made clear to the other officers, and those likely to be called into action on the venture….dependent, as must always be understood upon any orders standing at Kingston….that you are a full partner in this endeavor and to be both apprised and held responsible as such.”

His gaze swept upwards to meet hers then, “Is this situation clear and accepted by you Miss Erso?”
A sound came from Mr. Kay’s corner which might have been either the creak of a floorboard or a disapproving cluck of the tongue. No doubt some argument had preceded her being called in but, as was habitually the case, the giant’s countenance remained unmoved.

It hardly mattered, she found the majority of her concentration focused on holding her vision level with that of the gentleman addressing her.

*The feeling engendered was akin to climbing the mast and beholding a rope was placed within her reach. She could not clearly see what the line was tied to but the decision here was the same, her senses told her, hold on or fall.*

“It is, Captain Andor,” she said.

The meeting proved a productive one and went on for a number of hours afterward. The cook, a Mr. Decks, was prevailed upon to serve them dinner as they worked, much to his grumbling. She reviewed the charts that Mr. Melshi provided and was able to make several changes that might prove useful in time.

“Mr. Imway says God is with us in the wind at least,” Mr. Antilles said as he went up to take the evening watch. “What does Mr. Malbus say?” Captain Rostock asked. “Mr. Malbus says he would rather God rushed on ahead so as to make ready and meet us in Florida.”

Mr. Rook took her hand. “This helps us to a great degree,” he said quietly, as hopeful as she had seen him. “The more we know of that coast and it’s perils the better prepared we can be. They made sure the people they held in bondage, even those of us who sailed, had no charts so that ignorance of the geography would hold us prisoner just as soundly as chains.”

The bells rang and she returned to her cabin.

The wind was holding true and the boards creaked with it but the Rogues movement was steady.

Save for the calls of the men on deck the ship fell silent save for wind and wave. She dressed herself for sleep in her third clean shift and slipped on the wrapper for warmth, carefully lying her sailors clothes in her chest for tomorrow.

She lay awake, for some hour or more, conscious of a decision that she had somehow already made without any clear recollection of the steps by which she had come to it.

Then she rose from her bunk and walked across to Captain Andor’s cabin.

A light still burned within but the lamp was clearly turned down. She stood for a time in silence and laughed at herself inwardly, for being willing to risk so much but yet dreading to gamble the exposure of knocking upon a door. Touching the handle for a moment she felt it turn on its own beneath her fingers, opened outward by one within. She stepped back and to the side then. He stood
in his shirt sleeves, undressed but clearly not yet abed.

There had been some previous supposition on her part of asking if she might enter, and a look upon
his face as if questions pertaining to doubts, or the wisdom or madness of such permission being
granted formed briefly, but none of these things were ultimately uttered. She stepped into the cabin,
pulling the door closed behind her and reaching up with her other hand drew his head down to hers
to take the kiss she had long wondered about.
Happiness

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Andor considers the nature of the change in his relationship with Miss Erso, recalling some details of the first occasion in which their connection was altered. Other members of the crew note the change.

Chapter Notes

Querido Dios. Ella era una cosa tan pequeña = Dear God. She was such a small thing. (Spanish)

Jọwọ, olufẹ mi. A wọn ọna mejeeji gbekele = Please, my dear one. Both ways go with trust. (Yoruba)

Debes decirme ... ¿es esto lo que quieres? = You must tell me ... is this what you want? (Spanish)

Pensar ¿Estás seguro? = Think. Are you sure? (Spanish)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HMS Rogue's Venture

Westward on the Atlantic

November, 1769

The most exquisitely painful moment of the whole mad business might have come several days later.

He met with Mr. Kay up on the deck. His friend had been dropping a number of small weighted pails tied to ropes over the rail near the starboard bow and afterwards pulling them back up, with the assistance of Mr. Weems. He measured the temperature of the seawater within using a glass instrument, recorded his findings neatly in pencil in a notebook specific to the purpose, and then dropped each of them over again to repeat the process. Scrupulous records were being kept, as was Mr. Kay's invariable habit, of all proceedings.

"Could one venture to ask why?" Lieutenant Melshi asked, observing the operation from the
He ventured down just as Kay seemed to be concluding his project and Weems made shift to carry the ropes and pails back to secure below decks.

"I am glad to see you have found some scientific value in this passage, Kay," he said feeling rather light of mood as he handed that gentleman back the coat he had left lying on a capstan.

Mr. Kay nodded, unsurprisingly ignoring the attempt at conversation.

Taking a white kerchief from the pocket of the proffered coat, he wiped some sweat from his shorn head and then replaced the linen square again.

"It would be more convenient to exchange cabins," he said.

"What do you mean?" Captain Andor asked.

"That Miss Erso should remove her things to the cabin I currently occupy, so that I might make use of the one currently assigned to her. I foresee no added discomfort to myself thereby, as the size of the room differs negligibly, and the exchange would provide far more convenient access for her nightly visits to and from your cabin."

Oh santa Madre de Dios.

"Damn it, Kay!" he stepped closer to his friend in hopes of inducing him to use a quieter tone, "That is quite enough."

Kay's head tilted, by far his most common indicator of surprise.

"Does the suggestion not seem a useful one?"

"No, Kay...damn it," he tried to keep his voice low and his tone neutral, "the point is not....it is just that it hardly seems a good idea to draw attention to...."

"Are you referring to the alteration of your relationship to Miss Erso to include intimate congress on a regular..."

"Stop speaking, Kay."

His friend complied with his request, although clearly without even slight understanding as to why he was being asked to do so.

Cassian Andor took a long breath.

They were weeks out aboard a ship at sea and he was not so lost in the novelty of this situation….novel at least to his own experience…..as to be able to deceive himself in regard to how little about their movements and actions could be concealed from the eyes of others.
It had been the morning of the third day, after Miss Erso had begun visiting his room, that a squall of rough weather had come upon them. Captain Rostock had ordered hands available up to loosen the sails quickly. Coming in from the foredeck, turning his coat collar against the wind, Captain Andor must have let his eye stray up to the mainmast even as he moved toward the shelter of the quarterdeck cabin. Through the rain he could make out her form distinctly amongst the others moving out on the rail. The winds were dangerously high, and he found it took some effort to bring his gaze back.

*She has no more fear of falling than a fish has of drowning,* he berated himself, *And she would call you a fool or worse to your face if you presented yourself as fearful on her behalf.*

Thus steeled, he looked down again and to find Lieutenant Melshi standing directly before him and eyeing him most warily.

"I would never presume to question you with regard to your own affairs, Andor," that gentleman said, "but I do earnestly hope you know what you are doing."

"I do," he replied.

*Of a certainly he did not.*

Neither did he ever deceive himself that Captain Rostock was unaware of the regular movements of all persons on his ship, though he knew enough of Rostock to know he considered the amorous activities of either his crew or his passengers to be of no more interest than their cribbage playing. So long as tempers were maintained, no blood was drawn, and all hands remained healthy for duty he cared not a whit.

Kay, however, was quite another matter. He had frequently heard his friends lectures upon the subject of personal health and hygiene in matters of intimacy addressed to others and had no desire to now have the practicalities of such outlined to himself or Miss Erso.

*Even less did he desire to have such lectures pronounced to him in clear tones well within the hearing of all officers and sailors on deck.*

"You feel I am exceeding the bounds of propriety in the matter?" Kay said, showing rare insight.

"Yes Kay, thank you, this regards a private arrangement between myself and Miss Erso and we
prefer it remain so to the greatest degree possible."

"Ah," his friend nodded, "I understand. I assure you I will be most discreet. Do you wish me to inform the rest of the crew as to the facts of the matter in order to spare you and Miss Erso further discussion and embarrassment?"

"No, Kay."

"Because it has come to my attention that the majority of those aboard labor under the misapprehension that you and Miss Erso were previously connected and that these present episodes of carnal affection are in pursuance of some long-standing arrangement, and not, in fact, a very recent matter."

"No, Kay.".

"Very well." Rolling down and rebuttoning his shirtsleeves, his friend took both his coat and his scientific notebooks under his arm, bowed slightly and moved back toward the stern.

He stopped, a few steps past on his journey, turned as if recalling some matter nearly forgotten, and addressed Captain Andor further.

"I do confess, to my surprise, that the effects of the change in the short term seem to be largely positive."

"What Kay?" Andor asked, despite the full knowledge that he would most likely wish he had not.

"The effects of the altered arrangement you have asked my discretion upon, at least those perceptible with regards to your morale and your physical and mental condition. Though the liaison is likely to eventually prove to be detrimental, dependent upon developments in the Caribbean, I must admit that in the nearer term you seem...happy."

There had been no question as to whose shadow he perceived before his cabin door that night and no question as to whether he would open it.

Neither considered wisdom nor present thought had the slightest bearing in the matter.

The Great Cabin lay darkened behind as she stood in her bare feet yet again….The thought Did this woman never get cold? came to him with an incongruity that almost made him laugh at his own nervousness … in her linen shift covered by the blue wrapper he had seen worn before. Her appearance was so perfectly aligned to that which he imagined...when he permitted himself the luxury of doing so....that he considered briefly whether he might have fallen asleep at his book. Her hair was unpinned and tied back with a string, and looking far darker against the shadow than the
streaked auburn he knew it to be in daylight.

*He had found her wandering thus in her nightmares weeks before. She had glanced past him unseeing on that occasion but those same eyes seemed to hold him now with perfect clarity, quite unclouded by judgment or artifice.*

It was her utter fearlessness that undid him.

Stepping inside, very close, she closed the door easily behind her and laid her free hand first upon his shoulder then up across his jaw and behind his head. She lifted up on her toes in the same instant of drawing his head downward and pressed her lips against his, lightly at the first then again, harder, parting hers beneath his own.

An officers cabin on a brigantine is a much confined space but they needed less space than they had. Her hands slid beneath his shirt and, *before God he almost winced*, it was so much as if his skin burned where she touched him.

*Dios*, was the only clear though that came to him, *It is already too late*.

She might vanish from this room in the instant and he would be just as doomed, he knew.

He grasped her arms and shoulders, pulling her back the few inches it took to reach his bunk. She whispered then, but only to gasp, “The light.”

The small safety lamp was fixed over his bunk, for he had been reading when she appeared…. *fixed as the shadow of everything he had given up without the knowledge of having wanted it…at his door. The wick was trimmed, but she reached her lovely self across him even so to snuff the flame.*

*A pirate’s daughter, reared abroad ship, was never unconscious of the danger of fire.*

The light gone, they were in the dark with each other. Her breath seemed to catch as he tried to hold her to him with one arm and reaching to pull the shirt over his own head. She half-shrugged his hands away, pulling her own inside the sleeves of her shift, wriggling, as if impatient to be rid of the garments she wore. He took the task from her, finished it. She kept only the small round wooden cross on its ribbon still around her neck.

*Querido Dios. Ella era una cosa tan pequeña.*

Her skin astonished him, soft as silk over muscle beneath, and she kissed him again and again. Then, half through his efforts and half through her own, brought her self onto him on that narrow bunk.

“Jane,” he said, as best he could, kissing her shoulder and collarbone, “Jane.”

He brought a hand to her face and forced himself to stop, and her to look at him.

“Pensar ¿Estás seguro?”

*God, he could not even hold on to his English.*
In the near darkness, there was yet enough light from the small porthole of glass for him to see that her eyes were wide.

“Jọwọ….please,” she said, “Jen, call me Jen… that is my own name.”

He kissed her breasts and touched her with his hands but she would not let him go and her heart beat so fiercely he could feel the tremor against his lips as he kissed her throat.

Jen.

“Jen, Debes decirme … ¿es esto lo que quieres?”

He could not bear much more but he was half afraid with it. “No, listen..” he said, trying to see her face again, “..is this what you want?”

“Olufẹ mi…Please..” she whispered, looking at him again with those unrelenting eyes, her hands in his hair now, “Awọn Ọna mejeeji gbekiete.”

As if able to order herself as poorly as he.

The coasts of Africa and hills of the Caribbean had not been the scene of his childhood as they had hers, but he knew what “Olufẹ mi” meant and that“Igbekete” was kin to “fiarse de”.....trust.

He found he could speak no more after that, and nor could she, it seemed, save for pressing her mouth to his neck and gasping his name almost without voice some moments later.

Able to hold no further account soon after, when all was done, he could think of nothing else but to kiss her mouth and shoulder and turn a little from her but not far, for there was nowhere to go.

She lay in his arms, her back curled against his chest in that small bed and, unaccountable as it seemed, they both slept so at least until the bells for the First Watch rang. At the sound she untangled herself from him without a word, rose, and pulled her chemise from the floor. Slipping the garment over her head she then moved, quiet as thought, out of the cabin without so much as a backward glance.

He saw her up on the mast afterward, and when the watch was done, noted she had dressed again in her women’s clothes.

Trained since boyhood to think one part while acting another, he managed to conduct his business that day mostly undistracted and they conversed at dinner in much the same form among the others as they always had. She went up on deck after and he saw her sit a long time with Mr. Imway and Mr. Malbus, playing at cards. Mr. Imway seemed to be telling her something of interest regarding the small wooden cross she wore. He felt as if he knew it well now.

Attempting to manage his thoughts without the scourge of expectation, he told himself that he should
not hope for a return of her visit. Most certainly not that night, perhaps ever.

Even taken as a strange singular occurrence it felt to have changed the world in some way he could barely fathom.

*Best to let it lie, he told himself, until he could understand what had come over him and what, if anything, it meant.*

He was wrong, of course. She returned after the Night Watch was set.

He heard Melshi leave his cabin to take his turn up on deck, and moments later she opened his door of her own accord and slipped inside.

She returned each night after and always left before dawn.

Jen Erso he was learning, possessed perfect courage in this. Having chosen a course for herself, whether it be redemption, justice, friendship, the rigging of a sail or the love of a bloody-handed soldier, she would look back only to dare others to follow.

He found himself committed to go with her.

Chapter End Notes

So that's a thing.

Be kind folks, as I once noted, I have had little occasion to write anything too spicy since the early 1980's.
Limbo

Chapter Summary

In which Miss Erso bends her thoughts to the alteration of her feelings towards Captain Andor, and the varied ways in which that gentleman in some matters still perplexes her. Various episodes in her time aboard the Rogues Venture are recalled by her and she reflects upon what awaits them as they approach Jamaica. Captain Andor presents her with an insight into himself and his history.

Chapter Notes

“Bẹẹni," "Ndiyo," = Yes (Yoruba, Swahili)

Flat out unabashed romance, gratuitous cameos, art history and references to Catholic dogma. I may be a little out of control.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

HMS Rogue’s Venture

Off the south coast of Jamaica

December, 1769

By fortunate winds, whether or not driven strategically by God as Mr. Imway so often speculated, and the aid of skillful seamanship they were set to come up to Jamaica the next day or the one after that, dependent upon a breeze that had now slackened a little.

Mr. Rook suffered agonies at the thought of delay, even if it were to prove to be of hours only. All agreed, that the venture could not hope to progress much further until they had possession of whatever strategy and aid might be waiting for them at Jamaica. Faster ships than they were to have been dispatched by the Council directly here from England, and if, as seemed likely, this vile plantation was still being funded and provisioned from English purses some word of its scope and shape was likely to be found in the sticky gossip of the low and high at Jamaica’s port.

Brave Mr. Rook suffered agonies for the fate of the people left behind in peril, for his friends, for her father. Even his gentle heart, she knew, yearned now to finally be able to strike back somehow and act against those who had ruined his good conscience, who had hurt and abused him.

Her own anxiety was no less. These weeks aboard the Rouge’s Venture had been at some level like an extended state of preparation for battle or storm, unavoidable, but not yet come.
What was it the Catholics called it… “Limbo”? A notion she had never been quite clear on, but dimly recalled hearing described as a suspension of souls somewhere between Earth and Hell and Heaven, a holding place for those innocents ignorant of truth, babes, virtuous pagans… and as she had childishly, and no doubt heretically, imagined when the Irish women had briefly instructed her and still resolutely clung to in her mind’s picture… dogs and all other sensible but illiterate beasts. It had all sounded quite pleasant to her savage infant mind but according to the prints she had seen in books and upon church walls, it was supposed to be a pitiful state and one to be avoided.

And yet, and yet… she could not help but thank Providence for this unasked-for and unavoidable delay. Freed for a time from both the poison of her fruitless bitterness against those who had, she thought, abandoned her, Papa, Baba Saul, her mother… and the burden of guilt for those she had failed… Marie, Signora Ponta and that lady’s son… these odd six weeks of the voyage had been strangely happy ones. She was at sea again, well and strong, in the company of people dedicated to a fight she knew and at least had sympathy for, no longer feeling such a stranger… what had been the old phrase, “as a goat among sheep”?… on the face of the earth.

Looking back she could make herself laugh now at some of the fits and starts of her residency aboard.

Even before they sailed out of Cadiz, Jen had gone down below decks to Mr. Forell, the Quartermaster to ask about matters… in a general way.

“Eleven women” Mr. Kay was to reveal to her after, but even so early in the voyage, and despite being much wrapped in her own affairs, she had marked at least one of the midshipmen, Maddel and the Ships Carpenter, Timker, as likely members of her own sex. A company that did not wickedly deny itself the skills of half the world’s people must provision for them, she knew, even if it did so only roughly. Forell had only rolled an eye when he saw her and shouted “Kanata!” At this a tiny wizened person had appeared, rolling a barrel that they… she?… stopped near the counter and used as a step stool. This original appeared to be nearly blind and peered at Jen’s face at a very bold proximity.

Making a whistling sound that might have been either calculation or annoyance in equal measures, this person said only, with an accent of the Eastern coasts, “How old?”

“Twenty,” Jen replied, as they squeezed her wrist and forearm in a calculating fashion, as if measuring the weight of a chicken. “Ah!” Kanata pronounced and, climbing from the barrel, walked back around to the numbered boxes and barrels lashed behind the folding table to fetch something, returning to toss Jen a squared bag made of waxed canvas, filled with necessities “Enough to get you to Port Royal, or come back!”

They then abruptly paused and, looking up at her in squinting appraisal head to toe, inquired. “Erso? An officer? The new one above decks?”
“Yes, elder,” Jen said, bowing. Which caused the little person to chuckle.

“Mucendewabasokwe? The blue sweetberry? Holy leaf? Wife’s Bay? You know this? You are a woman of a wise nation?”

“Bẹẹni,” Jen said, *for was not preparation for even the most unlikely of events always wise policy?* “Yes, please, Ndiyo.”

“Ah!” Kanata then gave her a smaller bag, this one filled with dry herbs. “Count and measure! To rule yourself is a treasure and must be guarded as such. Hmmmm…” Abruptly climbing up on the table now, the aged person lifted two fingers and used them to prize a wrinkled brow and cheek yet further apart as if to see her more clearly. “I know you, bold girl, or at least I know your kind…they always come….the few, the brave.”

“Ah!” they waved a hand dismissively then and, climbing down, walked away back toward the hold, calling over a narrow shoulder, “Good luck!”

*For, indeed there had remained through all those first days aboard, the prickly matter of Captain Andor.*

That Andor was pretty she had marked from the first moment she had laid eyes upon him at that house in London. *Not so boldly or fashionably handsome as to be remarkable of course, oh no, she felt sure, not unless the role called for it.* She had seen such men before in the employ of a dozen nations and companies.

*Indeed, he might have come from a printers book of images,* she had thought then. “A” *to stand for either “Agent” or “Assassin” depending upon the letters of type available.* That he was there with the chiefs of that Council of the Alliance and named as their representative, trusted with both command and her keeping, told her of his intelligence and dedication to his cause. All she knew of the Alliance was that, while they did not serve those named and marked as villains and, as such, not subject to attack or harassment, the Commander had parted from their confederation long ago over points of strategy and engagement.

As a child she had stood back by the cabin door. ”Dreamers! Netcasters!” Saul had raged to an Alliance agent who had approached them as they took on goods off the Cornish coast. “You fight for hopes? The oppressed cannot eat hope! You sail for some distant horizon!…. but I stand in the water with the blood and the sharks!” but the blue-eyed boy, with a patchy blond beard… Mandine, Jen thought she remembered, something French…. had stood firm about whatever bargain he had come for. The Commander had threatened and howled but in the end had given him guns and a boat, snarling only, ’Tell her I am done! Tell her never send to me again!”

“One of his lieutenants had barked in scorn as the fellow had rowed off toward the cliffs but Gerrere had swiftly struck the man silent with the back of his hand. “They may be insensible fools, gulls, fantasists,” he said in a controlled tone, poised midway between anger and sadness,
"but they are none of them cowards."

Captain Andor was not a fantasist, to appearances. Nor was he to any conventional definition she knew, a coward. He fought well, very well, she had seen that at Lisbon. How old could he truly be, despite those sometimes weary eyes, a handful of years her senior at most? It took rare skill to fence equally well with either hand. Those knives she had taken from his coat the first time he left her alone on the ship at Southhampton were well balanced and well-maintained. She had watched him set up and load a brace pistols to keep at the ready below the rail, as a surety against any unexpected trouble when they approached Cadiz, and noted that he did so quickly and well, like a man who knew the task well enough to execute it blindfolded.

Something began to grow in her perception of him, though she could not tell quite when. Things he might have done with those in his charge and yet had not, drew a mirror-wise kind of respect from her. A man of decency may, if in possession of an actors skill, feign the actions of a bully but for a bully to convincingly present his opposite is a far harder task.

She began to note other incongruencies as well.

His passionate defense of Mr. Kay as his friend, and his reluctance to hear that odd gentleman spoken ill of had confused her. And then...

She had been on her knees in that burning room. How had he found his way there? Climbing down that broken hillside in silence for what seemed hours he had reached back to stop her falling again and again, as if without thought.

Something in the way he had spoken to her at the bottom of that hill, when they reached the shore, had needled through even her shock and distraction.

"Jane..." he had begun, then seemed to stop himself, "Miss Erso....Are you injured?" She had hardly known herself. The strength and instinct of animal survival had brought her off that cliff and down but words and thought had been beyond her. He asked again and yet again, relentless, and she must have finally made some reply or movement.

Stay here," he had said, and she found herself kneeling upon the sand beside Mr. Rook, unable to look at more than the ground before her.

"I am sorry." She had thought she heard him say, although she could not be certain, against the surf and the throbbing in her ears. Then he had turned away, as bruised and bloodied as herself. Had she but imagined it?

What sort of assassin saves strangers whose welfare cannot aid his mission? He had argued with Kay that no one could be left behind. Why? He had offered her her freedom at Gibraltar but made no contest when she attached herself to this venture. What did he want? She found herself unable to measure him by any tape she possessed.

None of which will be clarified, stupid girl, she had told herself after, by allowing yourself to be distracted by recurring preoccupation with such things as with the curve of a jaw and the shape of a hand.
She was not the only person he remained a puzzle to. “What can you tell me about this Andor?” Mr. Imway had asked, “I sense an air of the murderer about him, yet his actions belie it. What do you think of his face, Baze?”

His companion looked up to where Captain Andor stood then, near the helm with Captain Rostock. Jen expected some rough jest from Mr. Malbus, but he seemed instead to consider his instruction most seriously, looking long at the Spanish officer with great consideration. “No,” he said, finally “He has the face of a friend.”

Mr. Rook, as well, defended him, in their private conferences. “They are helping us.” that true man had said to her as they sat together on the deck, those first days out from Cadiz. She sat beside him whenever she could in those days and listened, fighting back tears at every tale he told. Rook's relief as they left Cadiz was palpable. He had endured so much to reach this point and his noble heart pressed him to fight on. “Your father begged for help, for someone to believe and to come, and the Captain has committed to doing this. I ask no more. Dear Miss Erso, I had almost given up hope in that prison, but I have found it again.”

Rook's heart was better than hers she knew. Perhaps he saw virtue where her jaded eyes could not.

*What sort of man behaved at such cross-purposes?*

She had been badly struck by his reckless action of showing her those orders with regard to her father, clearly willing to risk her wrath and contempt….maybe worse.

*Why? Why tell me this?*

She had found herself asking Mr. Imway on the mast.

“Do not be unjust in your anger,” that gentleman said, "You speak of Captain Andor as a soldier of war, and so he is, but I find myself also reminded of a peasant boy who stands on a cliff above a river. He tries his own strength there, as much as the edge. Does he dare himself to jump, hoping that the water might take him to a freer place he longs for? But oh…..what if his nerve fails him in the jump, or he has misjudged the depth of the water, what then? Fear can look like anger at such times.”

The monk had chuckled to himself but Jen, in no mood then to credit Captain Andor with any sympathy, spitefully replied, “A chance for freedom seen but not taken is worse than a broken neck.”

“True, true,” Mr. Imway had said, gazing out with her at the perfect horizon he could not see. He smiled then, rather after the manner of a conspirator, “Of course you are right, bold diver, but even you must credit the task a little harder if the boy is also blind.”

Mere days afterward, Captain Andor had revealed himself to be much braver than she had unjustly taken him for. Having made clear that he believed her, he proceeded to back that belief by actions. Risk, indeed. “A chain of hopes,” he had said to her in Lisbon.

As sometimes happened, when the quiet hours came she found a pattern in what had seemed only fragments to her before, and sensing a course she had walked through a darkened room to a cabin door to pursue it.

*Very well then, sir, let us stop walking to the edge of this other cliff as well.*
It was not merely the pleasure she found with him that so astonished her, although that had proved as fierce as any she had known since she came to understand such things, it was as if her heart had been returned to her, newly refitted, and she felt bound to test the gleaming thing to it’s limits before the world could take it from her and break it again.

He seemed equally surprised by what was passing between them, as if he were so unused to even simple happiness he could not credit it. “Are you sure?” he had asked her, each night for the first seven she came to him, as if somehow afraid he yet misunderstood her. “The answer is the same,” she whispered back, laughing against his neck, “No matter how many languages you ask it in.”

She saw that surety mattered greatly to him, and could not help but wonder at it. For most of her life she had been content to measure certainty in teaspoons, but that she wished to lie in his arms seemed to her the surest answer she had ever found.

The eighth day after her jump into the river she came down to change clothes after her watch to find Mr. Kay dragging a number of trunks through the Great Cabin over to her door.

“Miss Erso,” that gentleman said, “Will you at least show sense and agree to a change of cabins with me? Captain Rostock has agreed we may settle the matter amongst ourselves.”

Oh.

“I am sorry, Mr. Kay,” she found herself stammering, “I hope that…..”

Aboard the Onderean, before darkness settled over the crew as firmly as over her captain, this would have been a matter of the Mate shouting, “Damn you randy ferrets! You will shut the hell up and let the rest of the crew sleep or you can share a hammock in the lower hold and keep the rats awake!”

“There is no need for apology,” Miss Erso,” Mr. Kay said seeming, if such a thing could be gauged from that gentleman’s blank countenance, pleased to understand her meaning. “You and the Captain do not disturb me of yourselves. I have taken to placing balls of cotton soaked in paraffin wax in my ears at night and find that protects me from a number of minor nighttime annoyances and ensures my rest. I suggest this change merely as a matter of convenience for all concerned.”

Moving her few effects proved a short matter. Later she heard Mr. Melshi, as he returned to his own quarters, call out, “Kay? What the devil are you doing in here?”

“Miss Erso and I have exchanged cabins.”

“Have you?” the officer said, pitching his voice most clearly, “Oh, thank God, I was about to ask you to lend me some paraffin from your store.”
She resolved to beat Mr. Melshi most soundly at cards that night after dinner.

The days of the voyage passed and they worked and acted as fellow officers and crew by day and spent part of the hours of each night sharing his narrow bunk, with few words passed between them there save in whispers.

The rest was must lie ahead around the bend.

_Ah God, where was this river taking her?_

Now they neared Jamaica.

“Have you ever been inside the Hall of Audience of the Palacio de los Virreyes de Nueva España?” He asked this almost conversationally, as they leaned, conscious of the proper and careful distance between them, looking out across the rail of the port bow. The Rogue’s Venture had shifted course to the North and Northeast and bore them now toward land again. Only days remained before they should make sight of Kingston Harbor. Land was not in sight yet, but it soon would be and thus would be its direction.

“I have spent but little time in palaces of any nature,” she said, “Veracruz and Havana I have seen but Ciudad de México is too far inland for any business I might have accompanied in New Spain.” She stole for herself a glance at his profile beside her, “Or is your question more in the nature of a riddle, or the opening of a tale?”

He half-smiled in his turn but his gaze remained on the horizon. “The latter, I suppose, but neither in truth. You know what “Las castas” are, do you not?” _She thought she did._ "A most popular subject for paintings. Prints and copies are made of them sometimes and hung in all government offices, and they are gaining popularity on the Continent as well, I am told, as illustrations of almost scientific interest.” He continued, dispassionately, “A very fine set graces that hall within the Palacio and I myself have seen them there. Sixteen portraits hang, each portraying two parents and a child, representing each possible mixing of the various peoples of New Spain. The English fancy themselves great categorizers and the Germans even more so, but Spain outdoes them all. Organizing all the vast nations and persons under her sway into sixteen orderly boxes of birth, shade, and relationship. All is determined by one’s placement on this grid, this mathematics of purity that determines what one may wear or buy, where one may walk, love, live and be buried. Thus they tax and conscript, pay and punish. One child, whose mother lies, or worse yet will not speak, whose shade does not quite find its match within the chart….such a child undoes all the work of Empire. The system despises such anomalies, I can assure you. Numerous fanciful names are invented in order to attempt their description. Most, as you may imagine, are of a derogatory nature but my favorite is “tente en el aire” to ‘hold in mid-air.’ What do you think, in such an orderly system becomes of such a child?”

She knew much of what those in control did to maintain their power, but she also knew that any
answer she could make now would sound glib. He was not asking her a question, rather he was giving her a gift, one bought at cost to himself. She sensed that the only pay that she could offer was her attention, so keeping her eyes upon his face, she said, as quietly as sea and wind would permit, “Tell me.”

“He vanishes,” Captain Andor said, and turned to look at her. “He becomes a spy and lives his life to tear their charts asunder.”

He smiled at her then and she knew that whatever came after, she could not love a man more than she did him in that moment.

The ships bell rang and he bent to kiss her hand, the first time he had made such a gesture above decks, although he did so often below.

The wind had freshened now and she could feel it on her face and hear it in the sails.

“Miss Erso,” Captain Cassian Andor said, “I believe it is time for us to meet the other officers and principals and make our plan for how we will best manage affairs at Kingston Town, and Port Royal.”

Chapter End Notes

Actually got in trouble as a wee tot in Catholic school for hotly debating the "Of COURSE dogs...and my pet bunny....go to Heaven" position to the Blessed Sisters of Loretto.

Coming up soon: The disreputable Captain Solo
Chapter Summary

In which on Captain Han Solo, smuggler, presently in the pay of the Alliance, prepares to meet those he was retained to contact in Kingston Harbor, Jamaica. Including some short ruminations by that gentleman on his own prospects and history.

Chapter Notes

Hello Captain Solo.

He aha ta koe e hiahia ai kia mahi ahau ki te tinana? = What do you wish me to do with the body?

Tou = Yours

Ka taea e au te kite i tetahi pouaka me te puehu Karaitiana?= Should I find a box and Christian dirt?

Ka taea e ahau te maka ki roto ki te moana? = Or am I able to just cast you into the sea?

Ae. Pai. Ka maka koe ki te moana ka tango i te waa. = Yes. Good, then. I will throw you into the sea and take the ship.

E mohio ana koe ki a ratau? = Do you know them?

Tenei indigo. He mea kino tenei. = This indigo. This is a wicked business.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
"He aha ta koe e hiahia ai kia mahi ahau ki te tinana?" his friend inquired.

The word for "wish" being very similar to the word for "command," dependent upon how one pronounced it, and given that his friend had fully half of a roasted fowl in his mouth as he spoke, Captain Han Solo felt he was more than justified in being momentarily confused as to his meaning.

"Body! What body? King George's Balls! Did you kill someone before I even got here you savage bastard?"

His friend chewed, swallowed and wiped his mouth with a hand so patterned with lines and shapes of black ink that his natural tanned skin could barely be seen upon it.

"Tou."

Such a wit.

The disreputable Hanover Tavern was one of only three of size still standing in the Old Town and, as such was teeming with drunken thieves and thieving drunkards. Every bench and table was filled, excepting the immediate space around his massive friend, whose ordinarily alarming appearance was now augmented by his present use of the point of his own dagger to remove some errant fragment from his teeth. Solo sat upon the rough bench and laid his elbows upon the littered table.

"Ka taea e au te kite i tetahi pouaka me te puehu Karaitiana?" His friend passed a mug of ale over to him while speaking, which the Captain gratefully seized. While his First Mate shunned strong liquors himself it was a frequent habit for him to purchase them in such establishments and hold the libations in reserve for Solo's arrival, since the Captain so often had need to avoid direct conversation with landlords.

"Ka taea e ahau te maka ki roto ki te moana?" the man asked.

Solo drank the wretched stuff back and replaced the half-empty tankard on the table before answering.

"I thought I made my funeral instructions clear. I am to be carried to the docks by twelve beautiful women, who shall lift my mortal remains with their shapely arms and lie me…wrapped in cloth-of-gold may I bloody well add, sir…on the deck of the Falcon. There, amidst wailing and tears, I shall be pushed out to sea and the ship set ablaze like a fucking king of old."

"Ae. Pai. Ka maka koe ki te moana ka tango i te waa."

Solo finished the rest of the ale. His friend was watching the doors, although his decorated face made his gaze as difficult to follow as that of a mask for most people. Solo was used to him. They were probably safe enough in a crowd like this, and he had caught sight of no one in need of active
avoidance on his way in but “safety” was a state subject to change at any moment for Captain Solo in the main ports of the Caribbean. He kept his collar up and his hat down.

“We have a few hours to dispose of, before this meeting but it is best we leave separately when we go. You head out first and check the docks. We will need to ferry across to the new Harbor, so find a boat. I will meet you there shortly. These fellows are reliable to pay in hard coin but they’ll want to see it all first and no doubt press my brain for the juice of any extra knowledge they think me to have soaked up.”

“E mohio ana koe ki a ratau?”

“Know them?” Captain Solo shrugged, as if to indicate the question had no bearing, “the odds lie against it, these fellows change flags as often as a Paris wench changes sleeve ruffles, and they seldom live to pension out. They are…” he glanced over a shoulder to ascertain that no eyes could see the table, then linked his thumbs, spreading the rest of his fingers out as if to fashion the shadow of a bird with wings open.

His friend grunted.

“I fully anticipate your rebuke, thank you sir, and I assure you I was in utter earnest when I swore I would carry for them no more, but you know as well as I…” he glanced sideways again, “They pay better than any…” he let his voice trail off, then finished, as if in response to his large grotesquely patterned companion’s raised eyebrow, “at least any I can ever stomach working for again.”

His friend nodded with eyes closed. His usual signal of grudging content.

“Tenei indigo. He mea kino tenei,” he said in the quietest voice he possessed.

“Aye,” Solo agreed “Aye, that it is….I think…” he rubbed a hand over his eyes as if overcome with an older man’s weariness, for all his twenty five years, “Aye, that it is.”

His friend rose and laid a cartooned hand briefly upon his shoulder, then went out to secure a smaller boat to fetch them over to Kingston Port before the appointed hour. The Falcon herself must remain in one of the dodgy illegal wharves off the old graveyard on the Atlantic face of the Palisadoes spit. He did not like to be so far separated from her but to bring her into the orderly, well-lit and well-watched wharves of Kingston Town proper was to court disaster at the moment

“Khaeuri!” he called over his shoulder, “Get me another drink before you go!”

His friend but growled one of his habitual curses, which generally involved comparing Solo’s appearance and habits to those of a dog, and passed on without honoring his request.

He managed to persuade a weather beaten but spritely lass nearby to go fetch him a jill of rum, “Only a jill, sir?”she asked, pausing meaningfully.

Ah Jesus wept, the girl could not be a day over sixteen. There was far harder work than smuggling and worse fates than the noose wasn’t there?

He held up the two thin coins that were, in truth, the last in his pocket, and kissed her non-too-clean hand without hesitation.

“Sweetheart,” he said, for what need was there here to add another lie to the wicked world’s store? “I am but a poor brother-rascal with naught but these poor pennies in his purse and a moment’s rest to fortify himself before setting out to earn bread again this cold morn.”
He held the two coins together, so that they might look as one to any eyes that watched. “Bring me a half jill with one and keep the other hid for yourself as a wishful token for better days.”

The girl palmed the coins and a few minutes later returned with the measure, departing his company wordlessly to seek more profitable tables.

He looked at the spirits. It was short of the measure,…bless the little thief…but seemed to be unwatered. He tipped his hat to her across the room, downed his rum and departed.

Port Royal depressed his spirits. Nigh on eighty years ago it had been the wickedest city on God’s blessed earth, they said, until earthquake and wave had washed the better part of it into the sea. In his boyhood, he’d heard it said, on calm clear days the masts of a hundred ships lost and the roofs of merchant and pirate kings mansions were still visible under the water. If they had been once, they were no longer. He knew, for he had looked.

Since then it’s ruins had been rebuilt and burned at least twice. The ghosts of dead buccaneers, some said. Others credited the desire of the His Majesties Governors to prevent the old hard-to-control position at the Harbor’s mouth from rising again. Both, Captain Solo reckoned. The main port now lay inside the great reaching arm of the Palisadoes bar, so that to enter it you must pass the chastening facade of the Fortresses and batteries and cross to the fair and orderly, wide and straight wharves and streets of Kingston. Where there was just as much wickedness, he ventured but all was much better lit and a far greater portion now wearing gold braid.

*God how he hated it.*

The West Indies were done for the likes of them. The end of the war had brought order. Britain and Spain and France were now holding hands, like brothers who despise each other but have finally decided who shall have which joint at dinner. They still eyed each other’s necks, of course, but there was endless supply of sugar, silver, and human souls to be sold as chattel and they were at the moment content to share and share alike.

*The Commander….Saul Gerrere, the last Lion of the Seas….was dead, the man at Southampton had said so. Surely such a mustache would not lie?*

Solo had only ever half-credited the legends but….still….one wanted to believe that somewhere giants still walked the Earth.

He could not save the world. It was all a clever wayward second son could do to save himself and his friend.

*They were skirting the edge of a very nasty business here*, his guts told him so and his guts were seldom wrong….frequently unlistened to but seldom wrong…. but these angels of the Alliance paid well. With careful management, maybe even enough to get them to the East.

He had always wanted to see Madagascar….. although his friend claimed to have been bitten by some weird sort of monkey there and it had given him an unnatural prejudice against the whole continent. For a very fearsome fellow he had odd anxieties about trivial things….. and there seemed
to be opportunities on the Pacific, or the New Spanish coasts thereof. He had an odd sympathy for the North American Provinces too, nothing good could be said about the weather, of course, or the beer, but the people of Newfoundland and the New England ports were a practical and likable lot.

Europe he found he had lost his courage for.

The clouds had cleared. As he made his way down to the water’s edge and the straggling docks, he could see across the Harbor’s mouth to the Fort and behind that to the mountains.

*He wondered if Alando was still alive and up there.* Word was that the free people of the mountains had made their own nation and government. Maroons they were called….**bless them**….and were strong and secure enough to have maneuvered a bargain with the British for terms and alliances.

*What terms?* he wondered. *The bastards usually only sold you liberty on short lease and the price, all too often, was somebody else’s.*

Khaeuri still blamed Lando for the manner of the breaking of their partnership but Han Solo could not. Who was he to judge such choices?

*Well, great good luck to you, old fellow,* he thought, looking up at the mountains. *I suppose we shall never meet again for it is my vowed intention, if I survive this project, to never darken Jamaica’s shores more.*

He proceeded down to meet his friend as arranged and they took a small borrowed boat out to catch the tide and beneficial winds to take them over Kingston Harbor to the Port for a rendezvous arranged many weeks past back in England.

Chapter End Notes

Not joking. The late 17th to mid 18th century was a bad time for earthquakes/floods/catastrophic fires….people got a little twitchy about it.

Maori, by the way.
Kingston Harbor

Chapter Summary

In which Lt. Melshi and Captain Andor discuss matters pertaining of their mission ashore at Jamaica. That gentleman expresses concern about the friendship between the Captain and Miss Erso and ways in which it might alter the nature of their mission. Captain Andor私下 shares these concerns.

Chapter Notes

Holidays have delayed updates. Back at it!

Clothes.

Kingston Harbor

Jamaica

December 20, 1769

“I beg of you Andor, to tell me we will not be long here,” Lt. Melshi said as they sailed around the point, past the battery and the first of the many fortified emplacements on the shoreline to port. Leaving the tattered remains of once proud and wicked Port Royal to their starboard they crossed the Old Harbor at good speed toward Kingston.

“I hardly care what awaits us after. This island is a prison.”

He could not find it in his heart to disagree. These brooding fortifications had been built at the great harbor’s mouth a hundred years ago by the Spanish to repel the British. After the Surrender they were rebuilt and strengthened by the British in order to repel the Spanish and the pirates. Now it seemed they raised their walls and placements just as firmly to keep a captive population in. The fair, straight and orderly wharves and wide, lined streets of Kingston were laid so as to discourage fires, it was said, but they were designed just as much to enable the swift movement of troops from the garrisons in street-to-street fighting, and to promise a swift evacuation of the ruling elite should those thousands held in bondage here rise again to fight back.

“We must meet with this fellow, Solo, first,” Captain Andor said. “Doing so here gives us a chance to resupply and set a properly convincing cover if, as seems more than half likely, we must then needs circle round to Nassau under a British flag and try to move without raising suspicion for St. Augustine.”
“Damn the British. Had they bargained differently seven years ago we might be setting our trail from Havana and going forward under Spanish flag.”

Andor shrugged...*in his experience Spanish bondage was no less brutal than English, it was only less salted with Protestantism,*...“And so we might in three years time, if we were yet spared and our enemies a little slower on their cruel play. Do you think these devils care? My guess is that Tarkin’s Spanish is as good as his English.”

“You are sure it is the old Grand, himself?”

“The Council thinks so,” the Captain said, “Hence our orders and hence our haste in executing them. They consider that the grand master himself would take the risk of a crossing only if he knew the project likely to have already born fruit, so that he might claim credit for the harvest.” He watched the shoreline and counted the number of ships at this end of the well-laid wharves. *Twelve merchant ships and two frigates, two dozen smaller packets. Enough to render them unremarkable, but not enough to hinder them in turning and departure in a helpful tide.*

"I tell you Melshi, I saw firepower used at Setúbal the like of which….” he found that the memory of that shattered hillside deprived him of the words he needed, and left him able only shake his head.

“It has born fruit, Rue," he said. "We cannot fail here.”

*He did not share with Lieutenant Melshi Mr. Draven’s suspicions regarding the current whereabouts of Ritter Vader. The dearth of sightings for that gentleman’s scarred countenance in Europe, under any of his usual aliases, for almost two years stirred many fears. None dared to hope him dead. He had last been seen in Portugal near the Spanish boarder, hunting Kenobi some said. Save for a handful of rumored sightings of his ships at Havanna a decade ago, Vader had never played a direct role in the Americas. Perhaps that was about to change? Draven and Merrick were both assured that the New World was to be the next flash point. The dread commander had allied with Tarkin’s faction before.*

There was no point in raising that dark specter until needed.

"Hopefully useful information awaits us in this prison that we can fashion into a plan," he said, drawing his eyes from the approaching shore and turning back toward the Quarter deck. “We need to set ourselves for action. The sooner done the sooner gone.”

Lieutenant Melshi laid a hand upon his arm then, as if to hold him as he turned.

"Andor, I hope you know I do not question your command on this venture," the gentleman seemed most ill at ease. "What I ask now, I ask only as one who has known you long and counts you among a small circle of surviving friends. Are you quite assured still that having Miss Erso accompany you ashore for this project is the best course of action?"

*Ah. Here it comes. Very well then. Let us have it out.*

“I thought I made my reasoning quite clear when we met yesterday, Lieutenant, but I will lay it out again if you require reassurance,” Cassian Andor put greatest effort toward making no outward show of either annoyance, defensiveness or doubt.

*This must be carefully handled.*
Ruescott Melshi was the best of men, he knew. Bold, intelligent and loyal to the ideals of the Alliance, as all of them were, no matter the sacrifice demanded. They had crewed together since he had stowed away on Reikken’s ship and that gentleman had seen in him some merit for their cause. It had been Senora Tano who had first paired him up with an Alsatian beggar boy whose name he had pronounced wrong for months as they both learned English together. If Lieutenant Melshi was expressing doubts it was likely that others shared them but did not speak. This was a state of affairs Cassian Andor could not allow to continue. Many among the crew knew Melshi well and trusted his leadership. If the officer’s mind could be put at rest upon this matter it would go far towards settling the discomfort of others.

"We are set to present ourselves as a commercial merchant vessel here and have precious little time to waste setting up subterfuge," Captain Andor outlined patiently. "The vile economics of this port is such that nearly every vessel that trades at Jamaica and moves Northward trades in lives as well as goods, but the visible presence of female passengers aboard, most especially that of an officer’s wife, will go a very long way to deflecting suspicion and comment as to that lack. It is also essential that the hand of the Alliance cannot be seen here, and Miss Erso is a new face to any who might be watching. I know better than to suspect you think it likely that the lady will quail at the danger, or require unusual protection, and I can only remind you that it was you yourself who saw her action at combat and compared her favorably with the Devil himself."

He regarded his boyhood fellow soldier as evenly as he could. “We should settle this now and here, Rue, for once we commence ashore I can and will brook no hesitation regarding my orders. Tell me plainly if your doubts lie with Miss Erso’s suitability for the task assigned her here or with some aspect of my judgement regarding her?”

Lieutenant Melshi pitched his voice low, turning so that their conversation might be rendered as private against the shoreward wind as any aboard ship could be.

“Forgive me then,” he said, “I unreservedly agree Miss Erso is as capable as any operative I have seen, and think her as committed as any recruited to our cause in my time. We have all dedicated ourselves to a course that we requires we find friendship when and how we honorably may. Only those of us who….well, to be quite fair only Kay and myself I think……retain a personal concern, for we have known you long enough to know that such a connection is not a….usual thing for you."

“My old friend, We have none of us kept our hands clean in this fight but I was sent along a path of shadows long ago while you travelled another way, he found it on his tongue to retort. In many ways you know me far less well than you think.

But Cassian Andor stopped himself, took a breath and held his temper firmly, taking the flash of his own anger apart to see the makings of it. These thoughts were unjust. Melshi was not wrong.

This was not a usual thing for him. In truth, this connection with Miss Erso was such unknown country to him that might as well have been Atlantis or the moon, but it could not change the task that lay before them.

“Andor,” his friend asked, meaning well and seizing on what he took to be a hesitant silence. “I
venture to say you are in love with the woman. No one with a heart not made of stone would question any desire on your part to protect her.”

“Lieutenant Melshi…” the Captain began but amended himself, “Rue, my friend, affection and whatever stuff my heart was or is made of does not matter to what lies ahead of us. We are committed to stop these people and stop them we shall.”

Jesús, you are worse than Kay, he thought and did not suppress a small smile. “Besides, in these many weeks I think you have come to know the lady well enough to venture some guess as to how she might react if she thought anyone was trying to protect her.”

He clapped a hand upon the officer's shoulder. “The matter is closed now Lieutenant,” he said, “Come help me prepare. I need to shave and practice my Portuguese accent in English.”

Miss Erso emerged from her cabin shortly after he was dressed and otherwise prepared. Their light luggage was already bound and ready to be carried ashore. She had dressed herself as arranged, with some help, to his surprise, from Mr. Kay. Having taken clothing from the trunks, in the form of an English gown with a skirt of cotton printed with a design of sprigged blue flowers and green leaves and a closed, pinned brown silk bodice, she had set herself up with a fashionable appearance and somehow managed to press a better sheer cotton apron and kerchief and a small and neat pleated linen cap from Lady Mary’s supply. A blue velvet ribbon was tied to decorate her neck and a pair of pearl earrings....had her ears always been pierced? How had he not noticed this?.....had been procured from some locked box. He did not doubt but that her small wooden charm and it’s Eastern stone also lay concealed beneath her chemise. Her hat was tied with a red silk ribbon and he felt certain that the pin that held it was sharpened steel, as well that she had a dagger concealed in her stays and at least one other small blade sheathed either in her garter or a sleeve.

No one could ask for a sweeter picture of a former pirate transformed to a Madiera wine merchant’s English wife.

“Dear God,” she said, “What have you done to your face sir?”

He had questioned it all himself the night before....far more than Melshi or Kay could ever have done..... as she lay against him in his bunk during that small and precious hour or two in the dark between their embraces and the sound of the bell that marked the change of the Watch, at which sound she always slipped back to her own cabin. He found that he could say things to her there… and she to him, it seemed…that he would have censored from his speech before others, or in daylight. “Above decks” was the phrase she used to describe the world beyond this cabin.

“This will be very difficult,” he said, quietly against the back of her neck.
“Playing a good English wife or not knifing every waistcoated murderer I see?” she whispered. She might have smiled, he could not tell, but he found that he was not in jest.

“Both,” he said.

She drew his arms more tightly around her then, if possible, and pressed the curve of her back against him.

“I know,” she told the darkened air around them.

The Rogue was now rechristened the Lady’s Gambit. Not long after she docked, Mr. Charles Avelar and his wife disembarked.

After a short walk to accustom themselves to the sights of Kingston, and to arrange the purchase of some necessities, they and their servant hired a chaise to take them a short distance from the port, up the road to Spanish Town, were Mr. Avelar had business. The hour being late and Mrs. Avelar still weary from the voyage, they stopped as arranged at the Ferry Inn for a meal and an evenings rest well away from the bustle of the Port.

It was there that they met with Captain Han Solo.
Mrs. Charles Avelar

Chapter Summary

A very brief interlude in which Miss Jane Erso considers the difficulties of her apprenticeship in subterfuge and espionage. Mr. Kay acts as dresser and Captain Andor advises the lady.

Chapter Notes

Yes, it's kind of a high-stakes dress-up party in the Great Cabin of the Rogue. Forgive me for the clothes. It's a compulsion and I cannot help myself.

It is a practical impossibility to get oneself into back-lacing stays, believe me, I know.

Even slightly-real-to tell-a-fantasy-sci-fi-story-American-History is a rough place.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kingston Harbor, Jamaica

and environs

December, 1769

It would not have entered her mind to reproach Captain Andor with regards to the matter. He had warned her from the very first suggestion that it would be most difficult, for her and for all of them.
The Ships Master Gunner, Mr. Cor, had volunteered to come along to act the role of an enslaved servant, and was supplied from the seemingly endless store of trunks with a fustian jacket and waistcoat, cut well in English fashion as befitted a successful merchant’s man and all accompaniments thereof. He and Captain Andor clearly had much previous acquaintance, for the confidence involved in such a project was great.

“¿Captain Andor, son los botones correctos?” he asked at the Great Cabin door, but the Captain had answered him in English “We must play it seamlessly from the dock onwards, Baldwin. Check with Kay.”

One of the other sailors, revealed as a member of the sisterhood of eleven, was a slim midshipman named Hera Syndalla. She had acted the role of agent in the West Indies in her girlhood and now elected herself to serve as Jen’s “maid.” Syndalla joined them in a pale blue gown suitable for a well-off ladies personal servant, although Mr. Kay had to search to find a sleeve of just the right cut to conceal the bird-winged tattoo on her upper arm.

“Sometimes I inquire of myself where an Englishman-born, who stands near seven feet tall in slippers, learned to straight lace French stays,” she said holding her ribs and groaning, “And then I recollect that I have no real desire to know the answer.”

There was a certain light-heartedness to all their sartorial preparations that masked the real risks they all took. Cor and Syndalla were vital to the shore party by virtue of their African descent and their experience as agents, but the risk they took was the greatest, not least because they dared not carry any weapons themselves in case searched. Jen noted Midshipman Syndalla making sure that the leather cord that bound her pocket was strong and sharp enough to cut if required to and nodded as she showed her the concealment of an additional knife in the false side of one of the trunks, where it might be reached quickly at need. For all the trappings of pantomime Jen was painfully aware that this was not even remotely in the nature of a game.

"My birthplace is more accurately placed as Scotland.” Mr. Kay, who among his other myriad duties was apparently the ship’s costumer, tartly corrected Syndalla and that lady laughingly apologized for her unwitting insult.

Jen felt herself to be the weak link in a chain, by virtue of being the least experienced Alliance operative on this part of the venture. In the years after her departure from Gerrere’s company Jen had lived a dozen lies, taken on many names and guises, but her aim had always been her own survival and whatever theft might be necessary to accomplish the same. Never had she undertaken a masquerade where the lives of others depended upon the quality of her performance.
“You have often seen such women,” Cassian had said to her, a few days before, when the plan was broached.

And despised them, Jen thought.

“Aye, and robbed them,” she said.

“A demure new bride on her first voyage at her husband’s side will be expected to say very little. English women are still rare birds here so most will be content to stare or fawn. Be shy, be polite. If they ask you of anything it will be with regard to fashions or gossip from England. Where shall you be from?”

She had considered upon the question. “Cornwall,” she said.

A captain’s daughter from Penzance might marry a Madeira merchant met on familial travels but no one here would expect even a well-off Cornishwoman to be remotely current or fashionable.

Besides, she thought, it might help her better recall the cliffs above the tossing sea and the little house at the end of the meadow.

She had forced herself, through all these weeks of confusion and preparation…..and this unexpected respite she could not dare call happiness, even to herself…..not to think of Papa.

“Stay by me,” he told her. “Don’t kill anyone unless I tell you to and keep your eyes open. You are likely to note things the rest of us miss.”

“The contact is Captain Han Solo?” Cor had said, as measurements had been taken for shirtsleeves “His ship is the Faucon San Rival?”

“You have personal acquaintance with the man?” Captain Andor asked.

“I? None sir,” Cor replied as he tried on another waistcoat. “I know him only by reputation. He sails a single masted sloop of extraordinary speed, it is said, with a crew of never more than six, and that six changed often. All save for his First Mate…who is said to be a fearsome fellow.”

“Is this the first mate who might or might not be an East Indian cannibal?” Syndalla said, tying on petticoats.

It occurred to Jen that such a First Mate might prove a good incentive for frequent changes of crew. It also seemed to her that Solo was a name she dimly recalled, though she could not be sure it was the same man. Smugglers all looked alike but surely she would have remembered a cannibal?

“We will deal with Solo,” Captain Andor had said….and Jen found that that “we” affected her more than she would have credited…..“The fewer of us he sees the less of our company he can betray if pressed.”
Ah, you do not like this fellow, Jen thought, or at least you do not like the mold that he is fashioned from.

When she joined her “husband” on the deck, the crew was finishing work tying up. She had caught a glimpse of Mr. Malbus at first working hard at the ropes and then, as he tied off, approaching Mr. Imway, who sat with his back against the fo’castle wall. As Malbus moved back from the rail he glanced in her direction with a rough chuckle and could be seen to whisper in his friends ear. Mr. Imway laughed delightedly and held a hand up toward her as if in greeting.

Damn the bastard monk, he is telling him how I am dressed.

It was a strange sensation to blush at the thought of a blind man’s opinion of one’s clothes.

“It is hard to take you for yourself, sir,” she said, standing close to ”Mr. Avelar”, as befitted a new bride in unfamiliar surroundings.

He wore a cut away silk frock coat with covered buttons, breeches of a matching pattern in blue on grey ground, and a buff waistcoat of fashionable length for a young ambitious man of businesslike demeanor and more than modest means, along with snowy white shirt with good cravat and sleeves.

No wig, thank God, only his own dark hair tied back, and a good hat with braid and feather. That he had shaved nearly unsettled her altogether.

She felt, quite unreasonably she knew, that he might have given her some warning of the change, for he looked now barely older than herself, save for a weariness in his eyes, as he looked out on the ordered fronts and boarded wharves of Kingston. It occurred to her that she had no idea of his true age, and so she steeled herself to ask when….if….she might find herself again in that safe current they sometimes managed to sail.

“Mrs. Alevar,” he said, giving her his arm, “it is time to go.” His voice and accent was not his quite his own. Christ! but he was good at this.

“It will not be for long,” he had told her, below decks, the night before, “Two days, three at worst, but there will be many eyes on us for many reasons and we cannot be marked for what we are.”

It almost came to her to be annoyed at this, to protest her capability, but something in his grave tone arrested that impulse. Her thoughts brought to her the memory of her Olori speaking in just such a
voice the first time he taught her to walk the ropes on a boarding party under fire.

“It is not about who is bravest or strongest, when one runs the ropes. It is about not falling. Not falling is a trade, àṣàdí, like any other. It has its tricks.”

They had been sitting upon Captain Andor’s bunk with just light enough through the small casement to see him by. She had slipped her shift back over her bare shoulders in preparation to depart, but he had halted her this one time, reaching to hold her two hands with his own as he spoke.

She calmed herself at the sight of his serious expression. It was his trade to teach then, and hers to learn. “Where should I watch my steps?” she said, “What are the best places to grasp the ropes?”

He understood her meaning and told her several things she might best do.

Amongst his lessons was one that ran thus, “If you are suddenly lost or at risk in your feelings….it may seem almost like drowning….fashion for yourself some simple thing that can be done out of sight and silently and set that in your mind as an anchor, a reminder of who you are and where you are.”

He showed her a trick he had of pressing his thumb against his forefinger.

“Is it so simple as that?” she asked, wondering.

“Sometimes it can be,” he said.

Now as she looked out on the bustle of the mornings activity on the docks and streets before them, brave Midshipman Syndalla standing behind with her arms hidden and eyes downcast, Jen felt a cold shiver that she never had on any mast in any weather.

Mr. Avelar took his wife’s dainty arm in his own, as she took his hand she pressed her thumb gently to his fingers.

“My dear husband,” she said looking at that handsome young gentleman’s face, in an accent she hoped recalled her lost mother’s, “Let us see what lies before us in Kingstontown.”

He assisted her in putting her foot upon the gangway and they went down together into the city with their servants.

A number of the wealthiest dealers in town were most glad to meet with Mr. Avelar with regards to contracts for good wines and spirits. His company for such supplies at Porto and Madiera was well known. The quality of the additional goods he had brought for his British backers, chiefly in the form of woolen cloth and tea, was also most excellent. He was willing to fix price for wares of similar quality next year and was obligingly amenable to taking good quality sugar in payment now and
setting some contracts on credit to be redeemed upon his return journey. His backers were most interested in dye-stuff and as he had already taken on Brazilwood and cochineal, he made many inquiries in the town about the price and quality of any indigo available.

Several of the representatives for the merchant houses and plantation companies chuckled to themselves and ventured to each other that sending a young man out to bargain new contracts when newly wed, might not have displayed the sharpest of business sense, though in general they were impressed with Mr. Avelar and most charmed by his petite and pretty wife. The delightful couple were asked to stay by several well-off clients and a man with most of his mind on trade would surely have been expected to take advantage of such opportunity for connection.

Mrs. Simon Taylor, however, related to her husband that Mrs. Avelar had shyly related as how that they had been married only eight weeks ago at her uncle’s home at Madiera and had commenced upon the voyage immediately after. It was easy then for all to understand why Mr. Avelar might be overeager to conclude his day’s business and seek the comfort of his lodgings earlier than shrewd dealing might warrant.

Sometime after a good dinner at Mr. Simon Taylor’s fine town house, during which they were urged to return and stay through the New Year if their business permitted, their man brought round a hired chaise and they departed for their lodgings convenient to the Spanish Town Road and their next day’s travel.

Mrs. Simon Taylor watched from her window as young Mr. Avelar helped his bride into the chaise and seated himself beside her as their girl, no doubt a wedding gift from the Madeira uncle, climbed up to take her place beside the driver. As they drove away that estimable lady could not help but sigh.

She was by no means a sentimental woman, and considered that Mr. Taylor’s annual income of 47,000 pounds, 2000 slaves, three houses, two ships, outright ownership of four plantations with controlling interest in a dozen more, and greater political influence than any gentleman on the island, up to and including the Royal Governor himself, more than made up for a great many personal shortcomings and disappointments over the years. Notwithstanding, she found herself wishing for just a moment that he at least once had looked at her the way Mr. Charles Avelar looked at his pale young wife as he carefully lifted her into that conveyance.

Chapter End Notes

I think Diego Luna maintains that fine fine facial hair for two reasons: 1) it is
devastatingly hot. 2) It is probably embarrassing for a man to be carded in bars after 35.

The Ferry Inn/ The first part, pertaining to Captain Solo's interview

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Han Solo meets with the somewhat mysterious Mr. And Mrs. Charles Avelar and attempts to bargain with them based on additional discoveries he has made on the coast of Florida.

Captain Solo may have, as it is vulgarly put, "bitten off more than he can comfortably chew."

Chapter Notes

More small bits.

Wat denk je ervan, kapitein? = What do you think about it, Captain? (Dutch)

We moeten de kapitein vragen, matroos. = We have to ask the captain, sailor. (Dutch)

Una buona sera a tutti voi = A good evening to all of you. (Italian...badly pronounced)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Ferry Inn
St. Catherine’s Parish
Road from Kingston to Spanish Town

December 22, 1769

The Inn was just outside the lines of Kingston Proper on the main road to Spanish Town, whence the Colonial Government offices had moved after the great earthquake had dumped fully half of Port Royal into the sea as punishment for her many sins. Now all the cleanly brutal merchant trade of the
island took place at Kingston and the messier and slightly less profitable tumult of governance took place a few miles up the Fresh River. There being no bridge across the usually shallow crossing a ferry did brisk trade transporting all who came by horse or carriage to do business over the line in St. Catherine Parish.

The Ferry Inn was an ancient and honorable establishment, with a taproom and victualing house popular with common travelers and screened parlors and airy rooms in the spacious whitewashed stone Inn for the better class of gentry.

Captain Solo had brushed his coat and donned a hat kept in a bag in his trunk on the Falcon just for such occasions.

Khaeuri had assured him he looked well enough, but Captain Solo wished now that he had asked Sabe for her opinion, she being the only woman remaining with the crew he sailed now. She was a plain sailor at sea but a dandy ashore and although she had, in her own words “as much an interest in the fashion of men as a fish in the fashion of shoes” she would at least have given him an honest opinion of the state of his coat.

Damn these angels of the Alliance, why they couldn’t they conduct business in a proper low pub like ordinary mortals?

His First Mate had chided him roundly for his grumbling, and he knew well enough how the reasoning of these fellows must run. This “business” of the Florida indigo plantation… he did not know for certain the flavor and full outline of their venture against it and he did not wish to, what he had seen a hundred miles south of Saint Augustine where the Mantazas and Indian River wandered into the sea was more than enough for him…..must be silently managed and there was not gold enough in the Vatican to bribe the rum-soaked tongues of Port Royal.

His orders were to go to the taproom of the Ferry Inn for three nights running in late December and wait for someone to contact him.

Spies, saboteurs and magicians, these Alliance usually hid in plain sight. When you took the Starbird’s coin, for all you knew, you might find yourself reporting to a fat English ship's captain, a Greek maid, a native boy of twelve, or a fully saddled Arabian horse.

He maneuvered his way into the busy tap room just after noon to find that a package had been left with the landlord, Parker, for a “Captain Corelli” … ah, Italian, the ladies always liked that…… with enough coin within to pay for a bed and a meal for a night or two, perhaps even more than with care.

He ordered a spiced meat pie, ale and tobacco and spent a pleasant afternoon reading the three month old London newspapers and smoking. Evening was near on when a dark-skinned fellow dressed as a footman, or something very like it, came down to ask the landlord for a bottle of wine to be sent to his master in one of the upstairs rooms. Nothing of note in any of that, half a dozen or so such transactions had already passed while Solo had killed time there, but as he came near Solo's chair this man paused and reached down for something on the sand and sawdust strewn floor.
“Sir,” he said, politely, “I believe that you have lost a button from your coat.” He laid it on the table, bowed, and went his way.

Solo looked at the button, it was plain pewter, scuffed and bent, cheaply pressed with the figure of an eagle with wings spread.

*A fellow in Cadiz had tried to recruit him for the Alliance many years ago. He admired the boldness of these people, he truly did, but he found he also prized his own precious life far too dear to sell it for a shadowy dream…besides, these sort of games would have driven him mad in a week’s time.*

With a sigh, he pocketed the coin, set his jaw and went the way he’d seen the fellow go.

Up the narrow stairs, before the entrance to the public areas for gathering and refreshment, were rooms that could be closed off or divided as private bedchambers and parlors for guests of the better sort to rest and be served in. He saw the velvet footman go inside one of these so he tapped lightly on the door.

It was opened and he immediately found the man he had followed just inside, now holding a pistol pointed directly at him. This “servant” grabbed Solo by the collar and brusquely pulled him into the room, shoving his hands to the wall. The Captain’s carefully brushed coat and person was patted down most thoroughly. Only once he had been relieved of envelope, dagger and pistol, did Solo find himself released.

*Una buona sera a tutti voi,* he said, turning to face the room with his best rakish smile and straightened his great coat sleeves with an exaggerated dignity.

The dark-skinned fellow remained stern of expression merely turning to another man who Solo now saw standing by the fireplace. A very small fire having been lit against what was a slight evening chill, for Jamaica. “Nothing else upon him,” he said to the man, “Unless you want his shoes off of him.”

“Oh, I don’t think that will be necessary,” the standing fellow said with a faint smile.

He was young, light-skinned but dark-haired and lightly tanned as if from travel. There was something self-contained about the fellow, and he wore that fine patterned coat and waistcoat as if he were doing the garments a favor by it. “I’m sure Captain Corelli understands we mean no insult and are simply being thorough.”

“Leave us for an hour and check in with her. Take care,” he said to the man who was most clearly not his footman.

The other did not bow so much as nod, like a soldier taking orders, and departed without a word. He closed the door behind him and left Solo’s pistol, sans cartridge and ball now, lying by his knife on the table in the center of the room.

The man in the coat was still standing, but Solo perceived that they were not alone in the chamber. A slim young woman in a fashionable but not opulent silk gown stood by the window.

She was pale but pink cheeked, perhaps even a little freckled under the powder she wore, and a strand of light brown hair strayed from under her cap. *Pretty enough, from the right direction, but unsmiling.*

“Please have a seat, Captain,” the dark-haired young man said.
May I?” Solo asked, gesturing with open palm to indicate his pistol and knife.

“Of course,” His host said nodding pleasantly. The man projected utter unconcern.

Solo found he did not doubt the sincerity of that show. The captain knew himself to be an excellent shot and a fine swordsman but he had been in a sufficient number of rooms with a sufficient number of killers to know that this fellow could handle a blade quicker than he could.

Well and good. These were not errand boys, they were the fist beneath the glove.

It was the woman, however, who stepped forward before Solo could reach toward the table or attempt to claim his property upon it. She lifted the pistol, glanced at and down the barrel, checked the flint, and took a delicate sniff at the mechanism, even running a slim finger over the pan then touching it to her tongue.

Damn the girl, she was checking to see how recently he’d fired it.

Why don’t you just ask love? he thought. It was but four days ago.

She eyed him with the same appraisal a cat might, and with eyes just as green, then handed the gun back to him. The man glanced down for an instant, as if trying to suppress a small smile.

Solo pocketed his now-unloaded pistol and slid the knife back into the sheath tied beneath his waistcoat while taking a chair in utter defiance of good manners. The man walked round to pull one out for the lady, and when she had settled herself, sat in the third chair. “My name is Avelar,” he said.

“Shall I assume this then to be Mrs. Avelar?” Captain Solo asked.

“You shall,” the man said.

Solo tipped his hat but young Mrs. Avelar continued to regard him as if suspending judgement. There came a knock and a voice at the chamber door. His hand itched toward his now-unloaded pistol, but since neither Mr. nor Mrs. Murderer envisaged the slightest alarm he kept his seat.

It proved to be only the landlord’s boy with the wine and three glasses.

The letter in the envelope had been passed to him at Southhampton by an Alliance operative he had met once before at Dublin. The name had changed, only the splendid mustache remained the same.

“Why me?” Solo had asked.

“Because you have the fastest ship,” the fellow, who had called himself “Merriman” at Dublin, had said.

Sail across to the West Indies at breakneck speed, up to Saint Augustine and then hug the coast to see what could be seen and get around Jamaica to be in Kingston to meet before the 24th. For this he was to be paid a sum that would clear his pressing debts, pay his crew and set the Falcon, himself and Kheuri into safer waters.
Simple? Well, he wasn’t a fool, these people fenced with devils and a man might get scorched or worse, but it seemed straightforward enough.

It was his own curiosity as much as business cunning that had almost gotten the better of him at Ponce Inlet, if he was honest with himself. He would have no one else to blame, as Kheuri seemed almost grimly delighted to point out to him, if this all went wrong.

The man who called himself Avelar unsealed and read the papers which seemed to consist of only two handwritten sheets and a folded map, with an unchanging countenance, then passed them to his fairer counterpart.

There was something about his gesture as he did so, as well as in the glance that passed between them across the table, that sent a most unaccustomed shiver down Han Solo’s spine.

He was suddenly keenly thrust into the recollection of a tall man making the same motion, that of sliding papers to a woman, this one in a yellow dress and white cap, all within in a narrow room, with a carpet on the tiled floor and a door that opened into a small bright garden. “Wat denk je ervan, kapitein?” the man had been saying. Solo reckoned that he must have been very small, for in his memory his head had barely reached the tabletop.

Bloody hell, he had not thought of his parents in long long years, but he still remembered that his father had always called her “Captain.”

We moeten de kapitein vragen, matroos, had been what he said, laughing, and swinging a small boy up to ride upon his shoulder.

Ah God, what a thing to think of now.

“You put in at St. Augustine? “ Avelar was asking him at the present moment.

Solo availed himself of the wine. Two of them. This might well yet take on the flavor of an interrogation unless he played his cards soon.

“I did,” he said, “but only for a day. I passed the messages given me to your man there and set straight out on the next tide, much to the displeasure of the fort's officers. I then came South, by plain skill of sail against a less than convenient current I wish to assure you, putting in at the Matanzas River and coming up that way there for a time…. too long a time almost …. for I reached here but yesterday morning.”

“Those were not your orders,” Mr. Avelar's dark eyes were sharp, now.

“I made a judgement. There seemed a great deal of unexpected traffic on the coast that it seemed good for me to avoid.”
“You put in at the old fort?” the woman asked.

“Aye,” he said. “The British claim to man it now but the poor fellows keep dying of fever, it seems…and then carelessly falling into the river so their bodies are never found, most negligent of them.”

He smiled but neither Avelar nor his bride seemed amused.

Herself seemed keenly suspicious about the river, as if she knew the geography.

*Fair enough, pretty lady, but if it was easy, everyone would do it.*

It had been a fools gamble at many levels. Solo himself had feared they’d have to row for it before that lucky wind had picked them up on that becalmed stretch of washwater, and Kheuri’s opinions on the matter hardly bore repeating.

*Best give them the meat of it then, he risked all if he made them too angry to bargain.*

“I think I saw your plantation, set back from Mosquito Inlet to the sea,” he said.

The woman looked up at her "husband" quickly and he laid a hand upon her shoulder, in the barest gesture....reassurance?....warning?.....From such cool customers as these that rated as the equivalent of an earthquake and though Solo knew he should not have been, he found himself curiously pleased.

The man's eyes narrowed darkly. *Which Solo suspected was about as much warning as he ever gave anybody before he cut their throat.*

"You damned idiot," he said quietly, "were you seen?"

"I was not, sir."

*Come now! Do you think I do not know my business you bastard? I did not gain a price on my carcass in two dozen ports by getting caught.*

“I beg confidence of you, sir, as a fellow professional if nothing more, that I would not be here to tell you so otherwise. We held back on the Matanzas until it was full night and slipped out the Inlet, sails down in the dark with the tide. God himself and all his alligators didn't see us. What we found in the tangled rafts of the mangrove on the waterway five miles out was more than enough to teach us caution."

Taking the wine again he poured a glass for both of them and refilled his own.

"From the inlet I suspect all that could be seen even in daylight is a good plantation house of that Cuban stone they seem to mine locally, a few outbuildings and a dock. The stink of the indigo is hard to miss, but far back in the meanders of the forest swamps a great many oddities are lurking."

"Such as?" the man asked.
So he told them...about the corpses of birds with badly burned feathers, of the strong stink of saltpeter that two of his crew, twins named Leonis, knew far too well from their days as powder monkeys to mistake for anything else, of the broken hull of a smugglers boat, sunk with rocks in a backwash inlet, and the bodies...not whole ones, bits, ragged clothes, a single arm being the largest, all stained bright blue, wedged up where some alligator had cached it, and the box tied back in among the trees, tied round with a flag of pirate red that young Marcheur had found, based on one of his "bad feelings", filled with crumbled powder of what might be dye....

"Where is this box?" The woman interrupted him.

"On my own ship." Solo said, leaning back in his chair and applying great effort into a feigned casualness, "tied up back at Port Royal. I saved the arm as well, if that interests you?"

Well, it was a risky play, but at least he now had their fixed attention. For all his savage friend’s dark doubt about using the information gained on the Florida coast for a renegotiated bargain, Solo was reasonably sure that he might now wring a few critical extra pounds from this Alliance fellow. Desperate times called for desperate measures. If he didn't get sufficient coin to pay back Jabbar's men by the end of the year it would hardly matter who cut his throat, the well-dressed Mr. Avelar or one of cartel's hired assassins in a dark pub somewhere.

Chapter End Notes

Han Solo, the "if money is all you love, that's what you'll receive" years.

Hopefully I am not boring the hell out of everyone with this historical oddity.
Chapter Summary

In which the Captain Andor, Miss Jane Erso, Mr. Baldwin Cor and Midshipman Hera Syndalla review the progress of their mission ashore. Captain Solo is discussed by the party at large.

Miss Erso considers again her new compatriots in the Alliance, and engages in a familiar ritual to relieve her discomfort and distress of mind.

She considers Captain Andor's distress as well and finds herself desirous of comforting that gentleman.

Chapter Notes

If you have ever been in the position of bathing while on a sailing ship, or under any circumstances where clean water is at a premium, this is a familiar ritual and totally woks.

Pearlash = baking soda, a very mild alkaline/lye, not at all caustic in small amounts and most soothing and cleansing to the skin.

gill = a liquid measure, usually of liquor equal to about one half cup.

Capitão. ..você tem certeza de que está pronto? = Captain. ..are you sure you are ready? (Portuguese)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“Does it pass?” she had asked him, as she stood in her shift and stockings, regarding the silk gown as it hung upon the pegs to air. “Mrs. Charles Avelar” seemed to hang there as well, after the fashion of an empty snakeskin.

“In time,” he said, quietly, from his seat on the chair behind her, “the greater part of it, at least…..if one is lucky.”

_Oh my dear sir, you have done this many times, have you not?_

This knowledge did not alter her feelings toward him, although she realized now that he had greatly feared it would do so. Aboard the Rogue, when he had taken her hands below decks and talked to her of how such things were played, his aspect had been as of one who was gambling his last possession. The way he had held her that night had been somehow more tender and more desperate, as if he thought it their last. Then it had seemed to her that he dreaded some physical danger of this venture ashore, but it had surely been this that troubled his heart.

She felt be-grimed and hollow from the impersonation of a simpering, blind-eyed, slave holder for little more than the span of one day. What must it be like to wear the skin of some despised other, day upon day for weeks or months at a time? How had he been able to bear it and not despair? How did any of them?

Mr. Cor and Midshipman Syndalla reentered the chamber immediately after Captain Solo left it. Both of them, in fact, had stood a disguised guard outside while that gentleman was within, as a surety for his conduct. Together they four sat to discuss the dispatches and the interview of Captain Solo at length.

“A baby buccaneer,” Syndalla summed the fellow, “Longing in his heart for the glory days of Drake and Windu, Morgan, Kanhoji and Grace O’Malley.” She shook her head as if with pity.

Captain Andor removed his coat and laid it upon the bed. “We could well use a man of his nerve and skill, were we but assured he had the stomach for the long fight.”

Jen was surprised at his tone, for she would have wagered he heartily disliked the fellow.

“You trust him?” she asked.

After Solo tried to bargain with what she felt to be her father’s life, and that of Mr. Rook’s compatriots, she had been more than mildly tempted to gut him then and there and try after to get the
body out the window and into the river under cover of darkness.

*Her Olori would surely have done so, she knew, the moment the fellow first mentioned sailing the coastal river against orders.*

Andor smiled at her. To her enormous relief it was recognizable to her as his own half-unwilling smile, not Charles Avelar's.

“Trust him not to betray us by direct action?...yes,” he said, “If the man intended such he would have done so already in far greater safety. He lacks the guile to convincingly act that kind of part I think, even if blackmailed. More to the point,. you saw him when the boy knocked at the door did you not?”

She had. *The startled fool reached for an unloaded pistol then stopped himself, half abashed. Were these bloody stays not so tight she might have laughed aloud.*

“Did you note which way he started to turn, before he corrected his overreaction and elected to lower himself back into his seat?”

Jen tried to recall the scene.

*They had set the scene so that his back must be to the door, purposely putting him at disadvantage and Solo had at first moved as if alarmed, though afterwards the smuggler had made great show of brazening out. Cassian had been to his right as Solo had been addressing him the moment before. She stood to his left by the window.*

“On the turning of the latch he began toward Mr. Cor….” she pictured the man's hand jerking toward his coat, but…”yet he moved to his left even as he did so. Awkward... It almost seemed as if he meant to pitch toward the doorway and not to back away from it,” A brief and amusing show of clumsiness but hardly what one might expect of an experienced law-breaker. " ‘Why?’ Miss Erso wondered.

“To cover you had a shot or some other danger come from the door,” Captain Andor said. ” I doubt he was fully aware of positioning himself so. His thoughtless instinct being to place himself between danger and the person he perceived weakest in the room. Such men can be gulled by the Enemy. They can be outfought or killed but they do not seek its service.”

“Has anybody had sight of the cannibal?” Syndalla asked.

Mr. Cor had spoken with several held in bondage there, as well as the freedmen and servants gathered at the stable yards and tap room. Captain “Corelli” it seemed had arrived alone some hours earlier on a horse that looked to be hired from one of the shabbier liveries in Kingston. If this renowned cannibal First Mate or other of his crew had come out they must be positioned some distance away from the inn.

Directly after leaving them Solo had paid off his account with the landlord by writing it over to theirs and departed the Inn... Syndalla had learned so much from the kitchen servants, several of whom had been most admiring of the Captain’s dashing looks and careless manner. Before tipping his hat farewell to them the rakish man had also requested and paid for two gills of rum to be poured in his own flask and that a whole cold roasted duck he had ordered earlier in the day be wrapped in paper. These items secured, along with a loaf of bread and several oranges, he departed by the River road.

As he had arranged to meet with them again next morning on the road back to Kingston, it seemed clear the the captain had secured a private resting spot nearby and provisioned for the feeding of
someone of good appetite there.

Plans for tomorrow and its contingencies were outlined as best they could be. Mr. Cor had been assigned a bed in the attic room above that kept as accommodations for “better” serving men. The “girl” would normally have been expected to lodge in her ladies room but Mr. Avelar’s presentation of himself and his wife as newlywed made their otherwise extravagant and unusual engagement of a separate small closet for “Helen,” far less remarkable than it would have otherwise been.

After bringing up from the outside kitchens two cans of hot water to set by the fire, some small towels and two basins, one large and one small, for her “ladies” ablutions, Syndalla helped her out of the silk gown and the outermost layers of petticoats, showing her how to stow the many pins carefully. Jen in her turn helped the midshipman loosen her own stays, then took her hands and bade her goodnight. It seemed so inadequate to her gratitude that she could think of nothing else to say. Until a few weeks ago she had barely spoken to the woman, for they had usually served at different Watches aboard the Rogue.

The Midshipman was a few years older than herself, with a heart-shaped face and pretty, serious features. Her hands had the callouses of a working sailor but she moved with the confidence of a soldier in the field and with a kind of sad steadiness.

“You did well today,” the woman said to Jen, holding her hands in return.

“Helen” then retired to her own small space for the few hours rest she could earn before she would need to appear up and ready about her “ladies” business.

Back aboard the Rogue, when Syndalla had first appeared in the Great Cabin volunteering her services for this venture, Jen had chanced to overhear Captain Andor speak with her individually, “Capitão,” he had said to her quietly, “...você tem certeza de que está pronto?....” She had moved quietly into another conversation with Mr. Kay, at the other end of the room, in order to avoid the appearance of eavesdropping. So it was that while she had had seen the woman’s shoulders straighten and her head held high at this address the reply given to it had remained by her unheard. Mr. Melshi enlightened her slightly some minutes later, mistaking the cause of her unease, “She commanded a cadre based in Brazil a number of years back but most of them were lost and she returned alone after a leave of convalescence. Unwilling to be reassigned command since and yet equally unwilling to leave the fight she has asked to work as a common seaman. I assure you Andor knows her well and is confident she can well manage this business.”

Jen thought she understood. Once you have seen the true battles fought behind the stage scenery of the world you cannot “un-see” them. These people were braver than she had been upon that day the Commander left her in that watchtower. Knock them down and they would fight still upon their knees, taking each chance as it came, until they won the day, or all their chances were spent.

Between the two of them all clothing, petticoats, ornaments and shoes were arranged for airing overnight and wear in the morning.
All duty done, Captain Andor rose to check the locks on the doors. That accomplished he carefully laid the patterned waistcoat aside, so that he stood now only in his shirt and breeches. It came to Miss Erso that she was with him alone now in a room both larger and better lit than she had ever been before.

Placing the smaller basin on the table, he used a little of the hot water to wash his hands and face, drying them on the small linen towel.

She in her turn laid the larger basin on the floor near the fireplace, and from her trunk took a square of cotton cloth and the bag of pearlash and small bottle of oil.

“What are you doing?” he asked curiously.

“Washing in something better than a bucket of cold seawater, sir,” she said. Her tone affected to lightness but having laid the other linen towel upon the floor, she looked up to meet his gaze and found that she could not.

“Please avert your eyes sir. I promise I will not be long”

*Surprise seemed to show more clearly on his face shaven than unshaven.*

Miss Erso hoped he would not question her request, for she hardly knew what her answer might be, or why it seemed of such painful importance to her that a man whose bed she had happily shared these four weeks past should not look at her now.

Blessedly, he said “Of course,” and bowed slightly, as courteously as if they were strangers and not two persons intimately acquainted to each other. Turning then to the table he carried one of the chairs nearer the window and seated himself with his back toward her.

The sun was setting outside so lamp and candles now began to take up the greater share of the lighting of the room.

Very quickly and methodically she took up the task of washing herself just as the women of her Olori’s crew had taught her on shipboard long ago. Laying her shift aside upon the chair and turning her charm upon its cord around to her back, she crouched beside the basin. Pouring a cup from the
can of warm water she first dissolved a little of the white lye ash in it, then poured the mixture over her unbound hair and wrung it out into the basin. Twisting and piling the hair atop her head she then stepped her feet carefully to stand in the basin itself. After soaking the cloth well and scrubbing her all skin, she poured the remaining clean water by cupfuls over herself to wash the ash away.

_The rule of the Onderan at sea had been at least one seawater bath weekly. Oh how some of the crew had howled at the requirement! But her Quartermasters had been most inflexible upon the point. “The Commander has decreed that you shall die in battle and not of some scabrous fever! So all wash yourselves you rats!” At good port, or even after heavy rain, fresh water was always portioned out as luxurious as pay and each crew member had been allotted six cups, seven for women if requested. Old Suki would measure the water and laid tarp beneath them. The girl, or boy Jen supposed, who used their full measure but spilled not a drop would be granted an extra ration of cheese. Marie was taller than the rest of them and had long hair that curled, but she always won the cheese._

Finished with this, Jen stepped out of the small basin and crouched over it again to pour the last cupfuls of plain water through her hair and wring it once more, combing with her fingers. Pouring a little of the oil onto her hands she rubbed the water off of her skin as best she could then used the small towel to dry first her hair, then her little charm...placed right way round now and last of all her feet All this was done most carefully there by the fireplace.

_Seven cups, Suki, she thought with some pride, and not a drop spilled._

_Oh how you would laugh if I told you I used the extra cup and a little oil of almond because it is my honeymoon._

Something seemed to catch in her throat then and she felt required to lay a hand upon the mantle, as if for support.

_No. No, àṣádì. Stop this,_ she scolded her self, surprised by such sudden weakness. Why tears now?

“...Are you unwell?” Captain Andor asked, concerned but sitting still by the window, as good as his word.

Her own name was not said aloud for such was his discipline of himself that there would be no risks of a slip while this endeavor lasted. He had warned her it must be so that last night in his cabin.

Yet there was a pause in his voice where he would have placed the "Jen,” and she felt it there, unspoken.

Pressing her thumb to her forefinger again she drew a slow breath and more slowly still let it out.

“No,” she said. “I am only tired but...it is passing now. Thank you.”

“May I turn around yet?” She felt obliged to laugh a little for he sounded almost plaintive, like a boy asking if it was yet time to come in from the rain.
“Yes,” she told him.

The sound of patrons departing the tavern below was fading away and the little frogs in the trees began their nightly chorus, as audible as music even here on the side of the Inn facing away from the river. In the growing shadow within the room his face looked more familiar that it had during the day and his eyes were again those of the Captain Cassian Andor she had come to know.

He sniffed out the candle closest to the window and approached her as she still stood near the fireplace. Laying hands upon her shoulders and brushing aside her damp hair he kissed her neck.

‘Ah,” he said, “You must show me the trick of that.”

“Come,” she said, “I will teach you now.”

Chapter End Notes

So this may seem a little odd but for some odd reason I though of our pirate girl taking a bath for her soldier to be weirdly sweet and kind of fun in the midst of the drama.

And now another educational moment.

A Common myth about 18th cen. life was that nobody ever bathed. Not the greatest moment in the history of human hygiene maybe, but neither was my college field hockey team.....but seriously people who wanted to take a bath took a bath whenever possible, the problem was, as it is in undeveloped areas, water-restricted areas, on army patrol or onboard sailing ships to this day, how to get the water. People came up with many of the same answers.

Baking soda/pearl-ash was a byproduct of lye-soap and potash making and becoming widely available in the 1700’s. People had even started cooking with it, and had been using it for washing purposes for some time.

Enlightened commanders of sailing ships in the 1700s were also known to enforce hygiene on their crews in the form of regular seawater bathing at sea and freshwater bathing whenever feasible, (Captain Cook was a particular stickler) and since I have decided that the Alliance is the super-secret Good Guys of the Enlightenment version of
the Illuminati, here we are.

Next installment, Captain Solo screws up a few things and melodrama ensues. Also upcoming, Jen has a flashback to Chirrut talking about her necklace, Mr. Malbus arm-wrestles the "cannibal" and other wacky re-writes.
Khaeuri Manaaka

Chapter Summary

A few brief paragraphs pertaining to the musings of Captain Solo’s robustly tattooed and savage companion as he waits for that gentleman to return from his interview with Captain Andor and Miss Erso.

Chapter Notes

whanau = family
marae = ceremonial place
tuku wairua = ritual to help the spirit of the dead

Matakite = prophet, seer.
mahi waimori = light work, casual or temporary labor.
hākawa = fool
mōrikarika = ills, evilness
kaha = charm or chant for catching small game, fish. etc.
tupua = goblin, strange being.
pā = “sir”, a term of respectful address to an older male.
hoa tāpui = close friend.
mōkinokino = misery, desolation, something dreadful.

(all Maori)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
It seemed to Khaeuri Manaaka that his life was divided into two parts, the before and the after. Whether these two parts would ever be joined he could not say.

On some days it seemed to him that they would, that upon the day of his death the spirits of his whanau would find him somehow. He had dreamed of this often. They would make a marae wherever he was, by raising their hands up and making the place flat and clear. Since his days of mourning were already long over his flesh would fall away from him and his bones would lie clean and show themselves already to be painted with the red ochre. "'Do you see?' his father would say to him "We have performed the tuku wairua for you already, long ago. Cease your wandering now and come with us." Matiu with their child on a cradle-board would be there, holding out her hand from a great voyaging canoe, the like of which he knew only from stories. This would take them all together to the afterlife and his long exile would be over.

_Dreams did not mean truth, as he knew very well. He was not a Matakite with powers of seeing. Besides, in that dream the Dutch boy, Solo, was always sitting in the canoe beside Matiu, and was also waving and calling him to come along, which made the whole thing seem highly unlikely._

Most days it seemed to him far more probable that he must have already died and that all that had happened since was because he wandered now as a kēhua, lost upon the face of the earth and the waters.

Time would tell, he supposed.

In the meanwhile this mahi waimori of the messages and the wretched indigo plantation remained to finish.

He waited at a shaded spot some two miles or so up the road from the Inn. Solo would appear either tonight or tomorrow depending upon how he sorted matters with the Alliance fighters. Several of the European English soldiers looked askance at him as he walked up the road, but since he was clearly not one of the people they gained by oppressing in this place, and moreover as he was walking OUT of their city, they only puffed and barked like the dogs they were and left him alone. He had only to hold up his rope of carved fishhooks and they fled.

Some little brown-skinned children were gathered by the same spot along the river watering a few goats and a pony set to pull a small cart. They were very shy of him and stayed timidly behind the bushes as he approached the water. Khaeuiri tossed in his rope and such was the skill of the kaha he had laid on it that he caught a large fish right away. He unhooked it and offered it to the children.
They were much afraid of him but one of them, an older girl from her garments, screwed up her courage and reached for it from his hands, looking at him as if he were a tupua all the while. She shouted to her companions in English and they all fled then, dragging their goats jangling bells and pulling at the rope of the pony. He saw her hide the fish beneath her apron and chuckled. Brave action in the face of the unknown should be rewarded.

Then he placed his blanket beneath the low trees along the stream and laid down to light his pipe and smoke tobacco.

It was possible Solo would mismanage the business and they would kill him but most probably they would not. The Dutch puppy was a good fighter and these Alliance dealt fair unless they thought you likely to betray them. Hopefully the great hākawa would abandon his idiot scheme to try to bargain them up. Solo was worried that with his debts still looming he still might not have enough to pay the crew off properly. After the mōrikarika they had seen up that river he had now taken it into his head they must all be sent away. Not here though, this was a terrible place and unjust place. Veracruz maybe, or up North in the British lands. It was a muddled plan as usual.

Solo always did it this way. As soon as he found himself taking a liking to a crew he would dismiss them all.

Khaeuri knew why he did so but it was really too bad. This was a particularly good crew. The Leonitus’ were twins and that was always lucky. Sabe was a deft hand and very good at ignoring Solo’s stupid orders and only following the good ones. The European boy Marcheur, though he was “green as grass” as Solo said, seemed born to sail with a keen eye, a right quick hand with a sword and a very pleasant manner. Best of all, he was the only one of them for a long time who had learned to speak a few words and had even begun calling Khaeuri “Pā” which was a clear sign of goodness and sensibility.

Still, maybe Solo was right and it was for the best. Much as he liked him, Lucas Ceil-Marcheur seemed a little too fond of Solo at times and the last thing Khaeuri wanted to deal with was another broken heart. That business with Alando had been bad enough.

Besides, something very wicked and dangerous was clearly happening on that river at Florida. It was mōkinokino if he had ever seen it. The wise thing would be for the Dutch hākawa to give those Alliance what they wanted straight out and let them handle it rather than exercise his cleverness for a few extra gold pieces.

That Jabbar at Havanna was going to try to kill him anyway, whether he paid back the money or not. They would just have to deal with it.

Before sunset the little frogs all began to sing in the trees and the cheerful sound comforted him greatly.

Solo returned before dark and being a hoa tāpui brought him some bread and a roasted bird. There was not enough light left to play cribbage so they sat together and listened to the frog-songs for a pleasant long while then wrapped up in the blankets and got a decent night’s sleep for once. It proved to be the last such for a long time after.
Chewie.
Stories Needing to be Told

Chapter Summary

In which past events are presented, including Mr. Imway's request to see Miss Erso's necklace and comments he makes to her regarding that object. Some of Miss Erso's early encounters with Mr. Bodi Rook are also recollected as well as some of her thoughts of that time regarding her friendship with and sympathetic regard for that gentleman. Lastly Mr. Rook's first recounting of his arrival in Florida and the situation there are looked back at.

Chapter Notes

The evil scheme begins to be revealed. Angst with our exposition I fear. Making big time hay with American History not-even-remotely-fun facts.

Mērī priya = My dear (Nepali)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

HMS Princess Fortune/Rogues Venture

Port of Gibraltar

September 8-10, 1769

and later

out of Cadiz toward Gran Canarie
end of September, 1769
The first time that Mr. Imway spoke to her at any length regarding the charm she wore was while they still lay in harbor at Gibraltar. She had remained aboard chiefly for those days, almost dreading to go ashore.....indeed, what profit was to be gained by her in any British fort? Let Andor and his officers settle their business as they would.....her wounds yet too fresh and her mind still too much in turmoil.

She spent a portion of the hours in her cabin but a greater share up on deck with Mr. Bodi Rook. They walked when that seemed the better salve to one or the other of them upon their distress of mind and when that did not serve they frequently sat together in the Great Cabin or upon the deck near the bow. At times that gentleman and herself would be joined by Mr. Malbus and Mr. Imway when their duties permitted.

One afternoon as they sat so arranged, watching the evening shadows stretch out from the great fort upon the rock and all listening to Mr. Malbus venture a small strange tune upon a bone whistle he had won from one of the crew at cards, the blind gentleman said, most unexpectedly, "With your permission, Miss Erso, might I hold the necklace you wear?"

Mr. Imway held an open hand toward her and she found herself, to her own great astonishment, drawing that object from beneath her neckerchief. Her mother's small charm hung still upon it's cord. On very few occasions had she ever allowed anyone see her treasure closely, much less to lay hands upon it. Yet she took it then from her neck and laid it on his palm.

It was but a little larger than a gold shilling, carved of wood into the shape of a circle with four small triangular holes pierced through, which gave to it a shape as of a quartered cross. She wore it by means of a cord placed through one of the pierced holes. Whatever color the wood might have been upon it's making it was now quite dark with age and oil and varnished smooth by her fingers. Since childhood she had held it in moments of trial and discomfort, though she could never articulate to her self why that action gave her comfort.

Mr. Saul Gerrere had seen it first upon her neck when he carried her from that dark wet hillside to the waiting boat. In a rare moment of tenderness he had kissed first it and then her forehead as he wrapped her in a blanket. "Keep it with you child," was all he said, "Let no man take it from you."

A small teardrop-shaped stone was set in the center and polished almost flat. If she held it in strong light this jewel was still visible through the dark wax and varnish. In some lights it looked plain brown, while in others it appeared as of a dark golden color and flecked with pale lines and specks.

The monk traced his long fingers across the charm, "Ah," he said, closing his eyes as if feeling some great pleasure of recognition, or perhaps of relief from some pain, “Ștôna skripṭa. It is a script stone. Baze, what was it they called it when we first began to travel West upon the road?....Mariam? Yes. These were at the heart of many holy places. Do you know why child?"

Jen could but shake her head. A memory seemed to come to her then of sitting upon her mother’s lap, looking at the charm and her mother telling her a story, but she could not recall any details of it now.
“Only that my father told me such stones held a story inside them,” she said, hesitatingly, repeating again what she had told him on the streets of Lisbon.

Chirrut Imway smiled, “Yes!” he said. “That is one way of putting it, I suppose. The most important verses and stories and names can never truly be concealed or wholly forgotten. These find their way always back again and again even through stones of the earth, for darkness can never wholly hide the truth.”

He gave Jen back her charm then with great ceremony and reached his hand toward his friend.

Throughout this speech Mr. Malbus had only gazed resolutely at the rail and the fading light on the sea beyond.

“Mērī priya,” Mr. Imway said, “You remember this?”

Mr. Malbus only scowled and shook his head, his dark braided beard and hair moving in the evening breeze. “I assure you, I have long forgotten all such nonsense,” he said.

The blind man, undeterred, groped down his companions rough sleeve to take his tar-darkened hand.

“Yet I always find you, and you me,” he said, ”You know that this is true.”

“Ha! You are surely joking ” Malbus gave a short laugh, ”If I hold still enough I have seen you lose me in the middle of an empty room!”

Yet despite his gruff words he smiled and looking down at the slender monk, grasped his hand with visible affection.

They continued to meet this way, the four of them together, as often as they could as the voyage went on though Mr. Imway did not ask so directly to see her charm again.

Once the venture west was set and the brigantine set out from Gibraltar and then Cadiz, Captain Rostock assigned the renegade monks to space in the crews quarters, which suited them quite well, they said. To Mr. Rook he designated a small cabin with a hanging bunk and and though it was comfortable in comparison with the circumstances that gentleman had lately been forced to endure he often sought the air and light above deck whenever weather permitted. A day seldom came when Jen did not walk with him there.

It came to Jen's mind later how strange it might have seemed to unapprised persons that the two of them derived such comfort from each other's company.

She felt with Mr. Rook a profound kinship for all that their journeys and trials had been no wise the same. He also was a stranger among these people. He had been born to one place and situation, reared in another and when thrust from that as well had fallen far in his own estimation and been near to dangerous despair. Now, like her, his quest was to do right by himself.
Mr. Rook’s courage and his belief that he could yet find strength and act upon it inspired her.

She was also much moved from the very first by his lack of bitterness and recrimination towards herself. Catching sight of the scars upon his arms and noting the painful stiffness that still seemed to afflict his fingers her heart fairly wept.

_Please forgive us_, she yearned to say, though of course there was no "us" anymore. Saul Gerrere was dead and his people scattered.

_My Olori did this to you. There is no excusing.....he would be the first to say so.... but know that he was not always what he became. It was because he saw so much evil without flinching that he could no longer see good. They blinded him like the crows blind a downed eagle when they lack the strength or courage to kill it. Thus crippled it strikes its own kin._

Finding herself unable to speak any of the things that filled her heart she bound herself to listen. Mr. Rook began, even before they had left the coast of Portugal behind, as if it were a thing much upon his conscience, to speak to her of her father. Had any other person addressed her so the subject would have been too exquisitely painful to bear but from this good gentleman she found could bear at last to hear the truth.

“Erso Bey, your father, he is a man of great strength. I was desperate. I would have died with all my sins upon me if he had not found me in the hold. I had conceived a mad plan of drilling half-holes in the hull of the remaining ship, for seeing what we had brought those desperate souls to and what dark use their suffering was put to nearly broke my mind. The Director meant to take the Estella….for that had been the name of the ship……out to bring Mr. Tarkin to meet a British buyer at the mouth of the Mosquito River with the first bribe of indigo. My hope was that I could at least kill them both and wreck the ship. That I would forfeit my own life in the attempt seemed only justice to me in my despair.

I knew that I could not defeat them thus, that at best I could but hope to delay them a few months, but I was past caring in my shame.

The guards found me in the lower hold and would have slain me outright but your father was there and called down to them.

He said, “No, no you fool, you have quite misunderstood my orders regarding those barrels, come out of there at once!”

He lied, telling them that that he himself had ordered me into the hold to drill barrel holes for the ventilation of the powders and compounds stored there.

Taking my collar, to the laughter of the guards, he dragged me out and sent them away.

Your father took me then straight to the small cabin behind the works and said to me, “Do not throw your life away boy. If you have the strength, help me. Help me save these people and stop this madness.” He and old Sefla worked together and conceived a plan. I worked to memorize the charts and bound myself to be their messenger.

“He spoke of you,” he told Jen, “to steady my nerves, or perhaps his own. For months he did so, always in bits and snatches of time, while Sefla wrote the words in ink that the sea could not wash away and in letters that few in these pagan and Christian lands could read. While Formi and the
others built the raft in sections, hiding it in the brush at great risk. Always he would start his stories
the same way, “Let me tell you about my Jen, my Star, my little daughter….”

Jen wept when he told her these things and sometimes he did too.

While making ready to depart for Cadiz, Captain Andor had offered both herself and Mr. Rook
freedom to depart and they had both refused it. She then wrote a letter to her father that she knew he
would never receive and vowed to bring him the help he begged for at whatever cost. Whether she
came as the last Fury of the Onderean or a soldier of the Alliance had not mattered to her then.

“I will take you to him,” the loyal Mr. Rook said, taking her hand at the rail as they sailed out from
Gibraltar. “Miss Erso. Get me a ship and I will find a way. These people took my honor from me and
your father from you. We will go and take them back.”

That first night out into the Atlantic, Andor had called the officers, including Mr. Kay and the
returned Mr. Melshi into the Great Cabin. While he had interviewed Mr. Rook privately before, he
bid him to begin tell his tale to all of those concerned. For reasons that had seemed quite inexplicable
to her in those early days, he had permitted her to attend.

Mr. Rook, pale in the dark coat and vest they had provided for him, cleared his throat and spoke
thus:

“I was hired aboard a ship at Cyprus, at Limasol. Having incurred debts I could not pay I was
persuaded for most handsome wages to hire on as a ships pilot with a company. Seven ships, I was
told at first, were hired to transport Greek workers and equipment to a British commercial venture in
the Azores. I had no experience in waters beyond Sicily but was told by the Captain, an Englishman
named Mott, that I and the other pilots and officers would be trained and thus gain opportunity.
Nothing but misery sat with me in Cyprus so I took what I thought to be a betterment of my lot. The
ships for the most part rolled like a tubs, being but lightly cargoed at first with stores of equipment,
tools and a small number of Greek and Turkish dye workers, indeed I thought perhaps that I was
taken aboard partly because of my ability to speak both these languages with fluency. Discipline was
very strict but not, at first, brutal. The principals of the venture were two passengers, both European,
seldom seen by us aboard the lead ship, the Estella. They dined alone and spoke only to the Captain
who seemed to fear them greatly. One was called Mr. Krennik and was addressed as Director and
the other was a very cultured older gentleman addressed only as Mr. Tarkin. A lady, pale and
modestly veiled, accompanied Mr. Tarkin and was referred to by Captain Mott as his wife. We saw
her even less than either of the men…indeed I heard her speak only once, in Greek, begging to be
allowed to go ashore… although several of us thought we heard her weeping at night.

We sailed on to Malta and the coast of Italy, taking on more workers, older men some of them
missing fingers and toes, who described themselves as gunpowder makers. Mr. Tarkin left the ship at Corsica along with a body wrapped in black cloth. Mrs. Tarkin was not seen afterward. Extra crew in the form of uniformed officers and guard were taken aboard. The Estella and the other ships sailed on to Minorca and the harbor at Palma. We found the port draped in yellow ribbons and the docks themselves crowded with people nigh to death from hunger. A famine had struck the island and in it’s wake a sickness. Mr. Krennik went ashore there and when he returned we were ordered to prepare all ships to take on additional cargo. The cargo we took on was people."

He stopped, lowering his head, but the company remained silent and he then mastered himself and proceeded.

“I have never....had never....served aboard a slave ship but I know those who have, and none are ever made clean of it. I made my dying mother a vow that I would never take such work, not even if I were starving. In truth the Estella and her sisters could not by law be called slave ships for those captured and sold into death and bondage are driven aboard in chains. These people of Minorca freely walked to their fate, many giving what little they had to pay for what they were told was passage to the Americas. They were promised that the men among them would serve for six years and have land and freedom after and their families be allowed to remain with them. A set of ships such as these might have carried perhaps seventy five or eighty more souls in each vessel, under painful conditions even with a light crew, considering such passengers as we already had. Yet we took on 1500 souls at Palma. Whole villages must have emptied. Women and children formed nearly a third of those who boarded. Krennik took them on in groups, always by night, so that those who came after could not see how many were held below decks until they were already aboard. I spoke no Spanish then, I could not warn them even had I had the courage. Some of the crew tried, but their dialect was such that they said they could not make them understand or believe what they had assigned themselves and their children to until it was already too late. We sailed for the Americas directly and did not stop again for any further provision.”

“From Palma you say?” Captain Reikkan asked, almost in quiet horror.

“Some packets came out from Cadiz and the Azores with barrels of bad water. We ourselves did not put in to any harbor.” Mr. Rook said, clearly overcome with emotion again, “I will say no more about the crossing, for I know there are those among you who know more bitterly than I the evil that passes as a constant river on the Atlantic in far worse barbarity. These people were not chained and could at least fling themselves overboard to seek God’s forgiveness for their despair. Some did, I assure you, may their souls find rest. 400 or more perished but they had, many of them as I have said, their children with them. Such were the Director’s orders that such water and food as remained after that portioned to the crew be given to the children first, not out of mercy but that they might live as surety for their parents behavior.

By the time we reached the coast of Florida, all aboard were in most desperate straits but the place to which we were brought revealed yet more of the criminal enterprise that was underway.

I had wondered previously why so many of us had been brought across as crew with no experience in these treacherous waters, now I understood why. Knowledge came to be later that we were some considerable distance south of the old Spanish fort of San Marco, called Saint Augustine, but I did not know so then. It was of necessity to their scheme that none of us know clearly where we were or be able to find our way out or back again. The coastline lay before us flat and jungled for mile upon mile, broken only by occasional inlets that gave access to coastal rivers. We came in one such inlet at highest tide. A dizzying warren of inlets and sand bars brought us round eventually to firmer ground, or at least to scrub oak and soil that, though still mostly sand was at least other than a sponge of matted vine. A few dozen people were already there, survivors of a previous labor gang, their guards and a few men set as Engineers and Chemists who I would later learn were mostly held
captive as well. There were a few small buildings there of sticks and a strange stone that men were cutting with knives and carrying as if it were of no more weight than dry pinewood. The foundations of some large house seemed to have been begun but little provision of any sort seemed to have been made for so many people. Those capable of standing were whipped out of the holds and set to work cutting brush for their own shelters. We of the crew were ordered to set to work ourselves and to break up four of the ships that brought us there, leaving only the Estella, the Black Saber, the Pax Aurora, and the Mantelet de Guerre. It was clear that most of the officers and crew of the ships were now just as much prisoners as those wretches who had been tricked aboard for the labor of the plantation. We were given a single stark choice, join now or die. Disbelieving what was being said to them, many protested and were killed outright. I was spared, for like others frozen by cowardice, I held my tongue, which Captain Mott took for sufficient assent.

The wind from the sea drove the foul stench back but when the wind shifted a foul smell struck us from inland. Many fell ill at once. “Indigo,” some of the men said. Indeed the rot of it in its preparation is most loathsome, as I had often heard before then and learned well after but it was not that which assailed us then. There was a man beside me named Renaro, an Italian but who spoke Greek to me, “Maybe, but not that alone,” he said, “Nitrikó kálio. Saltpeter. They are making gunpowder here, a great deal of it. We are surely in Hell.”

Mr. Rook continued on at length, describing a little of the layout of the plantation and what he saw there with regards to the manufactory, although he admitted that he himself had been kept mostly nearer to the shore. He told of attempts by some of the men to escape and their brutal recapture.

Mr. Melshi and Captain Rostock began to ask numerous questions regarding such matters as the manning of the place and the depth of the waters at the entrance to the inlet and surrounding areas. Mr. Kay carefully began to scribble notes in his neat and regular handwriting.

Jen stood at the back of the cabin like a shadow through all, dressed in her blue wrapper and Mr. Kay’s old coat, for she had not yet found her place among the crew and this new world of purpose. Having drawn her mother’s charm on its cord outside the neck of her chemise without thought she had found herself holding it tightly in her fingers. No tears had come while she stood, for she had not felt capable of weeping as she listened to this part of her friend’s tale. It was if her heart was wrung dry with sorrow.

_Twelve years._ Twelve years these men had held her father, was the thought that tore at her heart.

Mr. Rook seemed to almost fail with weariness after nearly two hours of this painful recitation but would have bravely continued.

Captain Andor it was who said, “Enough.”

He had not uttered a word throughout the speech, only stood at the table to Mr. Rook’s left, making no comments and asking no questions, his face as still as any mask. Finally he laid a hand upon the Turkish gentleman’s shoulder and said, “It is enough for now sir, we have weeks ahead and will plan more carefully in the days to come. When you have had more time to recover further we will speak in greater length and consider details.”

Andor had glanced directly at Jen then. In meeting his eye she had found, just as she long ago had been able to recognize the Commander’s orders even when given without words, that she understood at once what was being asked of her. She would have objected most sharply then had she sensed
Captain Andor to be giving her an order with regard to any matter save this one, but within that moment she was more than willing to obey.

Crossing directly to Mr. Bodi Rook’s side she had said firmly, “Sir, please come with me now. Let us walk upon the deck for a while,” and taking his arm had led him outside to where they might stand together in the sun and the clean air.

Chapter End Notes

Dr. Andrew Turnbull was no doubt a complete and utter swine and although history has glossed over....or just plain forgot it because it never knew...exactly what went on at the mysterious and rather bizarre experimental Indigo plantation at New Smyrna, Florida....he was (probably) not developing a super-weapon for an evil international cartel and was NOT Grand Moff Tarkin, nor even Orson Krennic. However, he did (despite apparently seeing himself as an Entrepreneur, Renaissance/ Scientific man of the Enlightenment) stuff 1500 desperate Minorcans onto ships that could safely hold 300 and proceed to do such bad stuff to them that even the run-of-the-mill inhumane and murderous ruling class of the 18th century New World colonies stopped and went "whoa....dude, what nastiness are you getting UP to in that mangrove swamp?"

Also, New Smyrna is a GREAT place to spend your vacation and I hope the Chamber of Commerce and the Historical Society will forgive me for this.
The Ferry Inn/ the Third part, concerning Captain Andor's thoughts and reminicences

Chapter Summary

A short chapter in which Captain Andor wakes in the morning after his night's stay at the Inn, and indulges in several uncharacteristic moments of reflection on incidents in his past, including events precipitating his first connection to the Alliance, as well as advice given to him by others pertaining to his relationship with Miss Erso, and his frank regard for that lady.

Chapter Notes

Unabashed sentimentality.

Nelli = Truth
tequitl = work
Tochan = our home
ToTajzin aquin tined.... = Our Father who art in Heaven.... (Nahuatl)

.Dios como mi testig = God as my witness
Capitán, ¿cuáles son sus órdenes? = Captain what are your orders?
La llevaré. Ve, llévalo a Londres y luego a Roma = I will take her. Go, get it to London then to Rome.
Ve con Dios, señora = Go with God, madam.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Ferry Inn

St. Catherine's Parish

Kingston, Jamaica

December, 1769
Winter being a stranger to these climates the fields and trees, even so close to the road and the bustle of the ferry, were filled with bright birds all seemingly mandated by Nature to sing at sunrise. The chickens of the Ferry Inn's yard were not the least vocal of these.

Captain Cassian Andor found himself roused from far sounder sleep than he was accustomed to take upon any mission by this dawn chorus assisted by the distant lowing of cattle being driven to the River crossing for the morning market. He lay quite still upon waking, as was his disciplined habit when waking in unfamiliar surroundings, always taking time to apprise himself of place and circumstances before stirring lest some lurking danger be alerted by his movement.

* A decent bed, well-curtained against the night's insects and air. Jamaica. Avelar. The Ferry Inn. Dawn....or somewhat past it. His throwing knife placed beneath a bolster near the top of the bed frame.

The woman yet beside him.

This last was by every measure the most unfamiliar circumstance of all.

Throughout their time together aboard the Rogue, she had always stubbornly returned to her own bunk before dawn and he realized now that he had never before seen her lie asleep outside that darkened cabin.

A very foolish and commonplace thought it surely was but...*Dios como mi testigo.....*she was a lovely thing, with her uncombed hair spilled over the cotton sheet and one slim arm flung across to rest lightly on his shoulder.

She had seemed to him from their earliest acquaintance as if lit by some fire, whether silent or speaking, still or in motion. So seldom had it ever dimmed that it felt quite strange, as if he saw her here with new eyes.

Perhaps it was the unexpected question she had asked him last night as she had moved a dampened cloth across his back...."How old are you?"....or perhaps it was the sound of the birds that made him think on such things. It seemed a very long time ago that a half-starved boy had hidden aboard a ship at Veracruz, risking death crushed or drowned by the rolling barrels and leaking water of its lowest hold. He had done so out of a great need to answer a question for himself.
In the foggy light of a nearly full moon, the boy had been awakened within the almost inaccessible, and thus safe, sleeping nest he had made for himself under the eaves of the warehouse on the embarcadero. Hearing sound of sandaled feet running on the boards of the wharf beneath him, he had peered out with sharp owlish eyes much accustomed to the dark and made out the forms of three people on the gloom, a man and two women. One he saw was a mulata who dressed in the common clothes of a dock woman. She It was who uncovered a small lantern and set it aside on the boards while another woman, an India in brown skirt and Nahuatl blouse, approached. Hers had surely been the feet he heard. A European man, wigged and well-dressed in blue and white coat stood beside the mulata. La India seemed to be thrusting some small package into the gentleman's hands and whispering urgently. Cassian could make out only a few words “Nelli…tequitl…tochan….” but these caught at his ear and would not let him ignore this disturbance and keep to his hiding place like a sensible rat.

They never allowed any of them to speak Nahuatl in the orphanage but when she came to see him, in the evenings, while most of the other children were asleep and the other Sisters at prayer, she always did or tried to. While another nun stood watch by the door she would sit beside his bed and stroke his hair. In that language she would speak to him and he would answer. Sometimes she made foolish mistakes but was always pleased when he corrected her. The visits never lasted long but before she kissed his cheek and left him she would ask that he say his prayers for her and would whisper along with him “ToTajtzin aquin tinemi ….”. How old had he been when she stopped coming?

He crept down carefully and peering from behind a barrel saw another larger man approach the three, perhaps from some previous concealment in a doorway. This new gentleman was cloaked in black, although the red and gold of a Royal officer showed beneath. Loudly barking some order that Cassian could make nothing of, save to note that it was not spoken in Spanish, he pointed a pistol at the man in blue and grabbed the Indian woman by the neck. The bluecoat began as if to answer but the mulata dove to the side. Her action was almost too quick to see but as she moved her foot darted out to trip the other woman, causing her to fall down and thus away from the black-cloak’s grasp. The European dropped to his hands as well and then leaped swiftly back up, knocking the pistol away. The mulata had meanwhile darted behind and now grasped throat of the man in black and red from the rear. He struggled for a few seconds, hands flailing, but within a few moments dropped dead to the boards.

Cassian did not understood at the time but when he later made Señora Tano’s better acquaintance he learned of her skill with a strangling wire and preference for it as a weapon when surprise was available and silence needed.

On that occasion he had only tried to hold himself still and unseen as any mouse.

He saw the man run back to the Indian woman and help her to stand. Together all three rolled the body off the dock so that it fell into the water below with a splash, but first the mulata took the dead man’s purse.

“Capitán, ¿cuáles son sus órdenes?” the man in the fine blue coat said to the mulata.

That woman coolly tucked the pistol in at her waist and tossed the purse into the sea, putting an arm around the Indian as she said “La llevaré. Ve, llévalo a Londres y luego a Roma.” The man nodded and bowed, as the two women ran back into the fog between the buildings.

As they vanished, placing the small package firmly beneath his coat, the European said, “Ve con Dios, señora” quietly and turned to walk quickly toward the ramp of the ship docked nearby. The
matter in its entirety had take only a dozen minutes to unfold.

Cassian had seen much violence already in his young life before the time he had come to be one of the “ratos” of those docks. Murder and robbery might bring risk but they were of nightly occurrence in the busiest port of the New World. The world was accepted by him then as a dangerous and inexplicable place, but some truths he thought he knew at the ripe age of ten.

*Men did not address any woman as “Captain.”*

*A European did not take orders from a Mulata.*

*No one bothered to save an India.*

*The biggest man with the biggest gun always wins.*

The women were already lost to his sight but as he saw quite clearly where the man had gone he made up his mind to follow. Scrambling up to his hiding place one last time he took only his ragged blanket, a cup and the broken blade that served him as a knife.

It seemed to that boy well worth giving up everything he had to know the answer.

*If so much that he had been told about the ways of the world might be a lie, was there another way or even just the hope for one?*

In his soldierly way Lt. Ruescott Melshi was most concerned on his behalf he well knew. That Mr. Timothy Kay thought him slightly mad, also he knew, though that assessment in itself was nothing new. Kay thought the whole of humanity rather mad and he was not wrong.

Captain Rostock it been..... who in Andor's previous experience had ever made it a point of high honor in service to keep his eye to his ship and the horizon and almost nothing else..... who had spoken to him. That good officer had come up on the quarterdeck to stand beside Captain Andor as he had been watching Miss Erso’s quick figure up on the mast one fine evening still more than a week still out from this dreadful port.

“Do you know the old saying, sir?” Rostock asked, “’As a pearl on a battlefield?’"

Captain Andor did not and must have looked at that good captain in silent surprise because Rostock had proceeded “Two soldiers there were on the field of a great battle. One of them saw, as they made preparation for the charge, a great fair pearl glittering on the field amidst the wreck and ruin there. Unbuckling his armor he gets down to take the gleaming thing up and places it in a pocket above his heart. His fellow then chastised him saying, “Why take such a chance? A pearl cannot serve you in this battle. It is neither food not physic. You will have no occasion to sell it, nor trade it for anything better. When this battle turns against us you cannot take it with you into the next life and when you stand before God the former possession of a pearl will surely not lessen the number of your sins.”

“It is neither food nor physic. You will have no occasion to sell it, nor trade it for anything better. When this battle turns against us you cannot take it with you into the next life and when you stand before God the former possession of a pearl will surely not lessen the number of your sins.”

“Perhaps you speak true,” the first soldier said, “But at the very least I will stand before God as a man who has held a fair thing of the Lord’s making in his hand and near his grateful heart.”
A great smile had parted the old sailor’s dark beard. “I assure you sir that it sounds far wiser in Dutch, although probably just as maudlin.”

*It seemed doubly cruel to think of Syndalla lying on the other side of that wall, having taken on a burden she had sworn never to bear again. Mourning her dead lover still, he knew.*

This was a terrible place. Their orders brought no hope and now they must go and treat with this reckless fool Solo. If this box contained what he thought it did Kay must see it. Solo might well have charts and hopefully his compatriots would not eat them all before they could be prized from his mercenary hands. She knew the stakes as well as he, better perhaps.

Tarkin at least, Vader at worst, hostages at risk and no way out but forward.

Yet here he was with a pearl in his hand and a grateful heart.

She opened her eyes then and lay quiet for a time seeming as thoughtful or confused as he had been but moments before. After a little while passed she lifted herself up onto her elbows and smiled as a fair and true-hearted woman of twenty might smile at a man she loved.

“Well, damn you husband,” she said, “why are you staring at me like that? What an odd thing to be doing.”

Less than three hours later, Mr. Charles Avelar and his new young bride, along with their servants, left the Ferry Inn and proceeded on the Spanishtown Road back toward Kingston Parish.

Mr. Avelar made arrangements to return to the Inn within three days time as he said he intended to continue on to the capitol after some unexpected business in Kingston was completed. He did not, however, do so. This was not a surprising as it might have otherwise been since shortly thereafter a great tumult broke out in Kingston in which a number of Governmental soldiers and other persons of a lower sort were killed. This resulted in not only the temporary closing of the road but the closing of
the town gates and, for a brief time, even the port itself.

Since Mr. Avelar had paid in advance the landlord, Mr. Parker, was not seriously inconvenienced.

Chapter End Notes

After the grim historically depressing exposition of the last chapter, more reflections of young spies in love and a little heart-breaking backstory may almost count as lightening things up. Next: Some of Captain Solo's chickens come home to roost and a junky little sloop called the Falcon may need to rescue some folks.
Helen

Chapter Summary

A short interlude in which Midshipman, formerly Captain, Hera Syndalla considers some events leading up to her inclusion upon the venture in Kingston.

Chapter Notes

Gratuitous and tear-jerking inclusion of Hera required that I give her some POV time because I love her in all universes. Hopefully not requiring too much, if any, "Rebels" knowledge.

Talhador = Chopper (Portuguese)

Binti. Tunatumikia kwa nguvu tuliyo nayo. = Daughter. We serve with the strength we have. (Swahili)

huruma = mercy (Swahili)

Capitão. ..você tem certeza de que está pronto? = Captain. ..are you sure you are ready? (Portuguese)

I swear we get back to Han and the effect his bad life choices have on other people, plus the escape to the Falcon next up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Kingston Harbor and The Ferry Inn

St. Catherine's Parish

Kingston, Jamaica

December, 1769
Captain Andor had reviewed orders before they left their good ship.

“Solo has served the Alliance well in the past, but as he has served nearly everyone else in addition, it would be reckless in the extreme not be prepared for contingencies of betrayal. Cor, Syndalla, when you are separated from us use your own good sense and discretion. It is possible that someone from Leeward or one of the other Maroon townships may try to approach you. Thomwell’s people are known to have watchers in the port, and Quao would be a fool if he did not do the same.”

“What do we tell them if they ask if we are Alliance, Captain, and what if they ask our mission?” Mr. Cor had asked.

“If they approach us it will surely be because they already mark us as Alliance,” Syndalla proposed.

“You are correct, without doubt” Andor said. “Tell them as much of the truth as you judge safe to pass on. If the British gain access to such weapons as we think are being ventured in this Florida plantation, they may find themselves a most likely target and their leaders will need to know.”

It had seemed to Hera Syndalla that Mr. Kay turned his head rather inquiringly at this statement, although that that gentleman’s thoughts were never easy to gauge.

_Was Captain Andor exceeding his authority in this matter? Or perhaps it was nearer to say, ‘In this matter as well?’ Many of the cells in the Americas once derided the Greater Alliance in her hearing as cautious to the point of timidity. Not here it seemed, not Captain Andor and most certainly not now._

She had not known Mr. Baldwin Cor previous to this venture, although she well knew the physical valor and unnatural calm required to serve within his position. Mr. Melshi, with whom she had previous acquaintance, recommended him as a Master Gunner capable to lay out a plan of cannon and the manning of such to sink a French warship with only 20 eight-pound guns, 30 one-handed orphans, a hundred balls of shot, ten barrels of gunpowder and a leg of mutton.

Fool that she was, she had asked “What purpose does the mutton serve, sir?”

All three gentleman present, Mr.s Melshi, and Cor and Captain Rostock himself, quite doubled over with laughter and answered “Supper!” in delighted chorus.

_Sometimes Mr. Kay, for all his oddity, stood as a restful oasis among the Sons of Adam._

Master Cor had volunteered for this mission, as had they all. Who knew better than a Gunner the devastating potential of a stable and exponentially more powerful explosive in the hands of an enemy sowing the seeds of Empire among three seafaring nations? Add also the facts of his being a handsome fellow of the correct heritage, who knew the British ways and the role of a footman well enough to play it, having begun his life in bondage to a weapons merchant in Bristol and she could understand well why Captain Andor had taken him on for this subterfuge, even if he was green to such work.
The woman, Miss Erso, was quite unknown to her as well. She seemed almost painfully young, but had clearly been newly recruited to the Alliance for this venture in particular, possessing skills and intelligence pertinent to their target. Word regarding her filtered among the crew along two dominant lines of discussion. Firstly as she was confirmed to have served for a number of years at the right hand of the dreaded Saul Gerrere, which of itself dismissed any and all doubt as to her capabilities in combat, and secondly that Captain Andor was her lover.

Captain Hera Syndalla had first made acquaintance with Andor years ago, when she had newly taken command of her first ship. He had been one of Mr. Draven’s child couriers, a phantom-like boy all dark eyes and quick heels, distinct from amongst the others only by virtue of his youth.

“Great Lady of the Rivers, please let that child be older than he looks,” she had thought, as he slipped a sealed packet of orders into her basket on the Southhampton docks. Some years subsequent she was re-introduced to the young man at Veracruz in the uniform of a Spanish officer and given orders to get him into the castle of San Salvador de la Punta at Havanna ahead of the British assault. A handsome young cavalier he had been, though by his looks only newly come to shaving. His orders, as he tersely summed them, were to “Steal a book and kill a man.”

“How long shall we wait for you,” she had asked, her concern for her own crew’s safety being paramount to her. Their mission to Brazil lay still before them and time was running swiftly.

“You will not,” he informed her, most coolly. “You will proceed to Salvador and may God go with you.”

“We leave this young man to die,” Kanaã had said, much distressed at the thought and she could not disagree. Yet, orders were orders and young Andor had seemed to face whatever lay before him with equanimity.

The Espírito had brought him to the West side of the great bay under cover of night and dropped him ashore as the British warships gathered on the incoming wind.

What his mission had been in detail and how he got out of Havana she never learned. They proceeded on to Brazil and the great battle that lay ahead for them there. Within two years all those she loved more than her own life would be dead and her faith and hopes dashed.

Her spirit broken they brought her back to Europe after. When her body recovered, she felt herself little more than an empty shell but being still in possession of eyes and hands and back she went to Dodonna and asked to be set aboard a ship, any ship, to work as a common sailor.

So she had lived these last five years. The last ghost of the Espírito.....unless loyal Talhador lived still and fought alone among the rebels in the forests or the bairro.....Of those aboard this vessel only Captain Rostock and the other officers knew of her former rank. When she had signed on and claimed her hammock the old Quartermaster Kanata below decks had peered at her closely. “Binti,” she had said, “Tunatumikia kwa nguvu tuliyo nayo,” then taken both her hands and kissed them. “Huruma waits ahead and we can only walk toward it.”
Blessing on her, she had said nothing more and spoken to Hera no more after.

Why she had signed on when the call for crew came at Cadiz, she could not truly say. Rostock, she knew, was a good man but the Americas were as the land of death for her.

Yet she had had a dream one night in that port, not one of her nightmares, but a new one of standing with her old Second Mate, Orrelaza, looking out at a red horizon. “Look, Little Captain,”...for so he had called her.... saying in his great booming voice, “It is a sky to wonder at.” Confused, she had not known even whether she faced East or West. “Does it rise or set?” she asked him. “Ah,” he had said, standing in all his towering bulk beside her, “It sets. But you and I, Little Captain, we are not like these priests and mystics. We are sailors. We know that however long the night or bloody the sun's setting it will rise again to a fairer day.”

She had awakened in tears and risen from her bed in that Cadiz hostel at daybreak to find Rostock’s ship at dock and sign on to Andor’s venture to the West Indies.

When word had come down that they sought a woman of Africa to join the shore party her hand had lifted, as if of it’s own accord.

Only afterwards did Captain Cassian Andor approach her to speak privately. “Capitão. ..você tem certeza de que está pronto?”

She knew well what was required of her here. To play the part of one held in bondage was bitter beyond measure. The danger was great, but that was not why he asked. Still, she had felt no resentment regarding the inquiry. Five years she had hidden from action in the field. Andor commanded this venture, it was his right and duty to ask and she would have done the same.

Yet the thought that came to her mind, if not her tongue, was “Oh far better to ask young man, if YOU are ready?”

For she had seen the way his eyes followed the English girl upon the mast, and seen as well the way hers sought out his location first when she entered any room.

She had last seen her love as they turned to fight face outwards against the Viceroyalty troops that stormed their last stronghold. He had not seen her, for they had blinded him already by then, but before God there was never such a swordsman, sightless or not, as her Kanaã, her bold ex-Jesuit, and the love of her life. They had fought to the end and her last memory was of his back pressed to hers before loss of blood caused her senses to fail.

“Leave me,” she knew she had cried as Talhador had dragged her from under the wreckage where her enemies had left her for dead. “I cannot,” he had said simply, dogged and loyal.
Had any person asked her, or had she considered the question herself, whether serving with another pair of soldiers in their fraternity of Light who stood as she and Kanaã had stood, she would have said the pain would be too great. Yet now she found, as she looked at this shrewd and capable officer and bold young pirate, that she felt only an overwhelming wish to protect them. Hera Syndalla did not envy or begrudge these lovers whatever joy they could find, only bless them in her heart and pity them the separation that surely lay ahead.

Now, as Mrs. Avelar’s “Helen” she had walked through Kingston invisible and unafraid. Fashions had changed since she had last vested herself in such garments but little else in the visible relation of mistress to slave had. They walked as carefully as upon shards of glass to the Ferry Inn and events there passed as their necessity required. A merchant’s lady’s maid traveling through was treated in a dismissive but businesslike way lest her mistress take some offense.

She made sure she held a spot on the back stairway as Captain Solo passed her by with a rakish smile to follow Mr. Cor.

Damn it. She had seen this man before. Not under this name, or perhaps she had never been given name, for her business then had been with a popinjay mulatto fellow at New Orleans who had been giving her…..selling her in truth…..a ships log and charts stolen from the guano boat. Alando was the name the handsome swain had used but this European boy had been there on the dock too, also a larger man, silent, cloaked and hooded.

Interesting. She would pass this too on to Captain Andor.

In the kitchen she was given a plate and sent to a table reserved for the people of the “gentry” travelers. It was only as she spoke to the chief among the housekeepers that she noticed the white-aproned girl with the slight limp. She worked as a cooks helper, but seemed to be tasked with some upstairs serving as well. As “Helen” made ready to return upstairs to help prepare her “mistress” for bed, one of the other Inn girls made to carry up the cans of warm water.

“No there, Sara,” the crippled girl said,” Nan says I am to do it, you must take the pots up to the front room.”

As they crossed into the hallway the girl bent her head back toward Syndalla.

“Alianza?” she hissed softly.

Hand still upon the rail “Helen” pushed back the white linen ruffle of her fitted blue silk sleeve to show the bird tattoo upon the inside of her elbow.

“Here,” the girl said nodding at a closet door off the hallway, then with a glance down both ways she ducked inside. “Helen” followed her. It came as no surprise to her that the young woman stood tall and her limp vanished when out of public sight.
Captain Andor had been right. The Free people of the Maroon Townships in the high central mountains did indeed keep spies in Kingston. No doubt Cor would also be approached in the stables, either tonight or in the morning.

She made arrangement for an exchange of information the next day and reported fully to Andor of the encounter when she returned to the rooms with the items for the evenings ablutions and helped her “mistress” to undress. This was indeed a mission of far-reaching import.

Miss Erso had performed quite admirably, and she made certain to tell the girl so. She had neither under nor overplayed her part, the latter being the most common error of the novice spy. The poor buccaneer seemed shaken now that the masks were dropped and held Hera’s hands in gratitude.

Midshipman Syndalla retired to her closet room to give the lovers what time together they could have, hung her own gown and garments upon pegs and laid down in the small bed to sleep. In the cross-stitched reticule she had carried at her waist she found the tiny pressed tin box that held the balls of paraffined cotton Mr. Kay had given her.

“They are generally far more discreet than other couples of their general age and health, “ that gentleman had replied to her shocked questioning of the purpose of such an item, “but as you may be at close quarters with them over several nights it is a precaution that may help assure your rest.”

*Indecorous as it was she could not help but smile at the thought of the endless embarrassment his friend’s forthrightness must cause this reserved young Captain.*

She placed the small circles of wax in her ears and lay to rest.

*That night she was gifted with a dream of her Kanaã in happier times at the helm of the Espírito, his sword at his hip and his eyes clear. “Nothing is lost or forgotten my love and what is bound is never undone,” he said with his arm around her shoulder.*

In this vile place and on the edge of terrible hazard, Hera Syndalla slept better than she had in many years.
Obligatory Historical Note: The Maroons were powerful and independently governed communities of escaped slaves and their descendants who lived in the mountainous regions of central Jamaica mid-1600's through the 1793. Descended originally from slaves who escaped the Spanish when they surrendered the island they resisted British conquest until the 1790's, ensuring that the British Governor of Jamaica controlled only the coasts while the interior townships were governed by a succession of their own Maroon leaders under a modified code of Ashanti polity. The British bought peace with the armies of these free (Leeward and Windward) townships by treaty in 1738 granting them unharassed self-rule in return for maintenance of the old Spanish roads crossing the island, non-competition in the sugar industry and, in a Faustian bargain, to denial of sanctuary in their area to any other escaping slaves after 1738.
In which Captain Andor and Miss Erso leave the Ferry Inn and the party from the Rogue reluctantly return back toward Kingston in order to accommodate Captain Solo's new arrangement. Captain Andor considers information about situations that might await them in that port upon the dates they will pass through, based upon Mr. Kay's researches. The Captain reflects briefly upon his friend. They are approached by a representative of the Maroon Townships and catch their first sight of Captain Solo's exotic companion.

Yes.....I am actually including primary source references now....sorry.

I never overthought I'd do this, but there will actually be a weird kind of a Christmas episode.

Bienvenido de nuevo, valiente Capitán = Welcome again, brave Captain. (Spanish)

asafo = warrior

Oburoni baa= foreigner woman

abanoma = adopted child

e-dom = enemy

agya = father (Akan/Ashante/Fante)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Afterwards, when Captain Andor dispatched his report of the incident back to London, he included, under separate cover as he had always done, Mr. Kay’s personal commentaries as well as notes and pertinent selections copied by that gentleman from the variety of useful volumes of reference he had included in his luggage and equipment on the voyage.

[c. 17— THE LAWS OF JAMAICA

C A P XIX

An act for the building of a guard-house and barrack in the town of KINGSTON. —(2nd December, 1749.)

preamble. WHEREAS, account of the great concourse of negro and other slaves, coming from divers parts of the country into Kingston to market and on other occasions, it hath been found necessary for the public safety that guards should be kept there to prevent, as much as possible, any disorders or disturbances amongst them and to frustrate and defeat any of their evil purposes or designs: and Whereas, for want of a proper guard-house and barracks for the reception of soldiers, that duty has been performed by, and fallen very heavy on, the inhabitants of the said town, who have been obliged as civic obligation to supplement in the keeping of guard there from from Saturday until Monday in every week and on all the usual holidays in each year…….]


……In the towns during the Christmas holidays, they have….in parade….several tall or robust fellows, dressed up in grotesque habits, often with ox-horns on their heads sprouting from the top of
a sort of horrid viper, or mask……The Masquerader, carrying a wooden sword in his hand is followed by a crowd of carousing women, who refresh him frequently with cups of anise-seed water whilst he dances at every door, bellowing out John Connu….these feasts are characterized by great crowds…… in which it seems nearly all those slaves held within the town and adjacent plantations participate along with some numbers of the white bondsmen and lower servants….dance, song, drums, banners and costumed figures many with Cow Tails and other odd things that give them a most extraordinary appearance…..]

When Syndalla knocked discretely upon their door Captain Andor and Miss Erso had been awake for some amount of time. The Inn was already abustle with the day’s activities but as“Helen” had upon the previous evening left instructions that bread and coffee be available as a breakfast for Mr. and Mrs. Avelar, she had gone down to procure it and brought it to the room at the appointed hour.

Captain Andor realized that the pang he endured upon noting that officer’s fleeting expression of concern and slight sigh, as of relief, at finding them both out of bed and mostly dressed was a trial he would have to become accustomed to.

*Oh mi Dios, Capitão,* he thought, torn between amusement and embarrassment, what sort of scene were you expecting?

Miss Erso had an hour earlier disengaged herself from his arms after one last hurried embrace and slipped into the clean linen chemise laid out the previous night. The clever woman even managed her stays and first two petticoats herself, although he gallantly offered his own assistance in the lacing

“I confess sir;” she had said, smiling most delightfully, “the range of your skills continues to astonish me. Is training in the techniques of a lady’s maid a common part of a gentleman’s curriculum where you schooled?”

He took the needle from the ribbon, after pulling its through the last eyelet and tied the laces at her back. The temptation to kiss her neck seemed hardly worth the effort of resisting at this juncture.

He whispered in her ear as he did so, “I assure you, could you be granted some sight me at the age of fourteen, this would be far less mysterious to you.”

*Upon later reflection, it came to him that Miss Erso’s following peals of laughter may have been*
the cause of Syndalla’s quizzical expression upon entering the room moments afterwards.

By the time Mr. Cor joined them, both women were groomed and prepared. With their painful armor back in place they must quit the rooms that had offered them an evenings illusion of shelter and turn back to Kingston and the Harbor.

**Andor planned, as he had been trained to do, for every contingency visible to him.**

Their original and most optimistic hope had once been to gain whatever intelligence they might from Solo and depart within a day, skirting the main West entrance of Kingston with the mornings traffic and returning directly to their ship, with only a brief stop at a “safe” house upon the Harbor Street to change clothing and identities if necessary. Solo’s “box” and the agreed-upon necessity of now at least meeting with a representative from the Maroon Townships after their approach to Syndalla must delay them and engage contingencies.

The numbers moving toward the city from the Spanishtown Road for the upcoming holiday would make their concealment and escape easier in some aspects but more difficult in others.

“I had almost forgotten the date,” Miss Erso had said, peering out the window at the Inn, before their departure, "Is the custom here that the revels should be on Christmas Day or St. Stephens? I have seen such in Barbados and Cuba.” She watched as wagons of wares, in the form of foodstuffs, fruit and barrels of what was surely rum passed by upon the road before the Inn and and the oxen of the Ferry moved ceaselessly, carrying passengers

“St. Stephens,” Captain Andor told her, “The peculiarity of Jonkannu upon this island, lies in the layout of the city and the peculiarities of its military defense. If we can conclude our business, my is hope to be gone from here before it commences, but that as that depends on Captain Solo”.....he had a strong intuition that the phrase ‘depends on Captain Solo’ presaged disaster as often as it’s opposite.....

By ancient custom….indeed it seemed a universal thing, for he had seen its like, varied in details of date and scale, everywhere from Seville to Odessa, and Boston to Lima…..Those held in slavery and lowest servitude were given their “holiday” from labor at years end and some kind of constrained opportunity in riot and spectacle to vent their anger or forget their pain. In many ports of the Caribbean it was called “john canoe.”
Melshi knew this port well and Kay, as was his habit, had diligently researched the structures, events and geography they would encounter in Kingston.

“Unlike more ancient cities there is no ‘merchants row” or common district of business in Kingston,” he had informed them, “the town itself is very carefully designed to resemble a box.”

Cassian noted that he had paused at this juncture in showing them the maps, tilting his head in a manner the Captain had come to realize was one of his friend’s few indications of a kind of distress that in others would pass as some strong emotion. Why now?

“A cell might be a more illustrative metaphor,” Mr. Kay, “with limited and easily sealed points of access and egress and wide clear lines of sight to a single pre-determined spot for the gathering of groups, an open common indicated on this map as “the Parade.” There is no visible wall around the city but the closing of three roads would seal off all escape This accomplished the only open end faces the sea,”

There had been no change whatsoever in the gentleman’s dispassionate voice.

A cell. Captain Andor wondered sometimes if anyone save himself ever noticed such mannerisms or indeed if Kay himself were aware of them.

Few others had occasion to notice the faint scars upon the man’s wrists and ankles, or commented upon them if they did.

He wished, at such times that he might offer some comfort or sympathy, but he knew even after all these years no way to do so.

“Thank you, Kay,” he said and his old friend had nodded.

They ate the last of their bread and conferenced as they did so.

“The governors of Jamaica know, as do all oppressors, that they are vastly outnumbered by those they torment.” he said,"the climate and fevers of the Caribbean act as a further discouragement to the emigration Britain would require to fully control its most profitable colonies. One peculiar effect of this in Jamaica has been that one of the inducements to the many soldiers posted here to remain at their dangerous stations and not desert en masse has always been that upon Sundays and all festival and holidays they shall be allowed to remain safely in their barracks while all the white male citizens shall be pressed to act as their own militia to guard the cities upon such days.”

“Thus for some fifty-four days of the year a number of them must put their own precious hides at hazard in order to defend their bloody riches,” Cor said.

Syndalla shrugged, “Perhaps they do, but generations of edifice assure their risk is lessened. The people held at labor know that even the whisper of open resistance would be death for many. The red coated soldiers do but wait inside the forts and when they come out again no nation or power
could or would come to aid those standing before them. Strong as they are, the Maroons have bargained for their own safety, since the end of the War with Spain they are surrounded and resurgent Britain threatens all they have built here. They say they will give shelter no more to those who escape the yoke and since, with Gerrere’s death, the pirate confederacies are all now broken or foresworn…”

*Andor felt rather than saw a reflexive tension in Miss Erso’s form, even bound as it was in the pink silk gown, at these words.*

“…..there is no escape and no long path forward unless the world itself can be changed to cast light upon one. Few as we are, that is our task.” Hera Syndalla’s voice was firm.

*Ah, this again was the woman he remembered at the helm of the ship that had brought him into Havana Harbor in moonless dark, with sails down on a night tide, almost under the very guns of a waiting naval force.*

*Bienvenido de nuevo, valiente Capitán,* Cassian Andor thought.

“Amen,” Mr. Cor said quietly.

Miss Erso lifted her eyes and nodded.

Though her face remained composed, he was surprised to feel her small strong hand press his own beneath the shadow of the table.

“So,” Mr. Baldwin Cor said, “if I understand you, we must potentially walk back into a contained sanctioned riot of hundreds of desperate souls with nothing to lose, girded all round by trigger-happy and brutal amateur Sunday soldiers, all of them soaking in rum. Through this we will try to find our way back to our ship with Solo in shackles at pistol's point?”

“That is one scenario, yes,” Andor was forced to agree, “in a more hopeful one, Captain Solo will betray us by neither design or mere idiocy, and we can be back aboard our ship, out of Kingston Harbor and well outside the Pallisados and the graveyards of Port Royal before midnight tomorrow.”

“If not,” Syndalla said, with a fatalistic smile, “The costumes are often quite wonderful.”

Mr. Cor preceded them to the stables and brought round the carriage. “Mr. Avelar” handed his bride in and took his seat beside her, as his man lifted “Helen” into the seat across before climbing up to take his own. There was no sign of the woman who had spoken to Syndalla last night, but it was the Maroons play to make, they could not delay longer.
The number of travelers upon the road was greater than that of the previous day, but mostly consisted of wagons and carts bringing victuals and supplies. The 24th was a day of excessive cooking and work. All must be done, not only for the graceful Christmas dinners of the gentry, but to stand for the day following when nearly all who cooked, cleaned, sewed, tilled or washed would be permitted to attend the grand parade. The greater part of the traffic on foot and horseback would come tomorrow as the middling sorts of white planters and their sons, clerks and and shopkeepers from all of the Parishes adjacent came toward the town to organize for their day of “military” service.

It was a fine morning and although the number of carts at the shallow Cobre River crossing delayed them some, the sunlight shone on Hunts Bay and the breeze was pleasant. A dark young man in a green coat and a ferryman’s cap stepped forward to lay hand upon the horse’s harness.

“Please, let me assist you here, sir,” he said, “if I may hold the reins I can lead your horse with safety across the shallows. The water is but two spans at deepest but several have slipped today and traffic has roughed the bed.”

His hand moved to his jacket cuff at once to loosen the knife and he sensed that his “wife,” who but a moment before had been resting her head upon his shoulder now reached for her ribboned straw hat, not to prevent its blowing away in the sudden breeze, but to reach the six-inch hardened steel pin within it.

“Ah,” the young man said with a smile, and a tip of his brimmed hat, ”surely we have met, Miss Helen? My sister at the Ferry Inn does send her regards.

Cor flashed a look at Captain Andor and upon his nod of assent, passed the fellow the horses lead.

“Best you should climb up and drive if you know the ground,” Mr. Cor said and the green-coated man swung up into the seat beside him.

The stranger kept his eyes upon the river, but spoke quite clearly, “Your message has been passed on, Alliance, but you should know we will proffer no aid. I speak for Captain Quan at NannyTown, heir of the Great Lady herself and leader of Windward, but I assure you you shall fare no better with the Leeward. Fortune smile on you, he says, if you fight the British but speed away from this Island. We will not risk for you the treaty our fathers won.”

*The Captain saw Syndalla’s jaw work in frustration, as if biting back words, but she held her tongue.*

Mr. Cor spoke. “We do not ask your help,” he said, “We offer you warning without any request for favor beyond the courtesy that you forgo any mention of us to the King’s officers.”

The young man snapped a sharp look at Cor. “If such calumnies are spread abroad about the free people of the mountains, know them to be lies. We honor our treaty because we must but we do not spy for the vultures.”

From beside him, rather unexpectedly, Miss Erso spoke, “Do you know who I am, asafo of the Windward Township?”

The man did not turn his head, only his eyes flitted back, “No. Who are you, Oburon baa?”

“I am the abanoma of Commander Saul Gerrere.”
There was silence for a moment, save only for the sound of the breeze and the bay. Even the lowing of the cattle and other horses on the road seemed to fade.

The man bowed his head, “It is true then that he is dead?”

“He is gone,” she said. Then, injudicious as it was to stand in a carriage even if it moved but slowly over rutted sand, she held out her hand to Captain Andor without a word so that he might help her step forward to take the seat beside Syndalla. Closer to the man now, she turned her head as if toward her “Helen,” but spoke clearly so that the Windward agent could not miss her words.

“Darkness spreads and the Onderean sails no more. I hunt the E-dom and these are my friends who fight with me. I assure you in his name, firstly that any one of them is worth ten of you, asafo of the Windward Township, and secondly that we seek no action against you. Tell your leaders to believe me as they would my agya when I give you this warning, his Enemy have made an explosive in Florida, a black powder so powerful that 20 pounds will tear a mountain asunder, that will burn even wet, pour like oil or be carried in a knapsack and yet do no harm to he who carries it until a match touches it. Ask them this: When the British have such weapons how long will they honor your treaty?”

They had now crossed the ford at the marshy flats of the Obores and were in clear sight again of the Leeward Road.

The green-jacketed man stopped the carriage and climbed down. “What is your ship at Kingston Harbor?”

It was a risk, but how great was the likelihood that they did not know already? If not them then Trelawnly’s people at Leeward?

“She sails as The Lady’s Gambit,” Captain Andor said.

The man bowed then to Miss Erso, who had returned to Captain Andor’s side, “I am called Nine,” he said. "It is an honor to have met you. My father was freed from death and darkness by the Lion’s hand as a boy. We live under a shadow and it is not for me to make decisions for the elders or my Captain but I will pass on your message, asafo of the Alliance, and I thank you for your trust.”

Nine stepped off into the crowd of workers gathered to pull the wagons across the marshy shore, pulling off the green jacket as he did so and they soon lost sight of him.

Mr. Cor resumed driving and the horses moved ahead to the arranged meeting place with Solo a few miles ahead and nearer to Kingston proper.

“Well,” Syndalla said. “That went as well as it might have, I think.’

“Good,” Miss Erso said, “I admit I was a trifle concerned. It is not the sort of thing I am used to. You do not consider that I overplayed it?”

She had replaced her hat pertly and looked at him with genuine inquiry.
Where have you been all the days of my life and what saint do I thank for bringing you to me now? he wondered.

“Not at all,” he said, “You managed it quite well.

Some miles later they came to a place near to a shady and pleasant stretch of the road, a copse of trees beside a traveler's well that had been marked upon their maps as New Greenwich, although there were no buildings save a farmhouse some distance back from the road and a few shacks down by the shore. Two men with horses were in the shade by the covered well and horse trough. One was recognizable as Captain Solo. The other man wore a wide hat pulled low. As they approached, Solo caught sight of them and raised his hat with one hand while tapping his companion with the other.

Captain had thought the man to be standing beside Solo, but now as they drew closer he saw that he had been sitting on the edge of the well with his back to them. Now the fellow truly stood and pushed back his brim so that his face visible to them.

“Heaven save us,” Mr. Cor said, “Is that….?”

“The cannibal?” Miss Erso ventured, quite leaning over him in the carriage, “By God, I hope so.”

Chapter End Notes

Apologies as always to for the butchery I am committing to translation, chronology and the geography of Jamaica.....do you know how hard it is to read an 18th century map?
Chapter Summary

A short chapter in which our party returns to Kingston on the eve of the holiday festival there. Captain Han Solo again risks more than he knows in attempting to bargain terms with the officers of the Rogue's Venture, as his First Mate feels obliged to point out to him. Captain Andor accedes to his plan, but makes it clear that further license will not be forthcoming. The difficulties of Captain Solo's position are considered by him.

In a further complication he is approached about the payment of an outstanding debt.

Chapter Notes

E wha nga tangata kei reira. I korero mai koe ki a au e rua nga tangata. = There are four of them. You spoke of only two

Kaua e tinihangatia enei tangata = Do not cheat these (persons)

Ka taea e enei iwi katoa te patu ia koe = Each/All of these people can kill you.

Te tiaki. E mohio ana matou ki tenei wahine = Care. We know this woman.

E whakaaro ana koe ko taku kanikani tuatahi tenei? = Do you think this is my first dance?

E kore ahau e inu i taua mea kino = I will not drink that bad thing

(all Maori)

¿Tienes un destino, Capitán Solo? = Do you have a destination, Captain Solo? (Spanish)

Vrolijk verdomde kerst = Merry damn Christmas (Dutch)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
“E wha nga tangata kei reira,” Khaeuri said. “I korero mai koe ki a au e rua nga tangata.”

‘Do not concern yourself, sir,” Captain Solo assured him. “All will be well. I am confident that I have the situation under control.”

His friend managed to convey enormous skepticism by means of the short grunt with which he replied.

*As from my mouth to the ear of God,* Solo told himself as he watched the agents of the Alliance approach. For some reason he found the thought of dying by the hands of good men far more distressful than that of dispatch by the wicked.

Mr. Avelar’s driver dismounted first.

*A dark fellow, African by birth from the look of him but not tall. Broad of shoulder though, and the hand he laid to that horse’s bridle looked strong. The bottom joint was missing from the small finger of his right hand. Gunpowder?*

Avelar himself still bore the look of a well-tempered and self-possessed journeyman assassin thriftily saving up his pay to rent his own workshop. He stepped down and reached his hand back to assist his lady. That dainty creature was much flattered by her pink gown. As she lifted back the near transparent scarf she had worn over her hat to shield her fair face from sun and the dust of travel, Captain Solo caught sight of those sharp green eyes again.

*Had anyone been there to take the wager he would have bet she had already calculated the precise distance between her right hand and his left eye and how hard she would have to throw a knife to strike it cleanly.*
His first mate chuckled behind him.

“Kaua e tinihangatia enei tangata, Ka taea e enei iwi katoa te patu ia koe.”

“Enough!” Solo hissed.

His friend, stepping forward to stand close now spoke more quietly, laying a hand upon his shoulder.

“Te tiaki. E mohio ana matou ki tenei wahine.”

What do you say? Which woman?

Mrs. Avelar’s handmaid had stepped down as well, a slender mulatto lass in a blue gown. She was quite pretty with a heart-shaped face and a shrewd expression, a few years older than her “mistress,” but still young. He had seen her on the stairway in the Inn….but Khaeuri had not been there.

The heathen was right. Why did she look so familiar? Damn! No good had ever come to him from an incompletely recognized woman.

“I hope we have not kept you waiting long, Captain Solo?” Avelar said, pleasantly, ‘We were delayed at the river.”

“Not at all,” he replied, “The day has been pleasant enough, but we should press on. It is best to be well within the arms of Kingston proper before the crowds and make our arrangements before evening overtakes us.”

“What arrangements are to be made then sir? Do we make for your ship tonight?”

“The Falcon is anchored out on the far side of the Palisados, at old Port Royal. If you have, as you informed me at our previous meeting, the ability to secure accommodations where we may stay in the city with safety tonight, my proposal is that you yourself sir, and as many of your party as wish to accompany,” he tipped his hat to the ladies now, “should come with me in a small sloop I have borrowed for the purpose to my ship where she lies at anchor to assess the trinkets we obtained in East Florida. If you find them worthwhile, we shall set upon a price and your ship can come out on the most convenient tide either tomorrow or the next day, as whatever fiction you have spun for yourselves with the port authorities demands, to fetch you back again. We shall then part company,
yourselves on to whatever battle with Satan awaits you and myself to spend your money.”

Mrs. Avelar, eyed him suspiciously, “You said you had the evidence we sought aboard your ship sir, why the danger and trouble of the additional crossing of the Harbor? If your intention was to parlay and trade as contracted why would you not have brought in to Kingston wharf yourself?”

“Parlay?” had he not known her pirate-born before, he knew it now.

“My dear madam, your associates engaged me because my ship is universally known for speed and and discretion. I defy you to find any another who can make the crossing quicker, in any weather under any amount of sail. Still, in normal course of honorable business we have come to have entanglements with a number of parties in the Caribbean. The ports are none so free as once they were and certain, rivalries shall we say, have become testy as opportunities for those of us who prefer to be our own masters have diminished.”

Avelar cut him off there, “Might you state it more plainly, Captain, by saying there are those in this port who would recognize you or your ship, those you earnestly wish to avoid?

Damn the fellow, there are those in practically every port between Veracruz and Istanbul he wished to avoid. He ought to know that well enough.

"Not all of us can live on the good bread of hope, sir, and as the walls of Empires rise some of us poor rats have all that we can do to wriggle through the few cracks remaining in pursuit of our crumbs," he spoke lightly, but found a certain bitterness creeping in to his words, "sometimes the smaller rats fall afoul of the larger in these dark days."

Avelar seemed unperturbed his words although his bride scowled, a disconcertingly fierce expression on one so young, "Your ship is watched for and would be marked, and you hope to use us as your cloak as well as your purse."

Her well-dressed young husband sighed slightly, as if assured of some disappointing but expected conjecture. "And thus your election to meet so well away from the port itself, and your proposed timing to reenter it shielded by the crowds of the bondsmen's festival and to the quit the harbor under guise with us as the regular authorities yield their places at watch to the planter's own well-armed but more inexperienced militia."

He did not know which he found more uncomfortable, the husband's cynical dismissal, the wife's clear disgust, or the "maid's" faint, knowing smile and shake of the head. Who were these angels to judge him? And, damn it all, where did he know that maid from?
As it so often served him, he made bravado his shield.

“Come sir, we are all men….and women… of the world here. What serves us serves you in this instance. I have no wish to be caught by my competitors and having glimpsed their housekeeping set up in East Florida, even less to be detained by yours. Unless you wish to negotiate this by some other means...” he brushed his coat lightly in such a way as to bring his hand closer to his blade without actually reaching for it and felt rather than heard Khaeuri rumble slightly behind and to his left. His fearsome friend thought him a reckless fool, he knew, but would stand with him no matter the odds.

For an instant he thought he had finally cast in too high.

The driver's hand moved toward the cushion of the carriage, where he had no doubt a pistol was concealed, and both women tensed as if ready to move sideways and widen the field of attack. Mrs. Avelar openly reached for whatever blade was hidden in her left sleeve.

The dark haired gentleman himself however lifted his right hand slightly in a gesture that restrained his colleagues. It was not always easy to tell with Alliance who the lead angel was in any squadron of them, it was just as likely to be the cabin boy as the captain, but now he knew.

This dark-eyed (Spanish? Arab? Portugese? American?) killer was the St. Micheal here.

"We will play this by your script for now, Captain Solo," he said, "but I pray you, no more revisions or we shall be obliged to re-negotiate from the ground up."

Solo bowed and tipped his hat. Khaeuri, stepped back.

“Lead on then, sir. We shall be your Christmas guests. Afterwards….well, the sooner ventured the sooner completed.”

Avelar glanced back at his compatriots with a turn of the head. The order to “stand down” seemed by all taken without word or further motion, save the hand he laid lightly on his bride’s right wrist.

They resumed their carriage and he and Khaeuri mounted the horses that his Mate had procured at one of the Guard Houses adjacent to the Bay upon the previous night.
“The bodies are disposed so as to make it look as if they drowned after too much drink at the crossing, are they not?

“E whakaaro ana koe ko taku kanikani tuatahi tenei?” Khaeuri had snarled.

“I merely inquire, as missing limbs tend to incite remark.”

As was his habit, his friend took a moment to speak quietly to his mount, assuring the beast that the journey would not be far, and asking pardon for the greatness of the burden. The great baby disliked to ride, but there was little good option here. They must look passably like a SpanishTown planter and his foreman sent into the city to take their Squire’s place at the muster.

Thus reconfigured they joined in the flow of traffic toward the narrow entrance to the city offered by the Leeward Road.

The city of Kingston was a marvel of modern engineering. It had no proper walls or gates per se for it needed none.

*His memories of the thick-walled fortress that formed Dutch Batavia were few but very clear.*

Here the pattern of the buildings and houses themselves largely combined with the brick walls that cornered the ends of the streets to form sufficient barriers. Whichever English bastards designed it after the Great Earthquake her streets were laid out at a pleasant grid so that one slid up and down the right angled streets as pegs upon a cribbage board, entering at one of three points and moving up or down from there.

It was well past afternoon when their party stopped at one of the several white-washed buildings upon Bourdon Street at Mathew's Lane. From the door facing the street of this modest dwelling swung a sign with the image of a Trooper’s Head. It was not quite the better lodging to be found some distance from the East side, nor yet one of the lower public houses closer to the West.

The borrowed carriage was driven back to a stable behind after Avelar and the two women disembarked. The landlord, delighted at the thought of such well-dressed patronage quickly ordered
an aproned girl to guide them to a front parlor, probably displacing his own family from it in order to do so. Solo and Khaeuri, well cloaked, despite the warmth of the day, waited a few moments then followed in and were asked to tie their mounts back in a small high-fenced yard.

Avelar's "driver" met them there.

"Wait in the public room for an hour until I come for you," he said. "We will arrange affairs."

Send word to his ship, he means, Solo reasoned, nodding in assent.

The fellow eyed Khaeuri, who had removed his hat to fill it with water from the troughs set for the horses and now poured the liquid over his thick black hair and wildly patterned head in order to cool himself.

"I cannot help but wonder," the Alliance man said, "if concealment is your chief aim, why you elect this...memorable....gentleman from among your crew to be the one who acts as your second?"

"What? Do you refer to my First Officer, good fellow?" Solo asked, "I am afraid your meaning escapes me."

The man left them then and when Khaeuri finished drying his face and hair upon his coat, they proceeded into the cramped tap room.

Fully intending to put the costs on Avelar's account, Solo ordered a small bowl of punch and seated himself, back to the wall, behind a rough table. The room contained a few mechanicals and others with no households come to finish their day and make plans for the festive morrow.

"E kore ahau e inu i taua mea kino," his companion grumbled, as he always did, turning up his nose.

"Of course not," the captain apologized, "so great was my distraction that I forgot. I will bravely shift to drink both measures myself."
He was possessed of an optimism that had escaped him for some time. That Florida venture had put a chill upon his heart that was only now beginning to shake. Perhaps the risk had been worth it.

In truth he had hesitated in those windless leafy canyons on the Mantanzas River before that mad boy Luc had slipped overboard before the light failed, braving alligators and God alone knew what else to fetch that box.

“Some tormented soul perished to get this here Capitaine, I feel sure of it. I cannot bear to think of a restless spirit wandering without peace”

Bloody French Catholic chivalry.

He could not simply have left the boy to die there, could he?

Who but God knew?

Perhaps these fierce guardian angels might even win against whatever evil lurked back there, maybe, for a day, a year, ten. Long enough, it could be hoped, for him to close his debts in Cuba and pay his young crew off ashore some place reasonably safe.

The thought of it brought Captain Han Solo as close to a clean conscience as ever he expected to have again.

"My old friend," he said, quaffing the decent watered rum and good lime that even a poor tavern could manage in Jamaica. "I think we have managed a bad hand to our advantage here and may well have saved our own necks thereby."

The room was beginning to fill.

“Go and check upon the horses to make sure they are not visible from the street and look to see if that fellow has come back around to tell us our employers are ready with their next move I will settle accounts here and meet you by the door.”

Khaeuri nodded and went out by the side passage, thus increasing the available space in the room by half.

All that was necessary was to manage tonight and part of tomorrow. Solo lifted the bowl in a silent toast to his own good spirits.
It was only as he laid that vessel aside and moved to rise from his bench that he perceived the threadbare green coat of the gnarled man who abruptly seated himself opposite. Solo also caught sight of the scarred bastard’s hand slipping a pistol, no doubt primed and loaded, quickly out of plain sight and under the boards of the table between them. It was aimed at either his heart or, from that low angle, other organs he prized even more greatly.

“¿Tienes un destino, Capitán Solo?”

Oskar Grediaz. One of Jabbar’s lesser henchman.

There was no mercy for a poor sinner, was there?

Vrolijk verdomde kerst, Han, my boy.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Boxing Day.

Christmas Day itself was little celebrated in the 18th century, especially in English territories. Those with households might put up some greens or have a good supper and attend a church service, but for most it was an ordinary day. The trappings we usually associate with an "English Christmas" are largely Germanic and were only introduced to England in Victorian times. Carolling and mumming were more commonly associated with the Second Day of Christmas, St. Stephens or "Boxing Day", New Years Day or Twelfth Night.
Jonkonnu/ the Third Part, concerning Mr. Cor

Chapter Summary

In which Mr. Baldwin Cor passes Captain Andor's instruction to a messenger in Kingston so that it may be passed to the Rogue's Venture, still docked in disguise at Kingston. As he suffers the stress of the task, that gentleman considers his early life and experiences and how he came to serve as a gunner in the Alliance.

At the same time the young daughter of the landlord of the Trooper's Head struggles to act as serving maid to the well-attired party of a gentleman and lady and maid as they wait in the front parlor of that hostelry. In doing so she overhears a conversation and becomes swept up in unfolding events.

Captain Solo shoots a man and jumps out a window.

Chapter Notes

In the true Star Wars Universe tradition of giving every single character, no matter how much if any screen time, a full backstory.

Somehow this is turning into the historical mystery novel I never knew I wanted to write. Flagrant plot indulgence.

Overheard conversations are always the win.

The Trooper's Head

Kingston, Jamaica

December 25, 1769
Mr. Baldwin Cor knew that he might not walk long on the streets of Kingston alone without some question. Mr Kay had carefully provided their party with a number of convincingly forged “passes” to give to any authorities who questioned the movements of Midshipman Syndalla or himself when unaccompanied on the street, but these were no guarantee of safety. After sunset tonight the less professional volunteers would take over the duties of policing the streets and curfew and these measures might prove absolutely vital. Even at this afternoon hour he was stopped twice as he approached the Harbor Street, both times by men wearing the sash of the town guard. He had never known such fear in storm or under artillery fire. Yet he must have held his nerve and features in check, for seeming content with his letters they let him move on without apparent suspicion. One gentleman even smiled contentedly and bid him good holiday on the morrow.

He marveled most continuously at Syndalla’s courage and firmness of mind. What made his throat dry with imaginative apprehension she must have endured for months in Brazil.

In the West Indies, as indeed in most of the “profitable” colonies where the captives outnumbered their guards ten or twenty to one, the planters held their rule in thinly veiled terror of those they oppressed. Any deviation in action or appearance was crushed ruthlessly. Jamaica simmered on the volatile edge of revolt at all times and explosions occurred with regularity, the last but eight years ago.

If there was one thing Mr. Cor understood, with a natural affinity from boyhood that seemed as if it must have been granted to him by Providence, it was explosions.

He had been born in England, and his earliest memories were of bustling streets, shipyards and factory works.

His mother once told him of green valleys and mountains in the distance in a place called Futa Jallon near a village called Coré and how she and her sister had walked there where the wind rippled the grass like waves on the sea, to hold their hands outstretched together and dream that they could fly like birds.

“Where is your sister now my dear mother?” he had asked then and must have been so terribly young for he had not yet known that this was one of the many questions one must never, under any circumstance ask. “God alone knows,” she had whispered.

Never one other word of her life or trials or the place of her birth ever crossed her lips in his hearing.

He had been born in Bristol for his mother by virtue of her childish beauty and some agent’s whim had been purchased and brought back from Barbados as an age-mate companion and later maid-servant to the young daughter of the gunpowder merchant Mr. William Littleton and had later given birth below stairs in the house of that same gentleman.

They had called him “Anthony” as Mr. Littleton had an interest in the military generals of the ancient
Empire. It was a luxurious affectation of his mother’s master that he be trained as a house servant from as early an age as he could be fitted into child-sized livery.

Anthony could not have been more than seven when he came down into the kitchens one day, balancing a tray twice his size, to see the cooks and maid-servants in a great uproar.

A one-eyed, eight-fingered Englishman with wig askew, in an unbuttoned brocade waistcoat with shirtsleeves rolled up was tossing thin twigs of wood into the kitchen fire. Each one was popping into a bright yellow and blue flame.

Unsurprisingly, the cook was quite distraught over the effect this might have on her roasts of beef. Her helpers were shrieking in terror, but the man seemed oblivious. He proceeded pulling envelopes of waxed paper from a leather bag he had dropped upon the table amid the cabbages and carrots of the day’s dinner and was emptying more and more of the sticks onto the table.

“Good!” he shouted, “Good, most of them are still dry, perhaps the fool has not cost us the entire demonstration. Now I need the phosphorus! You, woman!” He shouted at the furious cook, “I need a kettle with tight lid, a copper kettle mind you, and a slitted wooden spoon. At once you bellowing harpy and this as well…” he seized a cabbage. The cook, much beside herself, picked up a cleaver and cursing all the saints in heaven, seemed to threaten the man with imminent decapitation. The butler and scullery maid made shift to restrain her.

“Do none of you fools speak the King’s English,” the man shouted above the dim, “A… COPPER..KETTLE…AND…LID! At once!”

The boy called Anthony laid the tray upon the back table and ran to fetch the demanded items from among the utensils hung upon the racks beside the baking ovens.

“Sir!” he said, running up and thrusting a small handled copper pot and lid toward the man amidst the tumult. The man snatched it up, and turned a sharp, small blue eye on him, rather like an inquisitive bird.

“Good!” he said, “And a little child shall lead them..’ the book says. Now, do you know where I can find a chamber pot?”

Anthony acceded that he most surely did, that there was a cupboard upstairs where these items were kept ready for distribution to the private chambers.

“Help me gather these up then and show me where to get one! Quickly child!”

Thus he first made the acquaintance of Mr. John Baldwin, chief chemist of the Littleton Powder Works.

From that eccentric gentleman, into whose service he was later given as a requested reward, he learned about chemistry and its engineering, how the basest and most vile of matters could be transformed. His new master had, after all, begun his career as an alchemist. In seeking gold he had become a keen producer of fire. Seeking the Philosopher’s Stone and the gift of life he now artesianed destruction.

Mr. Baldwin’s favoring of him for a quick mind and steady hand spared him the slow poisoning that could consume the lesser workers who bathed the phosphorus, and ground the sulphur. By skill and luck he escaped the accidents that struck all too often those who pressed the cakes of black powder
that ships of war consumed like bread in Britain’s conflicts.

Possessing two good eyes to Mr. John Baldwin’s one, he became in time adept at the practical calculation and requirements of gun and cannon fire. Strong of stomach where that gentleman was prone to seasickness he became the one who documented the practical trials of the incendiaries developed for firepower at sea. He became, as Mr. Baldwin often conceded his "good right hand."

He as well saw how a brilliant man of keen mind and kindly nature could close his eyes to the consequences of the work of his hands, both near and distant. Much that he saw and learned troubled him, the injustice of his own situation and his mother's burned his heart, yet he knew full well how thin the thread upon which his safety hung.

One day, when he was seventeen, one of the mill foreman had tendered notice, having been hired away by a rival manufactory on another part of the coast in a dispute over advancement. "A free man makes choices," Mr. Tuskin said, "and unlike Anthony, sir, I may choose to leave your employ when opportunity presents itself." Mr. Baldwin had appeared quite startled as if in ten years he had never once made use of his luxury in considering the issue.

"I have seen to some nonsense, with regard to your service Anthony," Mr. Baldwin said, one day when Anthony was eighteen, and then thrust at him, with some obvious distraction of mind, his papers of manumission among a pile of shop orders and blueprints. He looked up to meet Anthony’s eye as he added, “Keep them with you, eh? these papers. I have set copies with my lawyer but….the Squire would not be pleased, best to keep it quiet for now.”

The name upon the paper was Anthony Coré. How Mr. Baldwin came by this he never learned.

They never spoke of it, though Anthony kept the papers well hidden in his rooms. He found that he was paid now, though always directly from Mr. Baldwin's hand, not from the paymaster. At twenty one, by the grace of God, he was even able to give his mother, if not justice for her suffering and lost youth, her liberty. When word came that Miss Mary Littleton was to marry a Bridgetown sugar merchant and remove with a household to the West Indies within the month he dressed in his best coat and withdrew the money he had saved. Mr. Littleton struck a hard bargain but as Mr. Baldwin had quietly offered to back any offer required the deal was struck. Miss Littleton wept at the loss of her lifelong maidservant but Anthony’s mother took his arm and walked away from the fine brick house without a backward glance.

He knew how narrow the road he walked was and the risk of asking aloud any questions that troubled his sleep was great.

He returned one day from an long errand to the Admiralty offices at Greenwich, with the secretary he was required to bring along when Mr. Baldwin was otherwise engaged, for many of the officials would not speak directly to a person of his history, to find his patron and employer stuffing papers frantically into a stove in his offices. Mr Baldwin abruptly ordered him from the room in round terms. “This is nothing to do with you!” he shouted. “Go! Stay away!”

Even for that increasingly erratic gentleman this behavior had been disturbing. With the doors locked behind him Anthony had no choice but to depart. His intention had been to go to Mr. Baldwin’s house adjacent to the mill upon the following morning and inquire with the housekeeper, perhaps even his physician, as to his health. It was in the dark of that night when he felt a rumble, as of thunder. It shook him from his bed even in the small set of rooms he was let above the offices on the far side of the gunnery field nearly a half mile away. Books fell from shelves and the glass cracked in the windows that faced toward the powder mill two miles off. He knew at once what it must be. Half
of Bristol knew what it must be.

The fire at the works smoldered for days. Yet when he came running he was told that Mr. Baldwin had been, by some miracle the only casualty, having declared an impromptu holiday for all the workers the day before. Why he had been alone in the milling room before dawn upon a Sunday morning remained a mystery.

Some difficult weeks after, he went to his mother, where she lived in the city now with her husband, a kindly ships carpenter. She told him men had been there looking for him but that she had put them off.

She gave to him an envelope inscribed with his name in Mr. Baldwin’s hand that the gentleman had given her some days before.

It contained money, copies of those papers relating to his manumission and this note.

“Anthony; When I was young I delighted in mysteries and powers and the charting of the wonders of Nature’s forces. I told myself that the poor man who makes the sword has nothing to do in the sins of the rich man who slays with it. I was wrong. I took the coin of kings and princes, hid my unfinished work from all and hoped that I would be forgotten as too unimportant but now I face the bitter truth. They slew even the families of the others, Levoisier’s son, Erso’s wife and daughter, Lioni, and Stahl, were killed when they tried to run. There is no other way. Forgive me. Learn the truth then choose a path. I beg you only, shun mine.”

Also contained within was a small slip upon which was written the name: Captain Jan Dodonna, Stjärna Shipping, Rowes Wharf.”

He burned the note and kissed his mother goodbye. She did not weep as she had when he was eight and went to the Powder Works.

The white-bearded man explained who the Alliance was and what they fought for.

"I know a great deal about what burns and what will not," he said "and I can figure the aim for a 30 pound gun on a pitching deck. Have you need of such in your fight?"

"Aye," the old man said, "that could come in most handy." He had been twenty five then and he was thirty now.

Rostok and Melshi were men he knew and admired. Captain Andor was much trusted by the Council. In recruiting a crew at Cadiz they spoke of the events in Portugal. Mr. Kay, whom all acknowledged a stranger to exaggeration, told how one ship from a distance of almost a mile had lain waste to a fortress with but two volleys of fire, each of which had exploded on impact. There was a plantation in Florida, Andor told them, whereby the avowed Enemies of their cause had developed a blasting compound many had sought for decades. If, as seemed likely, this was but a test to
demonstrate its use to the watching powers of Europe, they must be found and their works destroyed.

“Do you understand what they are speaking of?” Porquins had asked him.

He did, all too well.

It was more than a week into the voyage that he had first learned the name of the young woman who served as new officer and their contact in the venture, Miss Jane Erso.

This was a battle he was meant to fight in any way he could, he felt sure of it. Yet, though he had served aboard Alliance ships at combat at Algiers, and Sicily and in long months of service had set cannon at forts in Cuba and San Juan. Yet he was forced to admit that this venture at Jamaica was by far the most fearful thing he had ever attempted. Despite all the expanded dangers that would have been attendant upon it, he wished with all his heart that he had a gun.

He recognized the cabin boy Toby, with great relief, passing out small broadsheets as if for a merchant ship's offerings at the edge of the wharf.

Mr. Cor presented Captain Andor’s instructions quickly to him and took in return a sheet penciled with the information they would need tomorrow.

“A blessed Christmas to you,” small Toby said, catching himself before “sir” escaped him.

“And to you as well,” he said with a smile. The boy leaned close and the Master Gunner thought that he must mean to impart some secret information. “But an hour ago,” the child whispered, eyes wide. “A man walked up this very street carrying a gigantic yellow cow’s head made of paper and another wore trousers fashioned the likeness of a horse’s rear end with a tail made of tinsel. Have a care!”

Baldwin Cor moved quickly back to the Trooper’s Head, with luck they would move to the safe house prepared for their escape after a perfunctory supper, to rest there a few hours and then be gone from this dreadful place upon the morning tide in guise as fishermen, for whom the ruckus of the holiday must wait. The Captain would proceed along with Captain Solo and his fearsome friend to obtain the intelligence they sought aboard Solo’s ship. Himself, Miss Erso and Midshipman Syndalla would return to their own good ship and bring it outside the Palisados. There Andor would rejoin them and they would move to their true target.

He disliked this plan, no one liked it in fact, Miss Erso possibly least of all. It had too many moving parts for any engineer to find comfort in.

So far, however, all had timed near perfectly. They had still a few hours of daylight. As he approached the street entrance of the hostelry, catching sight of Solo’s distinctive Mate leaning against the doorway he began to hope that all might proceed without dismay.

That, as Midshipman Syndalla later pointed out to him, was the mistake that marked him clearest as a novice to such clandestine ventures.

He heard the shot ring out as he was mere strides from the doorway. Frozen in shock for no more than an instant it seemed before Captain Solo himself came bursting out the tavern window.
Young Elizabeth Werther had been pinned into a clean apron and sent by her landlord father to serve the gentry who had been seated in the front parlor.

Normally such infrequent guests of quality would have been attended by her mother, but she was busy in the kitchen, as the girl who cooked would not work tomorrow and extra victuals for both service and sale to revelers would need to be set aside tonight. Even otherwise it should have been their Sula, or her father, but both of these were too busy serving in the taproom and the yard.

Workers and journeymen had begun to gather early in the public rooms, some for a Christmas toast, others to congregate and make plans for tomorrow's festivities. At the same time, men from the countryside had been gathering through the town to take up duty, as the Governors soldiers repaired to their Barracks on the far side of the Parade park and inside the Forts East and West, and a few of them sought refreshment before reporting to their ordered meeting places. This growing mob took all of her father’s time and Sula’s as well.

The well-dressed lady and gentleman had stopped only to rest their rented livery and refresh themselves before going elsewhere. Father had brought in the wine that the gentleman ordered but dared not leave the bar cage unguarded long, even with the lock on, lest he return to find half the rum missing. So Elizabeth was set to serve the cakes and coffee. Her hands had shaken, bringing in the pot, but the lady in the pink gown smiled at her and pretended not to notice any drops upon the tray.

She hovered in the stairwell, half afraid to enter either the tumult of the kitchen or the crowd of the taproom. When she had tried to enter there to obtain, from her father’s box behind the bar, the cut cubes of sugar for the coffee tray she had found herself looking straight up at a terrifying man.

That his black-braided head scraped the ceiling had not been what caused her to jump back with a shriek of fright. It was his face which had been crossed by swirls of black lines spread out like great curling wings across his brows, down his nose like a birds beak and back to his ears. Black lines traced his lips and spiraled his chin. She had since babyhood harbored a secret fear of the great masks and heathenish pantomimes that paraded the streets on the Boxing Day Jonkannu but this had seemed one made flesh. Sula swept in at her panicked cry and told her, “Stay upon the stairs Miss Elizabeth.” She fetched her out the sugar, elbowing through the crowd of convivial men, and said
that if young Miss Werther stayed in the hallway with the door closed she might adequately tend the folks in the front parlor without having to pass the fearful man again.

“Is he a devil, Sula?” Elizabeth whispered.

“Yes, I suppose,” the girl said as she closed the door to answer Mr. Werther’s orders from the cage to bring more lemon.

So Elizabeth sat upon the back stairs and she listened. There was nothing else to do. The gentleman, a slim and handsome man in his yellow coat, had asked for an hours privacy and quiet for his wife after the refreshments had been brought, but pinned thus she supposed she ought to at least be there to hear if they did call for more.

“I am still against it,” the lady in the pink gown was saying. “I do not trust this smuggler, or his cannibal.”

“He needs the money. I do not doubt. These fellows live hand to mouth out here these days.” That was another woman’s voice, their girl in the blue gown. “I know his type. They are honorable in their way, but they must play the fox sometimes, all their pride lies in it.”

“You say you knew him?” That was the gentleman.

“At New Orleans, but he was only the First Mate there, also of a quick sloop, maybe even the same ship. The captain I bargained with was another, a Creole charmer named Alando Calrissian. He charged me dear but did not shirk, I think this Solo cut from the same cloth.” The girl sounded as if she stood by the window.

“He has been there,” The gentleman spoke calmly and quietly. “We have not. It is a chance worth taking. I want his charts, the objects he found for Kay’s inspection and a chance to speak to his crew. I am adept at not getting my throat cut, my dear. Get the ship out. Melshi said it best. This Harbor is a ferret trap. We have learned all that we can learn here.”

“I think..” the lady in pink began.

“I understand your concern, but this is my decision at this juncture. We will adhere to the plan.” He sounded almost stern.

Silence followed.

“Ah, the cannibal has moved outside to smoke his pipe,” the girl spoke, she must be by the window.

“Perhaps at the request of the management, I am sure he has an interesting effect on the other customers,” the gentleman said, in a lighter tone.

“Baldwin should be back at any moment. By your leave, sir let me look and see, we will need to be ready to go upon the nearest opportunity I think, if all is prepared.”

“Check the street,” the man agreed, “but only if you can do so without peril.”

There was a sound, as if of the hallway door opening upon the other side.
“I take it I am ordered to be silent on this matter, sir?” the lady said, softly but with reined anger. Elizabeth knew that sort of voice, she had heard her mother speak so often enough.

“Is it enough to say that there is no point? I know full well you mean to suggest I take you with me. I cannot agree to it and you know why. What will further debate serve us?” His words sounded stern still but his voice had softened.

*It sounded as if they sat close together. There was a noise as if the lady were about to speak in protest, but perhaps it was only a cup being put down. The gentleman continued.*

“If you are right, and this fellow betrays us. if I am mistaken and have foxed a fox one time too many, you must be safe aboard the ship to see this through. The others have their orders. They are to take you and Rook to the Fort and the River and proceed from there upon your authority.”

A silence followed, in which only the movement of a chair and the faint rustling of silk could be heard above the muffled bustle of the taproom, street and kitchen.

“Damn you, sir” the lady was barely to be heard. It seemed that she also laughed a little.

“Ah, but this is hard. Had I known how hard I think I would have not had the courage to knock upon your door.”

“My dear,” the man said, in much the same gentle laugh, “As I recall you did not knock at all.”

At that moment several things happened, all within the span of a moment, or two at most.

A pistol shot shattered the air from the taproom behind her. There was a scream…*Sula?…*followed hard upon by shouting and the breaking of glass.

Elizabeth jumped down from the bottom step in her fright and realized she must have cried out. Before she could gather her wits even slightly, the front parlor door opened and the gentleman in the yellow coat was standing before her. He took her wrist swiftly and turned her. Holding her tightly he put a hand over her mouth.

“Your pardon, little spy,” he said, “But not a sound please .”

The lady in the pink gown was directly behind him, having pulled what seemed to be an embroidered work-bag from the table.

“We will not hurt you,” she said, “but you must take us to a room above the back stairs, now.”
Jonkonnu/ the Fourth Part, relating to Midshipman Syndalla's efforts

Chapter Summary

In which Midshipman, formerly Captain, Hera Syndalla, along with Captain Andor and Miss Jane Erso attempt to escape Kingston in the aftermath of Captain Solo's unfortunate confrontation with a man who wished to speak to him about collection of a debt.

That lady determines that she shall deviate from standard order to aid the lovers in their escape.

The aid of two young women within the tavern is obtained by means, eventually, of trade rather than coercion. Everyone changes clothes again and the chase is on.

Chapter Notes

Han shooting Greedo is getting a little "Rashoman"-like. Sorry.

He iti rawa te waahi = There is not enough space!
Kaua e manukanuka, wahine toa = Do not worry, female warrior!

Rorirori! Kuri! = “Stupid! Dog!” (Maori)

Eu deveria matá-lo com a minha própria mão! = I should kill him with my own hand.
(Portuguese)

Hono atu ki te hiku = Join the tail/queue (Maori) rough meaning: "get in line"

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Kingston, Jamaica

the early evening of
December 25, 1769

*The thought that first came clearly to her mind was, “I hope he has broken his neck.”*

A dead smuggler in the street would have presented all manner of difficulties at that juncture. A live one might have laid out yet more. The matter was indeed a question of balance.

*Still, no matter the scale used it would have been immensely satisfying to Hera Syndalla at that precise moment had Captain Han Solo actually gotten himself killed in pursuance of the mismanagement of his own affairs.*

Syndalla in her guise had but stepped out from the side door of the Trooper’s Head to assure her mind as to the location the tall and lavishly decorated exotic described as Captain Solo’s First Mate, who had departed from the public taproom out to the street.

It also seemed well to give Captain Andor and Miss Erso a few private moments to resolve their continuing divergence of opinions as to which of the party should risk accompanying their shadowy contact and which should repair directly to the ship.

*Captain Andor was in the right here, she knew. His was the command and he the most experienced field agent among them….She still yearned to know how he had gotten himself out of Havana….and while the next officer in the chain of command, Mr. Melshi, was a keen and well-liked officer most capable to manage the venture in theory, the fact remained that should Captain Andor be lost under such circumstances Miss Erso’s ready expertise would become even more critical to the mission.*

Syndulla herself would have made the same decision.

*Yet the pang that struck her heart listening to them was not about rank of authority or wisdom of any*
mission’s command. She found herself painfully obliged to conquer a blind and passionate wish to take the young Englishwoman to her side and say into her ear, “Do not leave him. Whatever may come, whatever he says. Stay at each other’s side.”

Better for both herself and them to now avail herself of a moments opportunity to leave the room, plot the cannibal’s movements, and attempt some glimpse of Mr. Cor.

The free black men of that ward of the city as well as those enslaved men given liberty to do so gathered in the side yard and the tavern’s girl and a kitchen boy brought out purchased refreshments to them.

Several men greeted her with great conviviality, and a few with outright sauce as she edged around the corner to the street. She feigned the diffident focus of a maid bound upon some mission of her mistresses’ and ignored them. Her intention was to pass back in again by the front way and if accosted there claim she had been sent to seek the tavern girl for more wine but had been unable to press through the crowds inside.

Movement from the side door to the front would both gain her sight of both the wandering cannibal and the street beyond.

The impressive fellow had his hat off and a white clay pipe in his teeth as he leaned against the wall of the tavern nearest the road. Such carriage would have been ascribed vagrancy and on any other day he might well have been warned off, had any guardsman on the street the courage, but a festival air already pervaded as the sun headed toward evening.

The cannibal seemed to smile widely when he caught sight of her coming around the corner of the place…that or a grimace, Lady of Heaven, it was hard to tell.

She had known many lands where decoration of one’s person was a rite and custom, often to mark profession, status or family connection. The mark of the Starbird she had had cut upon her arm, as many of them did, when as a girl she had defied her father to go to the coast and join the fight. Syndallas heart still burned with pride that she had spoken her oath to no less than the great Aayla Secura, herself. But where upon the blue earth was this fellow’s nation?

The Kayabi of the forests of Brazil, when she and her beloved had ventured there and shown their marks where asked by them, through the boy who interpreted, “Who have you killed?” For to those people inked designs pressed into the skin with thorns of a certain tree signified the cleansing of a warrior’s soul after some mortal contest. Accomplished warriors among them had many designs on face and body.

Were the tradition followed elsewhere, this accomplished person must have slain multitudes. She had caught glimpses of his neck and arms as he had saddled the horses and she did not doubt there was no discrete inch of him left uncovered.
Removing his pipe from his inked lips, Solo’s mate now tipped a cornered hat and seemed to call out to her.

“Kaua e manukanuka, wahine toa!” he said, and waved a great decorated hand back toward the tap-room door. “He iti rawa te waahi.”

Surely he knows I cannot make out a word he is saying?

From the corner of her eye she saw Mr. Cor progressing down the abutting lane toward them…Most excellent….she greeted him with a smile, which she could see him return from across the street.

She read genuine relief in his expression, but would not chide him for it as a failure of his role-play. No doubt every bondsman who walked the streets of this hellish place felt the hand of fear lift from him a little when he returned from even the mildest errand unscathed.

The Master Gunner-turned-agent was but a dozen yards across the wide sandy street. She debated in her mind whether she should wait for him or turn back inside to alert the Captain and Miss Erso first.

As it happened the luxury of decision was removed from her.

The sound of pistol shot rang out from within the Trooper’s Head.

Mr. Cor halted as if frozen. Syndalla turned back toward the tavern. Within someone shouted and a woman screamed. The cannibal let out a cry like a roar and a man came crashing out the half-opened front window of the public room in a hail of splintered wood and shattered glass.

Captain Han Solo landed in the street, shoulder and back first, rolling with arms crossed to protect his head.

The thought, I hope he has broken his neck, was followed instantly by, The bastardo insano has done this before and knows how to land.

“Rorirori! Kuri!” the giant was snarling. He threw his pipe aside and dashed forward with surprising swiftness to seize Solo from the dirt and debris of the road by his collar even as the captain scrambled upright.

Syndalla calculated in the instant. She gathered her skirts and ran to Mr. Cor, as he stood astonished across the street.

Passing the giant she snapped, “Come! now!” Even if the exotic could not understand her, the imbecilic smuggler could. Reaching Mr. Cor she grabbed his arm in a posture of alarm she had little need to feign.

“Where?” she demanded.

For an instant it seemed he did not understand….Come sir, you have ordered ranks of cannon under fire without flinching, do not make me slap you now….. but he gathered himself quickly and thrust a
paper into her hand.

A broadsheet from the wharf.

“Conceal them. Now! Go!” she said.

Mr. Cor rallied himself and took Solo’s other arm as the cannibal thrust his captain forward.

The three of them fled down the street and between the buildings.

Syndalla leaped back as quickly as her garments would permit, running back toward the tavern in hope that she might not be seen by those now emerging to be doing anything else but fleeing the path of the escaping men.

Although in the instant she turned she had not been able to forbear to growling, “Eu deveria matá-lo com a minha própria mão!”

“Hono atu ki te hiku,” Solo’s first mate barked. Although the words themselves were strange to her, it seemed to her that she could well guess their meaning.

Master yourself, Capitão, she berated her agitated heart.

As Syndalla ran back toward the front door she cried out, “That way! He ran that way!”

Making sure that she had both hands in the air and was pointing in no useful direction whatsoever.

Men were rushing pell mell from the public rooms of the Trooper’s Head, arguing amongst themselves.

All of the freedmen who had filled the yards outside had, unsurprisingly, vanished.

The men in the street paid her little mind, save for one rough-handed fellow, whose plain coat buttons showed him a foreman or shopmaster, but who now wore a militia sash. He grabbed her arm hard and said, “What did you see girl?”

Leaning against the wall as if much afraid, she answered him. “A white man came through the window, sir and ran with another who had a face like a devil,” feigning trembling alarm. There was no concealing the unfortunate cannibal’s involvement, he had been seen drinking with Solo earlier and was doubtless the talk of the street even prior to this disruption.

Such men would be willing to accept, even from a woman of her station, whatever confirmed their own notion of events and so quickly dismiss her.

At a chance, she tossed in a small detail that might divert them,”I heard them speak French as they ran sir.”
Somewhere in this wretched place there must still be retired French smugglers or some French ship at harbor. Let them waste time checking there first.

Mr. Cor must have already achieved the appointed rendezvous. Rostock would take the ship out on the morning’s tide barring some other upset or instruction. The safe house was prepared at Harbor Street #39 according to the message hidden with the text of the advertisement.

If the Master Gunner could reach the place unrevealed he might lie safe with his charges and slip out with the dawn.

Syndulla must do the same if possible. Her intention had been to return to the parlor and rejoin the Captain and Miss Erso, passing to them the message and location of the refuge so that they three might escape together but she looked up to find that the curtain of the front parlor room street-facing window was now widely parted.

The Captain and Miss Erso must have quit the chamber. Something unseen to her had complicated matters within. If she could not reach them the understood order would clearly be to leave and proceed on her own to the safe house and thence the ship. It might be possible to wait for there for a set number of hours but if the Captain and Miss Erso did not arrive, the ship must be removed from danger and all must proceed with the mission.

Andor was an operative of high standing. He had gotten himself out of passages as fraught as this alone and without aid before.

But he was not alone anymore was he? Affection strengthens the hand, but it may also slow it. Who knew that lesson better than she?

“We leave this young man to die,” her love Kanaã had said to her, accusing, when they sailed away leaving Cassian Andor at Havana, a boy with a hand-rifled musket and a dark mission. She had followed orders then for hers had been the burden of command.

It was not her burden now. She would look for them first.

_He was a sharpshooter. She was a rigging monkey. They would go high by instinct, to get the lay of things, if such a path was open to them._

Syndalla looked back at the tavern house. As with many dwellings here it had a sloping peaked roof and shuttered sleeping porches against the heat of summer at both front and back. Above these were likely attics and quarters for the laboring souls, and a long tilted roof against the storming rains that regularly dropped over onto the walls and fences of the adjoining houses.

She walked around through the now deserted yard.

The landlord’s wife had run out from the kitchen building at the back, calling for her daughter Elizabeth.

“Mistress,” “Helen” called, “do you look for the young lady who brought my master the coffee?”
Syndulla remembered the girl’s trembling hand, how she had winced at the shouts of the men in the tap room beyond...a nervous child, possibly prone to hide, or bolt.

“She took great fright at the shot I think and ran toward the neighboring house.”

A gesture of her hand directed the flushed matron toward another whitewashed building down the street and opposite.

The landlady, called back to the kitchen door, “Sula! Mind the fire!” and with a look fixed midway between anger and genuine concern ran down the lane, apron flapping, crying “Elizabeth, you foolish girl! Where are you?”

Syndulla managed an ear at the unbroken taproom window. The landlord seemed to remain within, with a younger man. No doubt the acting constables had been sent for, perhaps a physician or coroner as well, but with the gentry and soldiers at their Christmas toasts this would take some time.

“They are gone, father” a man’s voice, the younger one, was saving. “Aye!” the landlord said, miserably, “of course they are gone, what gentleman would not escort his lady quickly from such a scene? With their account unpaid. If we are lucky they will send their man back for the carriage. We must have the reckoning ready in writing for when they do so. The constables will want to speak to the gentleman in any case, none of those rascals are fit to give a statement…..ah damn it James, we shall need to re-plaster that whole wall!”

*From the sound of it he had broken into his own rum store in his distress of mind.*

*She had a half of an hour, at best....safest to say a quarter.*

Crossing now round to the outside kitchen door, she perceived that a small dark boy and the bond maid in the dark yellow gown and broad white apron were all who remained. *The white apron had been laid aside now on the bench, spattered with what might well be blood....likely not from the pigeons for the pies. No doubt hers had been the scream in the taproom. Yet more mess to clean up, Captain Solo?*

There might have been more servants but the rest had perhaps gone off to search for the missing girl. She must get the this Sula to take her into the house..

“Sula?” Syndulla said quietly from the door. “I was sent to fetch you.”

Her good chintz gown and muslin cap no doubt gave her credence, but the girl was clearly a sharp one.

“By who?” she asked with some suspicion.

Syndulla stepped up into the sweltering room. *It distressed her to create fear in one already endangered daily, but she had no choice. There was no time to construct a trick.* Two cooks knives, one for the gutting of fowl and one for the paring of fruit lay on the trestle to hand. She lifted the smaller knife and tucked it in her silk sleeve, then laid her hand upon the larger as it lay upon the...
table. The girl stared at her, eyes wide.

“This young man can tend the kitchen for a few moments, Sula, I will not detain you long,” she said quietly and conversationally, ”I have an immediate need to know more about the disposition of rooms on the upper levels of the house and where I might find clothing that would not be quickly missed.”

Sula nodded, without removing her gaze.

“Mind the pies, Arthur,” she said. “I will be back in a moment.”

Once outside Syndalla and across the yard told the young woman, “I shall leave you the gown and petticoats I am wearing. It shall fetch you a good price and none can accuse you of theft for none shall post it missing…..do you have a place to conceal it?”

“Yes,” the tavern girl said carefully, disarmed a little by the practicality. A clever girl indeed. She understood that if she could pawn this apparel tomorrow and conceal her gain, that money might serve her well.

*Hera Syndalla also gave her back the small knife, for missing knives set off many alarms here.*

Fear somewhat assuaged now, Sula quickly directed her up the narrow back stairs and brought her to where some low rooms faced over the yard beneath the roof upon the second floor.

As she climbed the girl whispered back over her shoulder, “Myself and Deborah do the work up here for the light. Mr. James’s old clothes are there for mending and giving to the boys in the stable for Boxing Day folded in the basket waiting to be cut down and made over also, some petticoats and aprons that cook is to have, and a patched coat of Mr Werther’s to be turned out for Cato at the farm.”

Letting her pass at the top of the stairs she then pointed to the rooms spoken of.

"If you are true, hide this," Sula whispered, waving her hand to indicate the gown “Helen” had offered in barter, "under the pallet by the door," Then she ran back downstairs only to stop at the and turn for a bare moment.

“Are you from the townships?” the girl asked.

*Poor child, she meant the Maroons. What must it be like for the people here to look up at the mountains and know that though some measure of freedom might lay there they were forbidden to even reach for it upon pain of death?*

“No,” Syndalla said. “I fight the long fight of the Alliance.” *It did not matter if this girl of Kingston knew. Who could she tell? Who would believe her if she did?* Lifting and pushing back the ruffle of the sleeve she showed the Starbird.

There was a sound of pounding and hammering from the floors below and at the front of the house. Young Sula fled back down, out and across to the kitchen.

Removing her shoes to walk barefoot in better silence, Syndalla tiptoed up the last step, skirts tuck back, toward the narrow portal the tavern’s girl had indicated.
Men were shouting outside, come at last to move the body of whomever it was the intemperate Captain Solo had shot and make some rude repairs. There seemed to be no sound otherwise.

She tapped three times with intervals of a three seconds between and pushed open the unlatched door.

Promptly to find herself facing the barrel of a pistol in the hands of Miss Erso.

“Hello,” the Englishwoman said, “I am most extremely glad to see you.”

The silk gown and petticoats were off as well as the pearl earrings. She stood only in her stays and chemise.

“Why in the name of Hell are you still here?” Captain Andor said.

He was already dressed in what must be the fustian cast-offs of young Mr. James.

Within the room, sitting on a rough stool in the corner, was also to be found the searched-for young Miss Elizabeth Werther.

“Ah, Blessed Lady,” Syndalla said, “Are we stealing children now?”

Miss Erso shrugged. “Elizabeth is a most inquisitive girl but I have promised her that if she stays quiet and out of the way she shall have my pink gown and cap.”

She closed the door quickly as Syndalla entered and began to swiftly unpin the flowered gown she wore, carefully tucking the silver pins into the ribboned front as she did so. *Sula could conceal these easily and sell each.*

*They had only moments to safely effect a transformation.*

“Sir!” Miss Erso tossed one of the thin steel blades that had hitherto been concealed on her person back to Andor, who caught it in his hand. “Get me the devil out of these.”

The Captain slid the knife beneath the laces that bound the fashionable stays at the back, and cut up them swiftly as if freeing a moth from its casing.

*Llittle Elizabeth Werther hid her eyes with her hands as if she were seeing something far more shocking than a man shot with a pistol in her father’s taproom, which, from her lights, she no doubt was.*

Miss Erso shortly after performed the same office for Midshipman Syndalla.

All things, clothing, stockings, accoutrements, being then swiftly concealed, they made ready to depart almost within the quarter hour she had allowed.
The sound of Elizabeth’s mother calling out in the street, as well the unmistakable sound of horses approaching on the street outside, bespoke the end of their time to manage here.

‘Miss Werther, farewell, ’ Captain Andor bowed and kissed the young girl’s hand.

*By God he was a marvel of convincing charm when required, was he not? It was rather terrifying.*

“Your father and mother will be most displeased when you reappear and tell them you had hidden upstairs, and will no doubt shout at you, but you must bear it. When the constables are well gone show your father the clothing and purses of money we have left behind. They will be most pleased with you then. My deepest apologies for frightening you.”

Miss Erso had taken a pencil from the contents of the reticule she had carried, which was now transferred to a market sack slung across her shoulder to finish her garb as a boy. With this she inscribed some words upon a scrap of paper and placed it in Elizabeths’s hands along with the pearl earrings.

“Are you pirates?” the child whispered, in a kind of awe. Miss Erso bent forward to whisper in her ear. “Yes,” she said.

In the tumult surrounding the disposal of the corpse of the Cuban man whom no one would admit to knowing at the front of the house, as well as the fixing of the window and the alternating storming and weeping of the landlady when her tearful daughter finally appeared, no one saw a roughly clad serving wench and two men climb down the slanted roof to the stable wall, and then climb up its backing roof to drop down yet again into the stable yard of the house behind.

*None at least save Sula, at the kitchen door, and she did not speak of it.*

It would be a minor point to note that some nine years later Miss Elizabeth Werther married one Captain Ian Tosh in a reworked pink silk gown, and shortly thereafter, despite the disruptive continuance of the secessionist war in the northern colonies, removed with her merchant husband to Canada.

The murder at the Trooper’s Head was long remembered locally as one of many of the riotous events
of that year’s Johnkonnu, the event having been infiltrated, it seemed, by pirates abetted by the French in a portent of future political upheavals.

Mr Werther was much recompensed for his troubles by the goods and money his daughter revealed to him two days later, wisely burning the note that read “Sorry about the mess” immediately after viewing its contents.

The cash especially cushioned him against the loss a year later of the slave girl Sula, who vanished from the house the following autumn and despite a handsome offer of reward for her recapture was never seen by Mr. Werther again.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies. it is all coming out in bits, I fear, but we shall get there in the end. its that awful stretch between Christmas Eve and New Years when you have leftover eggnog for breakfast and have no idea what day of the week it is and eat way too much cheese.
Chapter Summary

In which the shore party from the Rogue's Venture, with the addition of Captain Han Solo and his First Mate, find each other again in a place of comparative safety. In despite of Miss Erso's great annoyance, Captain Solo gives an account of himself. Miss Erso reflects briefly upon the virtues of both captains. A plan of escape recommends itself to that lady and is proposed to the party generally.

The captive population of Kingston engages in the traditional observance of the Jonkonnu.

Chapter Notes

aja kòfè = dog's penis. (Yoruba)

Dat is genoeg om vanuit je richting te praten, jij bal van pels = That is more than enough from your direction, you ball of fur! (Dutch)

Te lo ruego, dejame matarlo = I beg you, let me kill him. (Spanish)

Todavía no, querida señora, tal vez más tarde, = Not yet, dear lady, perhaps later. (Spanish)

Wahine! Ko ahau te tino kanikani o nga mea katoa! E wiri ana oku hoariri i toku aroaro! = Woman! I am the best dancer in the world! My enemies tremble before me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harbor Street

and the Royal Wharf

Kingston
Jamaica

December 26, 1769

Companies of musicians with bells, drums and flutes, formed first in the Western portions of the city nearest the old burying place reserved for the people. Dancers and performers began to assemble in the streets in the hour just before dawn, raising banners and donning their costumes and form into troops around the outlandishly attired leaders. The true identities of the principal masked figures were never revealed from one year to the next.

This one secret, it seemed, the bondsmen of Kingston were allowed to keep.

Great animal-like heads and bodies constructed of molded paste paper and cloth mache were stretched and glued upon wooden frames. These wholly covered the lead men...although gender as well remained disguised...well-concealing those who wore them from the eyes of onlookers. Other figures in guises of hobby horses, and queens in pantomime, along with patched and fantastical beasts joined along behind to fill the streets, led by the towering central figure designated as "John Canoe" who always headed each procession.

The wooden building that comprised lot #39 of Harbor Street was owned by the offices of a Boston and London merchant company specializing here in waxed canvas and salt cod. Upon most days it was a place of brisk business, for at such a commercial location a house unoccupied or long empty would have caused greater comment. The clerks who travelled back and forth between it and the docks some blocks away, remained most often on the first stories. The porched rooms above were reserved for the housing and use of whichever shipping agents the company had presently assigned to the port. At this season they had been assigned to the occupancy of a Philadelphia captain named Raddus whose arrival was somewhat delayed. Had anyone noted the entry of three bedraggled men the previous evening they would likely have taken them as sailors sent to claim pay or carry messages. The access of two other men along with a serving woman, just after the lighting of the evening street lamps and call of curfew, might have raised curiosity but went unobserved in the late fog for they entered not by the street but through a concealed door between the privies, which very few knew about.

"You stupid, lying aja kòfe!!" Jen snarled when Captain Andor, Midshipman Syndalla and herself reached the relative safety of the dim rooms concealed at the back stairway of the house.

Captain Solo was seated upon a small bench by the wall in a most dejected posture. Only Captain Andor's swift action in seizing her by the waist prevented her launching herself directly at the
gentleman with violent intention.

As Captain Solo jumped quickly to his feet in anticipation of a brawl, the cannibal chuckled and muttered something none save Solo could understand.

"Dat is genoeg om vanuit je richting te praten, jij bal van pels!" the captain admonished his Mate.

"Mr. Cor," Captain Andor said, "Your report please."

Cor related the details of their escape to this place and followed with those of his own brave survey of activities on the docks after the disposition of Captain Solo and his all-too-identifiable companion within the safety of the house.

"The militia seems most concerned about the surveillance of ships and their crews, sir," Master Gunner Cor reported. "The Harbormaster has enlisted a number of the militia to patrol the waterfront during the parades and there was rumor that the port itself might be closed for the duration of the fete."

This must evidence great concern on the part of the merchant powers of Kingston, Jen knew. Hundreds of ships a day came and went from this treasure house of the British colonies and the stream of misery, cash and sugar barely abated for the holidays. Only a handful of things ever paused the flow. Riot or Disaster. Uprising or Earthquake. Chaos unmanaged.

They suspected some pirate incursion, she thought bitterly, fearing the phantom of an enemy already defeated. Perhaps they imagined some action of unity by the Maroons, the ghost that always haunted their guilty dreams. Added to all this, rumor of a mysterious European murdering a Spaniard whose presence had probably been unknown to the authorities until his corpse popped up....Stolen horses, abandoned carriages and rumors of a painted giant? Chaos indeed.

Her temper had cooled somewhat from that attendant on her first view of the smuggler but Captain Andor still held her fast.

"Te lo ruego, dejame matarlo," she whispered.

"Todavía no, querida señora, tal vez más tarde," he said, near her ear, in the practical tone of a man assuring his wife they would purchase a new set of curtains as soon as the rent was paid.

"My comprehension of Spanish is quite excellent," Captain Solo protested, sounding somewhat aggrieved.
"As is mine of English and Dutch, I assure you," Andor informed him coolly. "Choose a language and give me a clear account of your fatal encounter at the tavern, the identity of the man you shot and the situation by which you have endangered both our lives and our mission." He waved a hand, indicating the bench Solo had previously occupied.

The adventurer took his seat again and Captain Andor availed himself of one of several rush chairs that hung upon wall peg on the wall in order to sit opposite him as if in conference.

"His name was Grediaz," Captain Solo confessed at last, unwilling, "a low-level cutthroat and lieutenant to Hidalgo Hugo Jabbar Tiure."

Jen whistled, aghast. "Did you try to cheat them too? I took you for a fool but not a suicide."

She put her knife back into her waistcoat as a show of her sentiment. *Why dirty a blade killing a man who will not outlive the week?*

The Tiure were an ancient shipping family, Venetian originally, it was said. Now they were "fixers" of most business-like reputation. An innumerable number of sons and nephews each seemed to manage the cartel's affairs in every section of the earth's rim, from Stockholm to Asia. It was also said that though they might own but ten ships outright they could put ten thousand to sea upon their errands at a whim. The trade in Spanish silver had much of their mark upon it but they seldom dealt in anything so tangible, and thus vulnerable, as coin or commodities, preferring instead to buy and trade other men's schemes, ventures and debts, advancing credit, influence, vessels, bail, space at wharf, and a thousand other favors as needed to the desperate.

"Go to any hanging, Saul Gerrere had once said, "you will find in the crowd an agent of the Hutta-Tiure, willing to trade the condemned tailor's last outstanding bill for an extra foot of rope."

Single favors were granted and unquestionably repaid, in coin or in kind, some a day later, others a decade, but a reckoning was invariably called in.

*Such influence demanded constant upkeep for the merest whisper that it was possible to successfully renig upon any Tiure contract, no matter how small, would shake the house to its mighty foundations.*

"Did I not say times have grown lean, Mistress?" Solo said bitterly. "I had...we will call them "debts"....and so committed to run a cargo from Cuba for Jabbar in payment. Luck turned against me. Even the best is boarded sometimes and as I had previously run afoul of the Crown and stood to lend my own head and those of my crew to decorate a gate at Southampton, I was obliged to conveniently "mislay"the goods. Jabbar at Cuba doubted my tearful tale of loss at sea and pressed me most urgently to cover the "losses" of the cargo in cash before the year's end."

"He lies," Syndalla said. "I know Jabbar, cash is not his first commodity. He would have wanted something else"
Solo snapped back then as if stung, "The fat bastard wanted my ship, but I bargained him to take cash instead."

"No," Captain Andor said quietly, looking at Solo with something strangely like pity. "You were played, sir. Where they British ships that boarded you? You have worked for the Alliance before and have surely been marked. They wanted us, or someone like us. The Hutt-Tiure have either bought part of the Enemy's venture in Florida already or hope to trade information for some in future."

"Why send a man to kill him at Kingston then?" Jen asked.

The smuggler shrugged. "A chance meeting perhaps? Grendiaz was but a lowly break-bone, perhaps he merely thought to ingratiate himself with his employer by bringing my head in upon New Year's Day with the roasted goose. I might have learned more for he seemed one of those inclined to monologue his plans at length but I judged the best of my poor options was to cut the conversation short and retreat strategically."

*If the Hutt-Tiure were calling in favors at Kingston to look for Alliance movements and the Enemy was watching, it hardly mattered now whose body laid on the tavern floor, Solo's or his would-be assailant. They were equally pinched.*

Solo seemed to strive for the light tone of a jaded rascal but the eye he turned, first to his cannibal companion as if in apology and then to face Captain Andor, betrayed him.

Bravado quenched for an instant, she thought she glimpsed a man both young and desperate noting that he looked at the wall behind rather than directly meet the Alliance captain's gaze.

*He is ashamed,* Jen thought, struck suddenly by the contrast between the two men as they faced each other.

*It came to her that they must be nearly the same age. Both were skilled in violent trade and both quite handsome fellows, though at this moment both were rather also in need of a shave. Each, it seemed, commanded and had earned friends willing to fight in their defense, but oh how different.*

*Only a handful of months had passed yet she understood her lover a little, she thought, well enough to know that he believed himself a sinner nigh on to damned and yet had done all for a cause he believed in and honored. Whatever the cost, Cassian Andor could not conceive to live otherwise.*

*Aye, Solo was the one who looked away.*
Andor sighed, "What is done is done... Gentlemen, ladies, I am open to suggestions."

Mr. Cor spoke first, "If they watch or even board the ships at harbor they will find all in order with The Lady's Gambit. Captain Rostock is well rigged against such play. Moreover they will not dare keep the lucrative traffic in and out the port delayed more than one turn of the tide in such weather, the very Bank of England might tremble."

"True," Midshipman Syndalla agreed, "Yet once searched they will be surely be ordered to clear their berth and sail out. Where Rostock to seek delay after that he would raise dark suspicion."

"The landlord of the Trooper's Head stands to gain handsomely by concealing the luggage and rented rig of Mr. Charles Avelar a little longer, as does his fashion-loving daughter. That will buy us time," Captain Andor ventured.

"Aye, but how will such time merit us to reach Florida? With our ship set to sail out of Kingston Harbor by noon, we will be left behind when the lax watch of the festival ends at sundown and the Governors Guard and King George's finest emerge from their holiday rest to investigate these matters in earnest."

An idea came to Jen.

"This ship of yours, aja kôfè, you say she is on the outside of the Palisados. Is she quick enough to overtake a brigantine at sail with a days lead?"

Solo looked up and smiled, grasping the direction of her thought, "Aye sweetheart, with a sober hand aboard she will overtake the Four Horsemen on Judgement Day, the winds of both Capes or a pretty girl's favor."

Idiot.

"And your great friend," she said, "can he dance?"

The First Mate, heretofore sitting wearily upon the floor with long legs folded, threw back his head and laughed most heartily, bellowing "Wahine! Ko ahau te tino kanikani o nga mea katoa! E wiri ana oku hoariri i toku aroaro!"
"He says, "Yes," Captain Solo confirmed.

The many parades of Jonkonnu wound through the streets of Kingston from the cemeteries by the West entrance of the Leeward Road, circling around each through all of the gridded lanes at the whim of their costumed leaders to finally join and mass, after midday, upon the open field of the Parade, for music and dance. Even as the largest parades moved forward new processions would burst up at random from one side street or another, or out of courtyard of stately homes and common taverns, to swirl in opposition or parallel before eventually joining the main course and flow of the crowds. Every inn and many large houses served rum punches and cakes without cost to the competing troupes as they thronged past, pausing before every occupied doorway for raucous mime or song. The towering cow-horn studded figure of "Jon", draped from masked crest to the knees in black and dark blue cloth, stitched with brightly colored rag ribbons, rushed up to each and every door, amidst shouts and the clanging of bells, to loudly cry "Jonkonnu!!" and strike the ground most threateningly, sometimes with a stick, or by the stomping of bare or booted feet.

Those well-off householders of Kingston who remained in the town for the Boxing Day Festivities or arrived for the militia muster before and after often watched from their upper porches, enjoying the music and spectacle and reassuring themselves that all was right with their world by the enclosure of the allotted chaos below. Many even provided the colorful cloth and paper used to make the costumes knowing that their seamstresses skill might be admired and bring money to their own pockets thereby. A good turnout by one's "people" was always seen as a sign of status.

Among one of the wildly celebratory crowds that circled down Harbor Street to Royal a half dozen or more always went down onto the wharves themselves to to parade within sight of the ships at dock. Usually to the raucous cheers of sailors aboard, many of whom chanted "John Canoe! John Canoe!" in their turn. The briefly unrestrained bondsmen traditionally threw fruit at the ships, especially toward any sailor glimpsed who seemed born of Africa or cried out in reply to the revelers in the language of the Ashanti or the Akan. For, on this day alone the people would not be censured or punished for the use of their own or their parents languages. They were never allowed too near the ships or even out onto the docks themselves, so the great bulk of the bruised mango and oranges fell into the Harbor amid cries and applause.

This year the militia were lined upon the edges of the wharf streets almost arm in arm, but even they could not hold back the crowds entirely.

One masked "figure" draped in white rags and blue with a mask in the shape of a "queen" climbed up upon one of the capstans and lobbed a number of moldy oranges so skillfully that they struck the boards of one ship already raising her sails to depart. A wizened old Quartermaster upon the deck dashed out to gather one, sure she had heard a voice cry out in the language of the Yoruba, little heard in those parts. The crowds were delighted and passed on, singing and shouting.

It was remembered, even days after, that the towering "Jon" of that particular troop had been most impressive in his charges and jumps. Although to the disappointment of some he was not among those who gathered at last for the final revelry on the Parade, having moved off with the early departing groups across the lone land road out to those houses that still stood on the barrier of the Palisadoes penninsula. All must return to the places of their service before dawn or face dire penalty.
and those dozens from the diminished parish at Port Royal had the farthest to walk by land.

The citizen militia had been ordered most sternly by their commanders to watch the wharves at all costs, so impossible was it for the authorities of Kingston to imagine escape from the city being effected by any way other than a ship at harbor.

Three days later the bodies of two of the Battery guard were found in some nets near the Salt River. Since they had clearly drowned several days before and their horses were found wandering nearby their deaths were never associated with the murder of the Cuban agent upon Christmas Day.

The spies sent into the city at great risk by the Leeward Maroons made their way back up into the mountains and reported to their officer, who was called Nine. He in his turn summarized their observations and included them in his full report to his Commanders, Captains Quao and Alando. Both men were much alarmed at the words of the Alliance spies and called for a council on the matter, but Captain Alando asked repeatedly for particulars of the events in Kingston town and laughed most heartily at several points.

Chapter End Notes

Finally! The Falcon awaits!
Chapter Summary

A very brief aside in which the crew remaining aboard the Rouge's Venture (presently called The Lady's Gambit) receive a clandestine message from their party ashore, retrieved by Quartermaster Kanata.

Lt. Melshi, Mr. Bodi Rook and Mr. Timothy Samson Kay all, in their disparate ways, suffer anxiety for the fate of their friends.

Mr. Imway remains, as always, optimistic and the ship departs Kingston Harbor with her mission yet before her.

Chapter Notes

Meanwhile...back on our plucky ship.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Lady’s Gambit

at the Queens Wharf

Kingston

Jamaica

December 26, 1769
Old Kanata brought them the message, knotted onto a string and wrapped around an orange. In the hours before she did so Lieutenant Ruesscott Melshi’s heart had been filled with dread.

That the shore party seemed to have been delayed by a day or more, of itself, had not at first been enough to cast a shadow.

Master Gunner Cor had made contact within Kingston on the previous day and indicated that at least part of the party would return aboard, either before nightfall of the 25th or with the following dawn at worst. Christmas being quietly observed in British ports it had in fact even seemed a tactical advantage. All eyes might be set toward the raucous observances of the following morning to better shield their departure.

Yet dawn came and passed and Captain Andor's party did not return.

It seemed clear to him then that disruption to their plans must have taken place upon the previous day, at some point after Mr. Cor had exchanged messages with the cabin boy at the end of Royal Street.

The Lady’s Gambit found herself instead accosted and boarded just after dawn by men identified as the acting Militia of the port searching for, of all things, a European pirate...ostensibly a French pirate.....and a tattooed giant of undetermined lineage.

Captain Rostock, in this case bearing the identity of one Captain Rosewell, handled all with equanimity, efficiently calling for and presenting for inspection all bills of lading, papers and articles of registration pertaining to the vessel. These were, of course, in scrupulous order.

Mr. Kay was questioned at some considerable length, which caused Lt. Melshi a degree of anxiety, not because he doubted the gentleman but because he still found it impossible to share Andor's calm with regards to Kay's occasionally unpredictable utterances.

As it was, the nervous citizen-officers of Kingston merely asked that the impressively tall man remove his coat and hat and roll up his sleeves, an odd request with which the Mr. Kay silently complied.

The Harbor officers departed soon after, having remained to all appearances quite unaware that the crew were universally armed and fully prepared to murder the lot of them, or even to blast the Wharf itself with the surreptitiously loaded port side cannon at the slightest signal from Rostock or Lt. Melshi.

By the turning of the second tide upon the 26th, there was still no sign or word from Captain Cassian Andor or any of those who accompanied him.
Captain Rostock saw the inspectors off with pleasant professionalism and then approached him at the rail. "Sir," he said, "shall I assume our orders stand?"

_Since we were boys you have always won our little game of "Cat Comes Back,"_ Andor, Ruescott Melshi prayed. _Do but win it this time and I will never grudge you again._

"Aye," the Lieutenant said, for his was now the command to give, "make ready to draw out and to the Harbor and raise sail quick when the instruction comes."

Mr. Rook had suffered mightily during the inspection of the ship by the officers of the port, yet he seemed to have successfully concealed his anxiety. He stood stronger now than he had as a desperate castaway. It was not until the crew was ordered to make ready to cast off upon the next hour that his courage nearly failed him. He found Mr. Melshi coming down from the quarterdeck.

"They are not returned," he said, "The Captain and Miss Erso are not returned. We cannot abandon them."

"Captain Andor's instructions in the event that he failed to make contact were most clear, Mr. Rook," the Alliance officer said, firmly, "I am to take command and we are to proceed to Bahamas and then to St. Augustine in continuance of the mission."

His face may have betrayed his distress somewhat then for the officer addressed him kindly, "You have taken no oath to us, Mr Rook, save as a passenger on this ship and an expert advisor to our plans. None shall hold you against your will. If you can not proceed further on this mission without Miss Erso, depart now, and God go with you."

The man laid a hand on his shoulder, "But I will not conceal from you sir, if they are indeed lost, we would need you sorely, Mr. Rook, should you choose to stand with us."

_Oh, how will I face Erso Bey if he still lives?_ Rook thought. _How shall I say to him "I saw your daughter sir. She lived and I tried to bring her to you but we lost her?"

_God have mercy._

He had taken an oath to Galen Erso and his daughter, as well as to all the people at New Smyrna. With hope or without it, he must go.

"Aye sir," Mr. Bodi Rook said, head bowed, "I shall stand by the mission."

Mr. Melshi nodded with gravity of a fellow sailor and passed on toward the bow.
From the streets of the city the sound of music could be heard, the festival must be in full cry now. Whether these sorts of spectacle were supposed be actions of Christian or pagan observance had never quite been clear to him. He suspected the latter. If possible it added to his despair.

A line of the Militia were arrayed at the very edge of the great wharf, not in the red uniform of soldiers but dressed in light coats of yellow, buff, white and pale blue. Some wore brocade, others more plain attire but every man of them topped with a cornered hat. Some were even wigged for the honor it seemed. All stood lined up to hold the wild celebrants away from the ships that were Kingston’s lifesblood.

Bodi Rook turned away from the rail, looking to find a place to gather his thoughts, but as he moved through the crewmen who had begun to gather above he felt a hand touch his own and looked up find the sightless eyes of Papaz Imway upon him.

“Wait, Mr. Rook. The light of she we follow here is still clear to me. Have faith.”

Sailors aboard every ship visible along the length of the long wharf now crowded up on decks. Many had even climbed up the rigging, or stood on the crossbeams of the masts to better watch the throngs of Kingston's bondsmen and their wild and festive display pour out from the streets of the town onto the very edges of the docks. To a cacophony of bells and drums, accompanied exuberant applause of bystanders and the men aboard the ships, bright-garbed dancers followed figures in heathenish masks. Many of those so decorated reached into baskets carried by other dancers and tossed flowers and fruit toward the ships. “John Canoe!” all cried.

Held back as their pitchers were, most of these missiles fell wildly short of the mark, splashing into the water and onto the docks. Pulp and juice of the bruised and rotten fruit even bespattering the boots and coats of the guard, to the happy shouts of many sailors and bystanders.

A few well-thrown fruits did reach the nearest ships and a great cry rose up from the crowds when it did.

From where Rook stood, bid to wait by that wise gentleman, he saw a bruised and half-green orange fly over the rail to land near his feet.

Sooner than anyone else could move a small person whom Rook had seen but once before above decks, an aged woman half-bent and with head wrapped in a green printed bandanna, dashed quickly forward to snatch it up in wrinkled hands.

“Ayyyyee!” the person called. "Captain! Captain!"

When this leathery ancient brought her prize to Captain Rostock, standing nearby, Mr. Bodi Rook saw that officer pull at something that seemed to be a hole or tear in the rind of the fruit and draw from under the skin of it a long string tied into knots.

Some knots were tiny, some square. At intervals small threads were tied to the cord in short tufts. Later, when he had a further chance to examine it, it had had a character rather like this:
It was Mr. Melshi who related to him the meaning of the code

**Unhurt. Sail out past barrier. with speed. Make for Nassau town and Fort beyond. We will find you.**

“What does it mean?” He asked that officer, who though still steady of his countenance seemed to breath easier now, as if some weight had been taken from him.

“It means we must move out quickly from Kingston Port and set course to continue the mission as outlined, but it also means they are all well and must have some means to a boat, for they mean to rejoin us. They are still alive.”

The heathenish parade moved off, weaving back into the center of the city.

Captain Rostock and Mr. Antilles gave orders and the sailors and officers moved swiftly to stations. The lines were thrown off.

There had no need to lay out the anchor and pull her by kedging from the dock. The tide and the wind served them then as well in their departure as the pilot had ever seen them do. Such was the skill of the crew that they drew out from that crowded pier with mainsails well reefed and only a small pull at the jib. The ship now called The Lady’s Gambit moved out from Kingston port and across that encircled harbor as if Providence itself wished her out to the sea as swiftly as could be accomplished.

Mr. Imway laughed heartily and patted Mr. Rook on the back as he stepped out to work as called.

Behind him Mr. Malbus passed, “The bloody fool took a vow to be humble,” he groused, to the pilot, “Yet look how he takes unseemly pleasure in being right.” He winked an eye though, and laid a companionable hand upon Rook’s arm too as he set to his place to man the lines.

With no tasks set him here, Bodhi Rook edged to where he might see the crews action but be out of the way.

He found himself standing beside Mr. Kay at the stern. For that gentleman looked out, not toward the harbor before them but to the town behind.

“The Captain and Miss Erso,” Rook said, “They are alive and will rejoin us.”

He did not know why he felt compelled to speak so to the gentleman, as if to offer comfort.

*As always that strange persons’s pale face and looming deportment seemed to betray nothing overt in the way of either sadness or anxiety.*
“He is a highly skilled operative,” Kay said, evenly, “although he has sometimes been known to err on the side of protecting others at risk to himself. Miss Erso is an unknown quantity yet it is safe to presume her quite resourceful. If they have some access to a ship….”

He trailed off, which seemed unusual for Rook had never before heard him leave a thought uncompleted, then turned his large pale eyes to gaze downwards. Rook saw that he held the knotted string that had conveyed the coded message in his hand.

“Yes.” Mr. Kay nodded, as if in reassurance to himself. "Yes," he repeated, "there is some hope of optimism for his return. I am glad."

The little Quartermaster must have brought it to him after showing it to Captain Rostock and Mr. Melshi. Rook had seen her passing back below, munching the orange, rind and all.

He nodded solemnly and bowed, saying “Thank you, Mr. Rook,” before turning away.

Even on later reflection Bodi Rook felt he could not be certain what precisely the gentleman had been thanking him for.

Within the hour they were out and making swift time to pass the batteries and forts that guarded the shores and to circle round old Port Royal and the far side of the Palisades and reach there freer seas. Yet the music and shouts of “Jonkaonnou! Johnkonnu!” followed them well out onto the water even as the port itself shrank from sight.

Chapter End Notes

This is my life now.

Me: (to a guy I work with) You re-enact a 1750 Naval Commander right?
Guy: Yeah.

Me: How do you back a brigantine out of a busy port?

Guy: (suspiciously) Why do you need to know?
A very brief aside, in which a member of the crew of Captain Solo’s notorious sloop, The Falcon, is troubled by uneasy dreams of her life before taking to the sea as that ship lays at dock on the still uncontrolled outer shore of the Peninsula past the ruins of old Port Royal, and briefly reassures another fellow sailor.

Total self-indulgence.

Nossa Senhora da Boa Estrela = Our Lady of the Good Star (Portuguese)

Mira. Mira. ¿Ves a tu hermana allí? Donde sea que vayas nunca estarás solo. = Look. Look. Do you see your sister there? Wherever you go you will never be alone. (Spanish)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Falcon

*off the Palisados of Kingston Harbor*

*the coast of Jamaica*

*near to Old Port Royal*
Late in the afternoon of

December 26, 1769

She had been asleep in her hammock up on the deck, for it was not her turn at watch. The dreams that came to her were strangely mixed, as dreams so often are. It seemed to her that she was a little girl again walking barefoot up the slopes of Serra da Estrela. Snow lay all around her, yet she was not cold. Looking back she could see the towers of Linhares below her but it seemed that she must hurry onward, for the others were waiting for her to lay out Her Highness’ Winter robes. Before her now was the old shrine, the cave her grandfather had shown her as a safe place to shelter with her sheep from bandits or the storms that might sweep up unexpectedly. It was holy to the shepherds of those mountains and always had been, for all that it was only a cleft in the rocks. Nossa Senhora da Boa Estrela they called it. If she could just get the child there, surely they would both be safe….for it seemed to her then that she carried an infant in her arms, tied in a shawl. “No sound,” she whispered, ”No sound, my prince, or they will find us.”

Yet even dreaming, she knew that this was not right.

They were in the Monastery, within the walls of the Almedina of Coimbra. Old Kenobi,…not so old, her waking mind whispered, he had been vigorous and red-bearded then, but in her dream he was the old man she had last seen, wandering the port at Faro, a half-mad mendicant….he had been the one to hand her the tiny babe. Eirtæ and Fae carried the other infant to where her lady now lay upon the bed, as pale as death, and placed her gently in the crook of her mothers arm. That brave woman was yet too weak to do more than raise a trembling hand to touch the white silk swaddling her firstborn.

“Let me see him,” she said, still weak, “My son, let me see my son.”

“Mariana, it will be easier if you do not,” the Bishop said. With great care he placed a bundle in the handmaiden's arms, wrapped in a clean but common blue-checked cloth “Take him away now.”

Easier, damn you? she thought. Knight of the Holy Church, Bishop of the Blessed Order. Do you know what you condemn her to? She will never lie easy again. He was nothing but a man. What did he know?

So Sabéna ignored him, took the babe to her lady and held him beside the other, his sister, near to his mother’s head. Her lady’s cheek shone with the sweat of her labor and her long hair lay tangled on the pillows, but she turned her face to see.

“Mira,” she said weakly in her own tongue, ”Mira. ¿Ves a tu hermana allí? Donde sea que vayas nunca estarás solo,” and kissing the small head, above the wrappings Sabéna held back for her, she whispered, “Adiós mi amor.”

Then Mariana Victoria, Infanta of Spain, and Queen of Portugal looked up to meet her eyes. Lips
white with pain, she spoke then in a stronger voice, resolute, “My protector… my loyal bodyguard. Take my child to safety.”

“Yes. My Queen,” she rose and turned away with the child in her arms, never to see her beloved lady again.

Kenobi took her down the secret passage with her precious burden, to the hidden gate by the river where a cart and horse waited for her. The little kitchen girl and her baby were bundled already inside, for the Bishop had promised Dyan gold and all her sins forgiven if she would be wet nurse to the child and forsake Portugal forever. He hung his head as if in shame, that proud, skilled, man and spoke no word to her.

Because it was a dream she spat at him the words she had not the courage to speak in her old life…when she was only a girl, a noble handmaiden, reared to serve... “You own part of this. You brought him here, that German devil. Whatever comes after, I pray you answer to God for it.”

In her dream it was not Pombal’s men that followed them, but wolves with the faces of men, and not the gates of the monastery but the tall peaks of pagan stone beside the city roads that framed the night sky.

Sabéna looked up toward the distant mountains of her birth for the good star of her childhood. Taurus rose above her old home and the brightest light, the eye of the bull, Aldebaran, seemed to point down like a lantern beam at yet other mountains, in France, covered with grass not snow. In her dream the light shone down on a tiny village made of slate, slate and more slate. Though in truth it had been many months of hard aimless travel, to France and humble Tournemire, without road or castle only a thorn from the Saviors crown as relic in the little church. To shine upon the blond farm girl on her knees in the little chapel, weeping bitter tears in prayer, heartbroken that she and her sturdy young husband were yet childless.

She unwrapped the baby, now suddenly a laughing boy of nearly a year, and gave him to the weeping girl. The Bishop’s gold was long gone for bribes and travel, and a generous dowry for the kitchen girl Dyan and her little Tosh when she remained behind to marry the woodcutter who had sheltered them on the coast.

It did not matter. The farmer and his young wife cared for no gold save the boy’s bright golden curls. They walked away from her up into their green hills singing to the little one some French lullaby.

In her dream she stood alone before the statue of the Holy Mother in that chapel and tried to call after them. “They will come for him someday. They will kill you both.” But no…that was later, she had not known that then. The statue spoke to her, saying. “They will not listen, but they would say yes, even if they knew. Forgive yourself, Handmaiden.”
There was a tap upon her shoulder that wakened her.

They lay in a secret slip tied up upon the broken shoreline of Old Port Royal, which only the tattered pirates still knew. Once it had been the fine cemetery of Port Royal’s privateer princes. Then the earthquake and wave had come to claim it’s own again. Stone tombs still tilted above ready to slide down into the shore in places, and in the still waters of the tiny inlets, white marble headstones brought at rich cost all the way from Italy still gleamed faintly from the bottom at low tide. “No bells out loud,” Captain Solo had said, “Keep all quiet and ready ’til we come back.”

“Sabé,” It was young Leonitus, “Eight bells done. You are on watch.”

She climbed out from her hammock, then took it down and readied herself. The dark-haired youth had brought his own sling to tie up back by the tiller, the weather was fine enough for them all to sleep above decks and there was little for any of them to do but eat through their remaining stores, tend the slender ship at anchor and keep ready. She found Luc sitting in the Falcon’s low-slung bow watching the horizon.

“No sign of the Captain or Khaeuri?” she asked. It was an unnecessary question, for had there been any news one of the siblings, either Zaccaria upon waking her or Darian Leonitus, who had gone ashore for water and could be seen returning now, would have mentioned it.

“No,” the boy said. “How long do we wait, do you think? Before we either sail away or go to try to rescue him?”

“That would require knowing where to rescue him and from what.” Sabé said, “I do not fancy searching the whole island of British Jamaica. “He said to give them four days.” She sighed. The boy admired Solo, though he would not admit it and for all his light tone the uneasy look upon young Luc Ciel-Marcheur’s face drove her to attempt some reassurance.

“I say we shall give him another day, Lucas, then search Port Royal for word among those returning from the cursed Town’s festival before we look to desperate measures. Do not worry boy, Khaeuri is a fearsome warrior and for all his misadventures Captain Solo has proved to have a fox’s luck for finding payment and a certain good share of courage.”

“Aye, that may be, but what good will it do us if he gets himself killed?” He stretched himself out flat then upon the deck, and closed his eyes. “I hope Khaeuri returns at least, I have been trying to teach him chess.”

*Get what rest you can, my prince,* Sabé thought. *No doubt he will return as he usually does, with half the Kings Guard behind him.*

As it fell out she was not so far from wrong.
Chapter End Notes

Because I am totally out of control on this wild Rogue One meets New Hope meets Rebels, 18th century historical reboot mashup. It's all up for grabs.

Padme's Handmaidens tragically rock in any and all possible universes.
Chapter Summary

In which Miss Jane Erso and her party manage their escape from Kingston, crossing the Harbor and the swamps of the Palisadoes to reach Captain Solo's much boasted-of sloop.

Captain Andor and Miss Erso take occasion to jest with each other and grow even less circumspect in their attachment. Venomous reptiles are discussed.

Contact is made with the Falcon’s crew.

Chapter Notes

Valkerij van Duizend = Falcon/hawk of a Thousand (Dutch)

aja kôfè = dog's penis (Yoruba)

Eu preferiria me deitar com o canibal” = "I would rather lie down with the cannibal.” (Port.)

Whakarongoa, kuri iti = Keep silent, little dog/puppy
Ka kino nga wahine ki a koe = Women hate you (Maori)

"Ningún hombre habla de su esposa de esa manera. Ella debe ser su amante” = "No man talks about his wife that way, she must be his lover. (Span.)

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

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The Falcon

off the Pallisadoes of Kingston Harbor
The land passage across the Palisades to the seashore, though short, was not an easy one.

*This will prepare us in some part for Florida,* Jen thought, then closed her mind off firmly from that anticipation. To think of her father and what he and Mr. Rook’s friends might be suffering even now, as they wasted time with this fool, would drive her mad.

The road that near a hundred years ago had passed along the length of the Palisades from old Port Royal to the plantations of the main island Parish were long ago sunk beneath the sea and buried in the sand. The fierce tangle of mangrove had reclaimed all and would have taken a week to hack through. They did not intend to try. Escaping Kingston by the eastward roads and skirting the small defensive battery of Fort Rock before nightfall, which would mark the return of the Kings soldiers to duty, was their aim in those hours. As the road parted, they left the company of the other celebrants. These surely knew them to be at least alien and likely fugitive as soon as they removed their masks, but none spoke.

A tall woman in a gown of faded sprigged calico, her hair tied in a white scarf, stepped out from the band they had followed. She spoke to those few who still accompanied them in words Jen recognized as of the Akan language, bidding the bondsmen there to ask no questions and go on. Captain Andor stood before her as if at attention before a fellow officer of higher rank and she returned his gaze with a nod before turning to and walking away beside those people compelled to now return.

The Maroons had offered what aid they could by their silence. The rest of the journey they must make on their own as the sunlight dimmed over the mountains to the west.

The crook of the inner shore past the Fort was filled with many small boats brought out onto its shallow inner beaches for careening at low tide. To take one proved an easy matter.

Shaggy inlets and gaps marked the outer shore, between Plum Point and the shabby pubs and brothels at the back shadow of Fort James, as the square tower at Port Royal, atop the ruins of the old wicked pirate city, was called. Like all the many cannon of British Jamaica those of Fort James stood
pointed to the Harbor leaving unwatched a few chancy anchorages. Small boats that drew shallowly could yet hide on the wild and haunted Atlantic shore.

Solo, of course, boasted of his ship that she could draw in to water as shallow as a ladies tea cup and sail back out again with no more wind than a French maid’s whisper.

*Dear God,* Jen thought. *Will this aja kòfẹ never cease extolling the virtues of that wretched sloop?*

The destination they sought was the narrowest stretch of the barrier’s neck where short crossing on foot might bring them away from the guarded Harbor’s shore to Solo’s ocean anchorage on the other side.

They had taken a small nondescript dory from the outer edge, so that her owner might think her merely washed away and thank God when she turned up floating unharmed across the water on the Palasadoes tomorrow with no further question of how she came to be there, and rowed her out beneath the moonlight.

The towering mate manned the oars with enormous skill and the rest of them took it in turns to aid him.

Jen fingered her mother’s charm where it lay beneath her chambray shirt and breathed a prayer that the Rogue’s Venture and her crew had already passed out safely from the prosperous purgatory of Kingston Harbor.

As they drew near shore at the place Solo had deemed the best for their foot crossing, he tossed a rope into the trees, pulling in but not all the way to “land.” There remained yet hours until dawn and to cross even so thin as a half mile strip of that swamp in the dark was to risk crocodile or scorpions.

All six of them were thus obliged to remain, crowded into the damp bottom of the fishing boat, amidst gear and nets, with nothing to do but to rest a little while and wait for light.

*Mr. Cor* laid his head upon a stack of rope where he sat and took immediate possession of the sleep of the just, wrapped in the painted violet cloth he still retained from his “costume.” Midshipman Syndalla stepped across his legs from the stern, looking for a place to lie herself down.

Solo stood shadowed against the moonlight, watching the dark shoreline. When he saw Syndalla’s movement he spoke rakishly.
Dutchman he might be, but too poor for sugar and tobacco, Jen guessed, for his teeth as he smiled gleamed white and straight.

“I have some space right here sweetheart,” he said, “Should it be of interest.”

"Eu preferiria me deitar com o canibal,” that lady replied tartly, tucking her feet instead beneath a roll of sailcloth wedged at the bottom and arranging herself in it’s limited shelter.

“Then I still remain at your service, madam,” the rascal laughed “ for that is also matter I can most conveniently arrange.”

The exotic gentleman referenced sat at upon the thwart, his decorated arms resting upon his great knees and his striped brow upon them in turn.

“Whakarongoa, kuri iti,” he muttered. “Ka kino nga wahine ki a koe.” He neither lifted his dark head nor spoke further, and within a few moments he too commenced to snore.

The night remained blessedly dry, the sky clear and the breeze not unpleasant though a little cool.

Jen herself climbed over another coil of rope to hand Captain Andor the workman’s corduroy coat and rough linen waistcoat he had given to her keeping when he took his turn to row.

The silvered light was just sufficient that she could see his face looking up at her from where he sat, back against the shoreward side and with legs half-bent before him.

He did not speak but only slightly raised his right arm, lifting his chin in a gesture she found she recognized upon the instant he made it. Always the request for her companionship came first with him, she marveled, never the presumption.

*Oh my poor spy, Jen Erso thought, have they made you tell and hear so many lies that you crave surety now the way a sailor craves strawberries at sea?*

Her back was to the moon's light so she would have thought herself too much in shadow for him to see her smile, but he must have sensed her expression by some means, for he smiled himself in return. She climbed down then to sit beside him in the bow and nestled herself beneath that right arm, laying her head against his chest as he opened and spread the coat over them both.
“The Commander loved the Ondarean but he did not speak of her as if she were his wife,” she whispered.

"Ningún hombre habla de su esposa de esa manera. Ella debe ser su amante," he mused, laughing quietly against her hair.

“Should I stress again my excellent command of Spanish?” a voice sounded somewhat peevishly from the stern.

Captain Andor leaned his head back against the side and Jen listened as his breathing beneath her cheek grew slow and steadier.

Solo may have stayed at watch there through the whole remainder of the night for all that Jen could tell. When the dawns first light and the cries of the frigate birds woke her he stood there still.

They pulled in as close to the shore as they could and made ready to climb over side, all of them needing to swim and wade ashore while giving the little boat a push enough that it would come in time to rest some place a little further off from their landing spot.

“Landing” seemed a poor term for their disembarking. Here the water lapped up beneath the finger-like roots of the mangle.

His First Mate spoke to Solo with some agitation and displayed great unwillingness to enter the water. He seemed, to Jen’s surprise, most touchingly distressed, hunching his great shoulders and shaking his head as he pointed toward the thin gap in the foliage’s curtain. It was little wider than the span of Jen’s arms but through it and a further short passage of water lay a thin strip of sandy ground.

A glimpse over the side revealed a sandy bottom perhaps five feet down. A wade or shallow swim of perhaps twenty feet would bring them through.
“Master yourself, Khaeuri, you great baby! I tell you you will be fine,” his captain scolded him.

“What is wrong with him?” Jen asked. “Is he afraid of the crocodiles? Surely if we all…”

“No, no, he rather fancies the great lizards as a delicacy,” Solo sighed, “The trouble is his unmanly terror of…..” he rolled eyes heavenward, exasperated, and made a sinuous gesture with one hand.

“Snakes?” Mr. Cor ventured.

The cannibal howled then and hid his eyes.

“Verdorie!” Solo swore, “Was it an absolute necessity to speak the word aloud, sir?”

Syndalla elbowed the captain aside and took the exotic giant’s great patterned hands in her own. “Warrior, I offer you a bargain. Come with me ashore. If you protect me from the crocodiles I will, in my turn, defend you from the snakes. They are plentiful in my country and I know many charms for driving them back and stilling their poisons.”

The cannibal seemed greatly comforted by this, and dried his tears, nodding.

Then, with a great sweep of his mighty arm, he lifted Midshipman Syndalla by the waist and jumped into the water with her.

The force of his departure nearly overturned the little craft, and the rest of them had all they could do not to spill out. Jen clutched at the market bag she had, by good fortune, already bound to her waist and Solo made a mad grab for his hat. Leaving their stolen boat to be well pushed out by the large man’s wake they now all swam as swiftly as they could for the thin strip of poor shore, dawn being also a time of great activity for the crocodiles.

Much bedraggled, they reached the spit of sand and made their way on. To cross the mile of the neck of the barrier peninsula took them more than three hours. Firm ground vanished often, so that for many yards sometimes they were required to almost crawl or climb. The mate Khaeuri, pushed
through with his arms to make a path for them all, always with Syndalla close by his side, for he clearly took her at her word.

"I had understood," Mr. Cor said in hushed tone to Jen, as he pulled behind her on the narrow path, "That the island of Jamaica's sole virtue was its utter lack of venomous snakes."

"Shhhhhhh," Jen whispered

Scratched and weary, they heard the surf of the Atlantic side before they could gain any sight of it through the thick foliage.

When Jen, of a sudden, felt something firm beneath her feet as she looked down. What she had taken for a stone she now saw to be a gleaming white headstone, toppled and half-buried in the sand and decaying leaves “Jocast… Nu…. 163… Faithfu… Unt… Dea…”

They had reached the edge of what was once the High Street of Old Port Royal. A last mighty push by Khaeuri brought them through onto a small sandy cliff above a dark islet overshadowed by mangrove, and even some broken and decayed willow and scrub oak. The bright white shore of the free Caribbean Sea lay beyond.

Directly below them, perhaps twenty yards, lay a little sloop with a long-angled bowsprit. She was made after the Bermuda and Jamaica fashion, with a single main mast and rigged with fore-and-aft mainsail and jibbed foresail all of dingy white, well patched with red and grey.

Captain Solo’s weary expression altered to that of a man returning to his beloved from twelve years press-ganged. He wiped the sweat from his brow, unrolled shirtsleeves down over his scratched arms and smiled, “Ladies and Gentleman, Valkeri van Duizend… better know to these seas as The Falcon.”

“Huh,” Jen said.
“What?” Solo, turned upon her, as if he would draw pistol and pronounce challenge upon the spot.

“She seems well enough rigged,” she conceded, “but, before God, the way you went on, I expected no less than Teach’s “Adventure” trimmed with mother-of-pearl. Surely you do not mean to tell me this will catch up to a brigantine with a days lead at sail? Can she even make 12 knots?”

“Mr. Avelar,” Solo said, in a deadly tone, “Kindly tell your wife that this ship will better 13 with extra sail, for I have made a few modifications of my own design.”

Jen felt herself smile. It wasn’t as if the fellow was even armed. Salt-damp, midge-bitten and weary as she was she found her spirits near lifted by the thought of a short scrap with a smuggler over some little boat’s virtues. It had the appeal almost of a return to childhood pleasures.

Captain Andor laid a hand upon her arm and flashed her look almost of warning, ready, it seemed to coolly step between them. “Come, my dear, we do not need such trouble now.”

The sound of a branch’s crack behind them was the only warning they received. Jen berated herself sharply for that later, and did not doubt that Captain Andor did the same.

Syndalla being at the back of their narrow passage, still acting as "protector" of the large exotic First Mate, managed to react the soonest, turning to face out and dropping to a fighting stance, but it was too late.

Two brown-skinned youths, almost of a height and similarly dressed in blue shirts and linen breeches, faced them from the trees at each side of the narrow path. One stood upon a sideways funeral marker, the other knelt within the brush to their left. Both held most workman-like cutlasses.

One blade was pointed directly at Mr. Cor,

"Oh bloody hell," that good gentleman said, as if this, added to the large scorpion that Syndalla had brushed off the back of his shirt mere moments before, had exhausted his patience past the point of conventional fear.

The other youth held the point of the sword a hands-span from her own neck.

_Hers, not Andor’s, Jen noted, though he was taller and the more conventional-appearing adversary_
Clearly these were Solo’s people. They must have judged her the nearest threat to that gentleman, being sensible enough to discern truth beneath appearance and loyal enough to stand for a rascal whose ship they might easily have stolen.

"Judge the fitness of a captain by his crew," her Olori had said on more than one occasion. She had seen it proved true many times.

Perhaps Solo was not quite the fool at sea that he appeared on land.

A shout came up from the deck of the sloop. They had been seen there as well.

“Hoy! Captain! Khaeuri! How goes it?”

It was a blond youth, of perhaps sixteen. He carried a rough musket and had it pointed with skilled directness at Captain Andor.

Beside him stood a small woman, sun-tanned, in sailor’s pants and shirt, dark hair peppered with grey and bound back in a ponytail. Incongruously tied with what looked to be orange silk ribbon.

Later Jen would have occasion to inspect it more closely and recognize the decoration as a scrap of fine Chinese-embroidered hem from some long-faded rich red gown. It would put her in mind of her wooden charm and she would think, “So it is. Each of us carries some little relic of the past, tangible or intangible, that we cannot part with.”

"Stand down, children," Solo called out, reaching a hand to lower his crew man's blade from it's proximity to her throat.

"These are friends..." He could not forbear it seemed, flashing her a small gloating smile as he did so, "...or renumerative allies at the very least."

The other dark youth had lowered their cutlass on the opposite side. They both had close cropped hair and though the one facing her seemed slightly taller she guessed them near kin, if not siblings. "We were near to coming to look for you, sir."

"Oh, ye of little faith....Darian.." Solo chided.

"I am Zachary, sir," the youth said.
"And I will take your honorable word for it, sailor." Solo replied, utterly unperturbed.

He waved his now battered hat toward the ship. "Ladies and gentleman, if you would but stow yourselves aboard we'll be on our way."

The process took some minutes, for there was no real shore to climb down upon at this measure of the high tide, only crowded tree roots reaching straight into the water, and the little sloop was fairly wedged against them. They were thus obliged to climb down one at a time from the rise of the small sandy bluff, around the stone boxes of old mausoleums and tombs crazily tipped and half eaten by the mangrove, to a rough board the blond youth laid across as a tilted gangway.

Solo's crew had not been idle in their hiding place, it seemed. Baskets filled with mangoes and small but full water barrels lay upon the deck and Jen, to her great relief, also saw a number of fish strung up along the mast, smoked and ready to eat. A welcome sight for many reasons, firstly because her own stomach rumbled, none of them having eaten more than some sweet rolls pocketed at the festival yesterday, and secondly because,...while she had no concrete concerns about the cannibal's discretion and manners, the sight of ready foodstuffs did relieve her mind of some mild worry with regard to him.

Solo's crew put to swiftly to stow gear and ready the sails, while that captain tossed his hat below the small cabin roof and moved up as his Mate took place by the tiller.

"This tide is as good as any we're likely to get. Ropes away. Khaueri, get us out of here."

They pulled out as swiftly and easily as Solo might have boasted, and the little sloop did indeed handle well.

Chapter End Notes

Somewhere offshore a warship, that flies the British flag at the moment but in fact truly serves no nation, hovers in wait with a hideously scarred German commander uneasy about the sloop seen passing off the Jamaica coast, for no reason he can yet put his finger upon.
Krennik

Chapter Summary

In Which portions of the Enemy’s secret dispatches, obtained by the Alliance reveal more about the purposes of the Florida plantation.

Additionally, at the New Smyrna plantation, Mr. Oren Krennik has a small number of desperate souls, captured in their attempt to escape the plantation, returned to his cruel custody. That gentleman ponders the possible contents of dispatches brought to him by the attending British officers and dwells upon the actions of his superiors and rivals with an eye toward securing his own position. With this aim in mind he reviews again the risky step he has taken in privately contacting a chief commander of the Enemy directly in an attempt to gain that fearful commander's favor.

Chapter Notes

In the weeds here, but you've got to let the bad guys monologue.....its a time-honored means of exposition.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MSS, Being a portion of a secure request for endorsement by one Dr. William Tarkin, London to the Crown Office of the Lords of Trade, London, dated January __1767,

obtained by Mr. David Draven and forwarded by the hand of Miss Mary Jade under his seal to Lady Mary Monmouth, 4 Tavin Park, London

(Decoded from cypher)

…..Isolation and a climate suitable to the manufacture of the substance can be obtained in numerous
other of our operations in the West Indies and the East Indies, operations on the African coast have proved untenable in the near term, yet suitable regions are rapidly becoming available in Asia, as per Captain Huxton’s report…….

**Acceding to you honor’s wisdom in focusing on the British as hosts the Florida and Carolina ventures both provide ease of access to the sea, with Charles Town by far the superior port. Mrs. Charles Pinckney has proved a receptive and effective overseer of her pilot project since the leverage regarding her late husband’s debts has been applied. In comparison to Mr. Orren Krennik’s project in East Florida the less isolated location of the Carolina plantation clearly offers far readier opportunities for oversight…..**

Processing the explosive compound alongside the indigo has proved simplicity itself even taking into account the additional precautions required to disguise it so that it may be shipped legitimately or smuggled as prized dyestuff, opens many avenues to the potential of the projects logical expansion.

The ease with which the manufacturing of the explosive could be concealed even beneath the very noses of the governments considered, if one may be forgiven an assay into low humor, not to mention the distribution networks that could be piggybacked onto from Canton to Europe and New Spain must present itself well to the imagination. Moreover, as pointed out in the previous proposal, Our Honored Master’s financial agents in London and Istanbul and Paris need neither purchase a ship or pay a pennyworth in bribe to transport it. Indigo being traded more lustily at present than gold. When I presented the outline of the project to His Emminence some twenty years ago he was most intrigued by the prospect that commercial interests and royal governments alike would pay dearly in coin for the privilege of carrying a substance that could lay waste to cities directly into their own ports and capitals. Agents of our consortium need only be standing by……

Whether events will prove more conducive to the use of such hidden stockpiles for manipulative trade with the childishly competitive powers of Europe or in direct assault against them will, of course be made by our Master himself when the time comes……

**Therefor it is my fixed if somewhat reluctant conclusion at this time that Mr. Krenniks East Florida plantation, notwithstanding that gentleman’s episodic mismanagement and less than transparent reporting must be the sole preferred venture for the time being.** I recommend, however, that should the compounds developed there be definitively proved of value we investigate and even prepare a second, or even multiple locations of manufactory and be prepared at once to remove any vital personnel and experimental records…..

(*handwritten upon a separate sheet :*

*Madam, These documents were brought to us at cost by brave operatives long concealed within the Admiralty. The deciphering of the notes has proved difficult but this section was deemed essential to our current action and is being sent to you with priority. Other pages will follow as secured.*

*It being judged likely that Captain Andor and his company have already quit Jamaica by the 25th notice of this intelligence will be sent by the swiftest means possible in secure copy on to our agents at Freeport and Nassau, as well as to a contact we have recently confirmed as trustworthy at St. Augustine. We must pray that they reach him in time to be of use, and that his mission can conclude quickly and successfully but we must also prepare ourselves for the worst. We have less time than even we feared.*
D.D.

December 12th, 1769

East Florida

New Smyrna Colony

Mr William Tarkin, Proprietor

December 24, 1769

If the British naval officers were possessed of suspicions regarding any matters at the plantation they displayed it by no outward signs. Mr. Oren Krennik felt most secure in his opinion that they were none of them capable of convincing subterfuge.

Bless the stalwart sons of Albion, they had an inborn gift, almost to a man, of not being able to see anything that deviated from their pre-formed frames of reference. Move an object two inches out of place or dye it red when the fashion current in the Admiralty declared that it should be blue and their eyes could be counted upon to pass over it unperturbed.

As matters fell out, they drank their measures of rum punch companionably enough in the newly finished front rooms of the mansion house while the prisoners were transferred, then took possession of the dispatch cases containing those letters of thanks addressed back to the Governor at Jamaica and departed on the following tide with respectful well-wishes all around

His men were in position throughout, of course, primed and loaded to kill them all had the signal were given but their departure under their own power made for a much more convenient resolution.

Bodies could be disposed of with ridiculous ease here but it would take a dozen of his men more than a day to get a ship of such size back far enough into the inlets to strip it down adequately. Even with the season of storms not yet over he did not dare risk a fire that might be seen for miles at sea.
The small ragged sloop that had been lingering on the inlets of the nearby Halifax several days back might well have been but smugglers trying to evade patrols, but no chances could be taken. The British were already showing far too much interest in the imagined economic potential of the peninsulas' eastern coast.

The officers had babbled of attempts at rice and sugar plantations further south....Good luck to those fellows, he told himself. They will last a season at best. If the Yellow Fever does not kill them despair and boredom will.

He glanced up at the British flag that flew above the outer wall.

*The Spanish will take this wretched strip of sand and jungle back from you strutting jays upon the first instant you take your eyes from it,* he mentally prophecied to the waving colors, *and if the French decide to meddle again in affairs North you will very soon be required to do so. I shall deal well enough with them then, afterwards. The bribes will be higher but the sherry wine will be cheaper.*

He would not second-guess himself this close to success. More bribes would solve any problems in the short term and once the success of the project was proved to his Lordship and their Master, cost would cease to be an object of concern.

Yet Mr. Krennik did not deceive himself. Time for that success was running short.

The trials here had been promising though prone to occasional dramatic accident. Erso had insisted that all issues relating to instability must be solved here before any full scale real-world tests of the explosives full capabilities.

*This bespoke at best, over-caution and timidity on his Engineer's part, or perhaps some motive less worthy.*

He would deal with Erso when other problems were, as they promised to soon be, under firm management. Wild and unconfirmable rumors circulated the smugglers ports, and the gossip of the British officers seconded, heartening tales of the death of the brigand Saul Gerrere and the dramatic destruction of one of his Portuguese bases.

Rich reward in the form of fortune..about which Krennick cared but little, save as a means to other ends…. and influence….about which he cared a great deal….came to those who brought their Master tools. This explosive nitrate stood to be the most powerful tool since gunpowder, perhaps since steel.

*Striking against one of Gerrere's strongholds without waiting for Tarkin's direct approval had been a bold risk, but boldness was clearly called for now.*

Standing within view of the newly finished "Mansion House," he watched the sails of the British ship that had returned his errant workers and most recent dispatches disappear out around the great matts of vegetation and through the watery maze out the “Mosquito” inlet toward the wider Atlantic.

Mr. Krennik was most content with the impression the “Governor’s Mansion” had produced, this being the first time since the completion of the facade that he had had occasion to display it to outside eyes. He had, after all, designed the house, himself.

*In his youth he had studied architecture and he still took genuine satisfaction in design that achieved*
the goals set for it. Most persons, especially those of the ruling classes, whatever their nation, wandered about like sheep, thinking that their world simply happened, sprung from the mind of Jove not the forge of Vulcan, and that appearances always reflected some natural reality. Present a group of English officers with a graceful and imposing structure of a size, shape and style they interpreted as reflective of an orderly, prosperous, intelligently managed plantation of Britain's tropical provinces and that is what they could counted upon to see.

Sending messages through Jamaica had a taken a few irksome extra weeks in transit but the amenable if expensive General Grant was no longer in place as governor at St. Augustine. The interim governor was one Dr. John Moultrie, an unknown quantity.

Chances could not be taken with his goals so near in sight, Jamaica was by far the more secure route.

The document case so Britishly delivered was tucked firmly beneath his arm, still sealed. His impatient intention was to set his men to arranging the escapees while he returned to the house to securely digest it’s contents. His most earnest hope was these contained in their sealed envelopes official and detailed descriptions from his men who had set the trial in Portugal, along with copies of confirmed third party accounts of his success.

That he had such in hand was essential before Mr. Tarkin arrived from Charles Town as expected at the end of January.

His rivals now circled like crows.

Krennik knew full well what that grand gentleman's true motives must be on the coast of the Carolinas.

Mrs. Charles Pinckney’s rice and indigo estates were situated near the Carolina coast, within a few days reach of Charles Town. William Tarkin, whose shrewdness in matters of self-promotion was legend, clearly sought to hedge his bets with regards to all ventures in the New World. That gentleman’s spies…the sloop spotted on the River? Perhaps even turncoats within Krenniks own guard?…..had no doubt informed him of the weapons enormous promise.

He thinks to steal the innovations….my innovations….with regards to the dual processing and concealment of the compound in indigo. The Widow Pinckney is being set up as potential competitor and Tarkin will swoop in to claim credit himself for whichever project bears fruit first.

Let him try, he thought.

Krennik had taken another bold step. Their Master prized Tarkin as lieutenant and gave him an ear, but there was another whose advice he rated even more highly.

Mr. Krennik had sent overtures directly to Freiherr von Vader

A quick glance at the seals upon the case, as well as a certain lingering anxiety…trembling, might be a better description….in the posture of the British officer acting as secretary while he handed over the
dispatches led Krennik to hope that amongst the long awaited field reports from Europe he had received a reply to his request for an visit by Vader himself before the New Year.

If he could subvert the established ladder and greet that fearsome commander directly with some irrefutable record of success….success moreover in a direct trial against a European fortified site, documented so that Tarkin's lackeys could not conceal or twist the reports…..it would cement his position in their Master's favor beyond question and Tarkin's self-serving interference could finally be dispensed with.

His ambitions lay within his grasp, but he must walk the knives edge.

He would first read the dispatches and make ready his play based on their contents. These escapees must be questioned and dealt with….hopefully before midday.

Captain Pence followed him as he walked back the short distance from the dock.

“I will be in my offices at the Overseer's House,” Krennic told him, without a glance backwards. “Have Mr. Gesh bring a bowl of shrub and a plate of bread and cheese, but do not disturb me otherwise for one hour.”

*He would toast Mr. Saul Gerrere's re-location to Hell with brandy later in his private quarters.*

“Yes sir,” the officer replied.

“In the meanwhile send for Mr. Galen Erso from the works,”

*Did he sense a flinch in that phlegmatic Scot? Damn the man, he should at least be grateful the wind blew from the sea today.*

He did not bother to conceal his mild contempt. “You need not go yourself if you find the task offensive, Captain, send one of your men, but have him here before noon and make sure he is given instructions to wash and change clothes.”

Krennik found his eye drawn to the line of ragged men being led tied toward the palmetto huts beyond the guardhouse. Forni was no doubt among them, and a plan began to form in his mind.

*Erso was perhaps overdue some refreshed awareness of his responsibilities with regard to control of his people.*

“And have your men set up the gallows on the field.”

“Yes sir.”
Chapter End Notes

I was actually in New Smyrna, FLA. over the weekend and seriously considered knocking on the door of the Historical Society and begging their forgiveness.
Chapter Summary

An exceedingly brief conversation ensues between Midshipman Syndalla and Captain Han Solo. That gentleman's long failure of memory regarding their previous acquaintance is remedied and he proves, in fact, regretful of some of his previous saucy behavior.

The question of Solo and his crew's continued employment by the Alliance is introduced

Midshipman Syndulla makes a singular request of the Captain regarding Captain Andor and Miss Erso.

The Falcon

North from from Jamaica

December 29, 1769

They made straight for Nassau with all good speed.

Midshipman Syndalla took a place on deck and watched Solo's crew set to well and quick. *Though requiring great skill to work it was indeed a clever arrangement of sail.*

The sun had passed over and both the rosy sky and fortunate winds seemed a good omen for tomorrow.

The captain came back as his mighty Mate took over his place at the wheel but paused as he passed near Syndalla with a considered glance.
"I have given it much thought sweetheart," he said, tipping his hat back and smiling, “and find I still cannot escape the notion that we have met before."

This again? Spare us both, she thought. I know your sort boy, you are not half the villain you feign to be, yet to be thought a nearly-honorable man, or God forbid, pitied, for even an hour makes you feel yourself in such false costume you must quickly play the rogue again to better the fit.

She leaned back against the rail and regarded the young Dutchman evenly.
"You are slow enough to come to it, then, Captain Solo. Tell me, whatever became of that handsome fellow you called Captain at New Orleans? It was he I managed my business with. You played a much less forward part in those days I think."

She could not fail to feel a flash of annoyance at the way the smuggler's eyes widened as belated recognition washed over him like a full moon tide, but quickly chided herself.

O false pride Hera Syndalla! No doubt you have changed, and greatly. How could you not?

"She was the Espírito, your ship?" Solo asked. The tide of memory had reached the high mark at last.

"Aye," the woman answered, "she was."

He touched his hat brim in salute then and bowed his head. "My apologies, captain," he said.

To her great surprise he seemed to speak now in respectful earnest, all his habitual sarcasm gone. She returned the gesture.

What do they say of us? Do they remember us still in the Gulf and the South? Lay on her lips to ask, but she forced such weakness back.

"With regards to Alando, I cannot speak with any certainty" the man said, returning to her question, “We parted company some years ago, over cards in part but in the main because, it seems, he long harbored a secret wish to stand a citizen....to find another calling, as it were.”

Solo turned back then with a look almost of sadness toward the dark rise of Jamaica's mountains, now quickly shrinking in shadows astern.

The Maroons? Syndalla marveled. She would never have guessed that. Thereby must hang a tale.

Rumor in her days upon the Gulf had pegged the dashing young Captain Calrissian as a habitual gambler, required to engage in many bold and chancy ventures to pay his constant debts. She had paid the handsome fellow his money and dismissed him as yet another daring but self-serving privateer.
Yet who was Hera of the clan Syndalla to judge the fellow, it seemed? she wondered now. Surely to bind oneself ashore and give up one’s boat to fight for the Maroon Townships was among the boldest gambles imaginable.

Solo might well have asked in his turn, since she had broken the code first, "How came you here?" Yet he did not, only turning to look off to the west and the open Atlantic again.

Therefore she ventured another question of him, knowing Andor would do so soon enough.

"Will you join us at Nassau, Captain Solo? You and your crew must surely have some notion of what we move against."

The man laughed, mirthlessly she thought and glanced first up toward the fair-haired boy and small but whipcord-strong woman at the lines, and then back toward his towering Mate. His manner as he answered remained in this new, in her experience with him thus far, more frank manner.

"Off the boards of this ship I would not presume to speak for any man or woman among them. My agreement is to pay them, and if your commander’s purse proves dependable, I will do so at Nassau port. Afterwards they will reckon their own decisions. You are free to make your angelic overtures then. The Alliance may find young Luc at least, open to persuasion and perhaps Sabe as well, as she has all but adopted him..." the Dutchman shrugged.

She did not pursue the subject further.

Captain Andor was the senior officer on this venture. Any offers must be made and approved by him. Skill and even virtue alone did not determine who would swear the oath and take the Starbird’s mark. It required a commitment of hope, even in the face of despair and the certain knowledge of loss.

*Would she have the courage to still go on, even with the treasure of her memories, save for the dreams in which her Kanaã returned to her and spoke of the better worlds she would not live to see?*

She saw Miss Erso now emerge from the low cabin and speak to the fair-haired French boy, asking some question about the arrangement of the small sail heads.

Captain Andor came up from the cramped space as well. From where she stood Midshipman Syndalla could see how his eye looked up quick as a hawk’s to locate the Englishwoman first, before sweeping around to place the rest of the persons aboard.

*Once a marksman always a marksman,* she thought of the young officer’s dark eye. He assessed all movable pieces in advance of any possible play of events. Perhaps he was not even aware that he did so.

*Miss Erso however was the exception no matter were she stood, her placement always came first. Of that habit she felt sure he was unconscious.*
Miss Erso, in her turn seemed as if she heard the Captain's step on deck despite the clamor of wind and wave. Looking back toward the stern and catching sight of her lover she smiled bright and quick as a fish's leap, then turned back to her study of the sails.

“Captain Han Solo,” Hera Syndalla said, “We have both sailed these waters in ships of some renown. In the name of that kinship may I ask of you a favor?”

Solo raised an eyebrow, as if questioning if she flattered to deceive. She did not and hoped him man enough to see it.

Perhaps he was for he answered her gravely, “I will if I am able, Captain Syndalla of the Espírito.”

*Ah, that was painful indeed.*

“You will find our officer a brave, capable and fiercely dedicated man, who will deal with you honorably,” she looked up to where Captain Andor stood, back toward the stern, and Solo followed her gaze, “but there may come an hour, while you remain in our company, when some trial or danger threatens and he asks you to take her…” *there was no need to clarify her subject further, the man was not blind,* “…to remove her unwilling from his side to some place of safety.”

The smuggler looked at her with furrowed inquiry, but Hera Syndalla went on, “I ask this only of you brother, should such an hour come and such a request be made, do not do it.”

From the bow the young pilot, Luc, seemed concerned about something and had called for the spyglass to look West.

"What troubles you boy?" the small crewman, Sabe, could be heard to ask, "Do you see something?"

"No," the boy said, looking toward the red sunset, "Or rather, I cannot say. It is merely a feeling."

Sabé laid a hand upon his shoulder but none of the rest of the crew seemed to pay any mind. They were perhaps by now accustomed to Ciel-Marcheur and his "feelings."
La Inferno

Chapter Summary

In which Mr. Galen Erso is called to meet with the indigo plantation's Director, Mr. Oren Krennic and prepares himself for what he knows will be a cruel ordeal. That gentleman reflects somewhat upon his unhappy circumstances and the persons and their plights at New Smyrna. and also recalls the brighter days when he, as a poor student courted by means of the great classic of Renaissance Italian poetry The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri the exceptional daughter of his employer and the birth of their child and brief time of happiness together before he realized the snares into which he had in his hubris fallen. Mr. Erso and the captives at New Smyrna prepare for dark times to come and Mr. Erso continues to nurture his faint hope in the mission of Mr. Bodi Rook even as he yearns for his lost daughter, grieves for his wife and plots revenge against his enemies.

Chapter Notes

Well, you knew anything with a Galen Erso p.o.v. was going to be a little dark. Yes. I had to read a lot of Dante once upon a time and and have always found piles of antiquarian books hopelessly romantic. Somehow Lyra Erso makes almost more sense to me as a tragic 18th century. heroine.

Hej, gammal vän = Hello, old friend. (Swedish)

Senyor, és veritat? Els han trobat? = Sir, Is it true? Have they found them?

Què has sentit? = What have you heard?

Les naus tenien banderoles angleses. Es van treure homes de cadenes. = The ships had English flags. Men were brought off in chains.

Ja sabeu què vindrà Sera. Hem de resar a Déu per força. = You know what will come Sera. We must pray to God for strength.

Ocultarem les nostres llàgrimes. = We will hide our tears from them.

(all Catalan, a dialect of which is spoken on Minorica)

L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle = The love that moves the sun and the other stars (Italian, From Dante’s The Divine Comedy)

Gå med Gud, min son = Go with God, my son. (Swedish)
Krennik’s man came to fetch him as he walked back up to the drying yard.

A kerchief held firmly to his mouth and nose the man quickly related the Director’s orders and as soon as Mr. Galen Erso had bowed and committed himself to arrival at the Directors Quarters within the appointed hour fled to await his compliance upwind of the works on the main path back to the riverfront in a place of more congenial air.

The fellow’s name was Dorton.

Galen Erso knew all their names well after so many years, just as he knew their habits and most regular actions.

In a way they were as much prisoners in this place as those they guarded.

This knowledge bred no pity for them in his heart.

Officer Dorton betrayed a Dorset accent in unguarded moments, and had a particular dislike amounting almost to a disabling fear of the brown thumb-sized foul-smelling hard shelled insects that frequented the windless corners of the woods. This knowledge had proved of use two years back when Sefla and Peya had been able to distract his interest from the alterations to the mixing tank by having the children gather the insects and place them thickly along the path.

Thus unguarded Galen Erso walked the sandy path back to the small wooden house appointed to his use. At some point prior to an inspection by British "investors" two or three years back Krennik had
sent men to paint the boards with lime whitewash but the rains had long since melted it away, and
now the bare accommodation matched the yellowed grey color of the rest of the plantations shacks.

Within the house had been placed a desk, tables for his papers, a rough bed for his hours of sleep and
also a tall chest kept locked with a key containing clothes. The lock was a necessity it was believed
since the most desperately sought commodity in this hellish place, sometimes to a greater degree than
even food or untainted water, was clothing. None of these furnishings had been placed at his request
of course. The house had been arranged so upon his arrival here ten years ago.

Nearby the doorway sat a small wooden bench and here he seated himself to remove the scuffed and
bespattered boots he habitually wore near the works. A pair of woven grass slippers waited beneath
the bench and he shook them carefully before slipping his feet into him. The jungles of the Americas
had taught him caution in this, among other things. A small striped lizard fell out upon the board of
the doorway step, eyed him with disgruntled alarm, and fled to the cool darkness beneath the house.

Galen Erso walked through the dim sparsely furnished room and opened the shutters to dispel such
of the brooding air as might be displaced. He then walked through to a small shed that had been
attached at the back and removed the dirty coat, headscarf and neckerchief he had worn for the bulk
of the day.

He would need go to seek water for washing before he put on his reserved untainted shirt. Nothing
worn near the putrefaction of the tanks could ever be wholly free of the smell again, neither cloth nor
hide, but he resolved to go through the motions as required.

Above the pegs where he hung his garments to gain what virtue still air could give them was a
drawing in blue ink upon a scrap of notepaper. Fixed to the wall with a fragment of nail it presented
a small sketch by his own hand of a monstrous dog with three heads. He touched the image lightly
with his free hand if in greeting.

Guardian of the Third Circle.

_Hej, gammal vän._

His wedding band he kept always on a string around his neck when he worked, but he now took it
off from this and placed it back again upon his finger. Saying to himself as he did each day upon so
doing,

_Help me Lara. Guide me through._

___________________

He had found the volume in the original archaic Italian on the table when he first entered into the
library of the stately house in Derbyshire.

Most of the impressive hundreds, indeed thousands, of volumes there contained had clearly sat upon
their respective shelves carefully dusted and just as carefully unopened for generations. Whether
originally hoarded and prized as knowledge, booty of war or fashionable affectation he could not tell, but the vast majority of the dazzling trove had clearly lain unexplored by the noble residents of Ogston Hall since the days of Richard III. He had been engaged by Lord Arian to fully catalog the scientific and alchemical tomes...for sale he doubted not but did not enquire. One of his patrons at the Royal Society had recommended him to the employment, knowing his dire poverty...and had come upon that day to do a first rough catalog of his task armed with ladder, ledger-books and quills. His one serviceable velvet coat was swathed in a linen duster for protection.

The room was well-maintained, cleaned, cavernous and cold. A small cursory fire was lit in the great carved fireplace at the far end of the room. He had considered at first that this might be for his comfort but later learned was simply by the Lords standing instruction. Lord Arian disliked that any room of his house be unheated, on the mere chance that he might one day choose to enter there.

Mr. Galen Erso, aged nineteen formerly of Uppsala University, presently an applicant of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge, more commonly known as the Royal Society, was left daunted and astonished behind the closed doors of that stately room by the house servants. He stood frozen in awe for several long minutes before slowly taking hold of his dazzled wits and setting about measuring the full scope of the six months task before him.

A first clue that someone else had recently been in the room for purposes other than dusting ought to have been the small rug and stack of rather moth-eaten cushions he found hidden under a draped gate-leg table not far from the fire but the doings of the gentry of all nations were then such an exotic mystery to him....For all he knew there was a pampered and literate dog who liked to nap here.

What gave him pause, youthful pendant that he was, was a book out of place, atop a stack of newly printed volumes by Swift, just slightly off center.

The beautiful and ancient leather bindings of this volume made pointed contrast with the marbled covers of the more modern collections and so created a discord that caught his eye.

He opened the tome with greatest care.

The frontispiece brought his heart to his throat: La Comedia di Dante Alleghieri. The volume in his hands was the most ancient he had ever seen of the text.... Foligno...printers Johann Numeister and Evangelista Angelini da Trevi. 1472.

And between the pages lay a thin blue string, as if someone had marked a place.

Young Mr. Galen Erso laid the work carefully back and set about his cataloging, working diligently until evening and then being shown out by a different serving man than the one who had admitted him.

The next day when he was re-admitted to the room he re-investigated. The ancient Italian masterwork lay on the same table and stack but was altered very slightly in position. The string had been moved forward to lie between the pages of the next Canto’s beginning.

On impulse he took a pen, tore an edge from the corner of one ledger page, dipped his quill and wrote: “Dante sees Aeneas as a prophet – as a one who might speak the future into being. Yet the Apostles Paul’s world shall replace Aeneas’ as the popes replaced Caesars – how might one pilgrim’s renewal usher in a new order of the ages? This seems the poet’s question”

When the ink was set he placed the scrap within the pages of the book.

Ever a man who could blinker his mind when consumed with a task, for good or ill, he then stilled
his trembling heart and set about his day’s work.

The next morning he fairly raced the stout brocaded serving man to the library door.

_The fellow cast him many a suspicious glance as he closed the doors behind. Galen Erso was not at all surprised to find that evenings escort had received instruction to search his bags before he left, whether for theft or strong liquor he was was never sure._

His note was gone. The blue string had moved forward several pages and a small note on a folded and torn scrap of foolscap was inscribed thus in a small neat ladylike hand: “Will not the poet succeed Paul as Paul succeeds Aeneas, and by the same act: the rediscovery and renewal of love? The implication here surely is that it lies within each man and woman to do so. Whenever a human being is saved by love, the poet seems to say, the future is redeemed, both for that person and for the cosmos.”

_So it began. The most strange of courtships surely?_  

They wrote each other commentaries on Hell and Heaven and all the vagaries in between then moved to complaining about the limits of their own Italian. He knew the poem already but her commentaries made it fresh to him.

Or did at least until she wrote that the “Classical poets took infinite vision and seemed to aspire to reduce it merely to the level of their own over-rationalistic understanding,” then she simply made him want to argue with her.

_Small cakes, some with bites out of them began to appear, wrapped in oiled paper in a corner of the hearth. He was, of course required to consume them to hide the evidence._

It was more than two months before he finally saw his heavenly guide, although she admitted to spying on him much earlier from her hiding place. Like Beatrice from the clouds she stepped out one rainy afternoon from behind a bookcase in a simple and slightly dusty dove wool gown, pinned over rope jumps, to judge from her ease. With a fine linen kerchief, shoulders wrapped in an India shawl as if against the damp and dark hair pinned beneath a lace cap, she presented as fair a picture of the Divine as he had every hoped to see. This vision of Holy Wisdom showed him the cobwebbed secret chamber behind an old “priest hole” left from the days of the Tudors. A backbreaking handspan of a staircase wound up from it to the third storey, opening she said into a narrow closet behind an upper chamber fireplace.

“I could never fit through such a passage,” he told her.

“No,” she said, as if genuinely saddened, “and I had so earnestly hoped you would prove to be short as well as young and handsome. Still, one must not look ungrateful to the fairies that grant two wishes if they stint a little on the third. As uncomfortable as it is I fear we shall have to meet here.”

He was overwhelmed by the risk she took even for the weeks when he stupidly thought her merely an overly educated lady’s maid, a paid companion to one of Lord Arian’s many daughters or some
impoverished genteel relation kept on charity.

Had he known she was the Lord’s seventeen year-old daughter confined to her rooms as punishment for yet another public defiance of her father, he would have fled in terror.

*Oh Lara, had I done so you would still be alive.*

In the end they were caught, of course. They were too boldly and foolishly besotted not to be.

She was locked up for nine months at her sister's in Kent, where there were no secret passages until her father, satisfied that she was not quite the shame to her families name that she might have been, packed her off to accompany an eccentric elderly cousin, Lady Wortley-Montagu who lived scandalously in Italy and Turkey. Galen Erso was packed back to London, unreimbursed.

Through another year of smuggled letters she wrote of her growing interest in geology and the political causes her cousin was involved in. Despite insistence that her cousin would help them and the heartening inclusion of snippets of erotic Italian and Turkish poetry she included, *always with sweet requests for his assistance in “translation”* he vowed to himself that when he came to her it would be with a fortune worthy of her. The offer of his old University friend Oren Krennik seemed the answer to all his prayers. Galen Erso worked, afire as if his hope and future depended upon it and made enormous strides, pleasing his new patrons.

Coming a long last to Naples where her cousin had a villa he found her walking down on the Bay, her gown and petticoats tucked into her apron, barefoot in the surf with a wheelbarrowed servant in tow plucking volcanic samples from the sand, he knelt before her on the very beach.

“L'amor che move il sole e l'altrre stelle,” he said as the Mediterranean washed over his shoes.

“You bloody fool!” she cried and threw herself into his arms.

They were married in a little Italian church by a priest seemingly unconcerned that neither of them were Roman Catholics, their Italian was good, it was enough.

They travelled the world as they had each dreamed of doing and Jane, named for her disapproving mother, was born at sea on a Dutch ship, the Vallt, bound for India.

The Company, through the congratulatory Krennik, offered her scope for her talents as well finding her capacity with languages and prodigy-like skill with the identification of rocks and minerals a worthy contribution to their projects and imposed few restrictions as to her sex.

She accepted gladly especially when she learned that she would even be able to publish, albeit under an alias.

*Her elderly cousin had disapproved, surprisingly, as that unconventional lady had in the past proved such an ally to them. He was grieved to see that she and Lara parted in argument. Even more grieved when word reached them that the good Lady Wortley-Montagu had died while they were at sea.*
For a year, even two, their happiness proceeded perfect and without shadow, or so it seemed to him.

Galen Erso knew now that he had attached himself so strongly to this dream he believed himself to have built and at the same become so engrossed in his work…. the advancement of ideas he had only dreamed of in boyhood, the company and admiration of powerful learned men…. and so fixed upon the beauty of their daughter as she grew that he did not see…..so many other things.

Laura grew distant and he told himself that motherhood changed every woman. She was weary, he decided, perhaps of travel and determined to seek a house for the three of them.

Krennik agreeably helped them find a fine one in the city and urged that Lara and Jen remain there and settle in while Mr. Erso and some of the other men surveyed sites for a possible venture in the West Indies.

Galen kissed a stricken tearful Lara and a round-cheeked little Jen goodbye, promising it would for but four months with good winds.

Upon that journey he saw…..at long last….many things he had been blind to.

Shaken he returned to London six months late.

The pretty house had been dark and for an instant as he stepped down from the hired carriage a terrible thought had struck him.

“She is gone. She has left me.”

A part of him thought, "Of course she has, and it is better so."

Yet it was not a servant who opened the door to him, it was his wife and he swept her into his arms with relief he could not articulate, then ran as if from a devouring beast upstairs to where Jen was asleep like an angel in her nursery and sat beside her crib.

Lara came to him there, pale and desperate and knelt beside his chair. When had she become so pale? How had he not seen it?

"Galen," she said, “You must believe me. These people are not who you think they are.” Then she told him the truth, laid it out with dates and names of ships and colleagues who had disappeared, she showed him the letters of a young Scotsman who had returned from Jamaica and more. All that he had seen made sense now.

He had not freed them. He had trapped them all. He had sold them to the Devil.

He wept and begged her forgiveness, and found when he did so that she was weeping as well.

“I was so afraid,” she said, shaking, “I was so afraid you would deny it. That you would…be like…”

They wept in each others arms like the rebellious lovers they had once been for a little while and then
his Beatrice steeled herself.

She showed him that same dark night a package she had kept hidden in the false bottom of her traveling truck holding papers, gold, a few common clothes and a pistol.

*How long had she been preparing?*

She told him to carry Jen from her crib, choosing but one of her ten thousand little penny dolls and poppets to bring with along and the three of them came out together out of the house in the dark. A carriage waited in the dark at the turning of the road. There were people who would help them, she said. She had made arrangements.

All the servants were gone but he never asked how she had managed their absence.

They ran.

*You should have left me Lara. Why did you wait? If you had loved me less you would still be alive.*

As he walked out the back door to obtain at least a little rainwater from one of the covered troughs, one of the young Minorcan women, Sera Fortesa, appeared from around the rough stick fence behind the house holding a pitcher of well water and a cake of precious soap.

Dorton must have sent her down with it.

“Gràcies, Sera,” he said, standing with a slight bow. He knew the child well. Her mother worked the tanks and but so far this slight girl had been kept mostly to the fields and stacking barns and other of the plantation’s work.

As he took the items from her hands, he whispered, “Espereu. There is something for your mother.”
She kept her eyes averted but nodded and remained where she was as he carried her the items inside.

He never, unless forced to by the presence of Krennik or his minions, allowed any of the women or boys pressed as servants inside when he was there.

It was not that he hid anything of value that he feared stolen. *Laughable. All that he had of value had been taken from him long ago.* Nor did he fear anything from discovery. How could he? The house was searched regularly, quite openly in fact. Krennik usually made a great show of it.

Mr. Galen Erso still possessed secrets but they were not kept here.

It was simply all he could do, under the guise perhaps of misanthropy, to grant them some small appearance of dignity.

Within the plantation itself Krennik brooked no distraction from duty or disruption of routine but with these maintained he seldom bothered himself about any abuses his men committed so long as they did not affect security, imperil the work or damage the “equipment.” Debauchery itself held no personal interest for the Director, save for when other men’s indulgence in it provided him with a tool against them. This Galen Erso knew, from long acquaintance.

*It was a hollow gesture perhaps, to say “I will not harm you,” but all that he could do. At least he could spare them that one moment of fear, that each must surely suffer each time they passed alone through the door of an overseers cabin.*

He carried the items within and laid them on a table. Using a penknife he pared the small cake of soap down by perhaps a third….more might be noticed,…and returned the scrap thus to the girl who waited with bowed head by the door, glancing about first to make sure that they were unobserved before pressing into her hand. When the rains came and water was freer a little soap might bring ease for a wound, or at least clean a scrap of cloth.

She concealed the precious morsel amongst some tied pocket in her tattered skirts, and then looked up at him with dark eyes.

“Senyor, és veritat? Els han trobat?” Sera whispered urgently

*Ah, God. That was why he was sent for, why Krennick had demanded his presence with suitable clothes.*

*Galen Erso had dared to hope that it was only some new inspection, the guards had seemed to fear one.*

“Qué has sentit?” he asked the girl

“Les naus tenien banderoles angleses. Es van treure homes de cadenes.”

He had seen the mast of ships coming in in the morning, two small sloops but had fled up to the works. From their size he had hoped them to be no more than messenger packets.

Forni and the others had been caught, some of them. It must be.

Two weeks ago twenty men and three women, all but driven mad by desperation had taken two of the dories, killed a guard and made a run out the Mouskuto Inlet for open water.
He had tried to warn them, as had Sefla. They had no man among them sailor enough to get themselves to safety in these currents.

Young Mr. Rook alone had never been found, either dead or alive, and no scrap of the little boat they had built for him had ever washed up on any shore within reach of Krennik or his allies patrol. After a few months even Krennik’s suspicious mind numbered the Turkish pilot amongst those of the crew who had found they could bear the guilt of the task they had been set to no longer and given themselves up to either the jungle or the sea.

The memory of that brave youth’s face haunted Erso, even among the throngs of other ghosts. Sefla, last survivor of the first crew, had tied the shirt lettered with their desperate message upon the boy’s back and kissed him on both cheeks saying, “God is great. His eye will be always upon you.” When he had embraced Rook himself the spray and tears had soaked his face equally. “I will not fail you Erso Bey,” the pilot said, looking toward the wild moon swept sea they launched him on with what might almost have been joy. Galen Erso understood. He too had sinned and the innocent had died for it and now he strove, if not for the redemption of Paradisio at least to be lifted out of the Inferno.

“Gå med Gud, min son,” he said, “Go with God.”

Where are you Rook?

But Forni and the others lost hope. Almost a year had passed and against his advice they had braved a chance when the dories broke free during a fall storm.

They must have known they were most likely to drown, be swept back ashore and devoured by the great alligators or shot by the embittered and unforgiving natives, some of whom might give rough shelter to escapees they judged to be solely African but who vowed to slaughter without mercy those they judged “Spanish”. The cleverness of Krennik and his employers in pitting the oppressed against the oppressed was breathtaking.

Instead, cruel Fate seemed to determined that some of them would survive only to be captured by the ever-efficient British.

He knew what would come next. It would be as it had been four years ago and two before that.

An example would be made.

Galen Erso looked down at the girl’s thin face.

Her skirts were torn and dirtied rags, her “apron” a mat of woven local grass that the Minorican women had found the skill to weave and some now wore as coarse hats and shawls, having nothing else. Her single gown was but a shift of coarse sailcloth. Her feet were bare and stained with the blue that the wealthy of Europe and Asia prized more dear than gold.

Some years back he had gone to to the Directors then half-finished “mansion” and persuaded Krennik to allow them to take the torn sheets from the dead smugglers ship his men had wrecked in the back inlets that the women at least might have shifts. He knew better to ask it as a gesture of
mercy, and took care to conceal any sympathy on his own part, but presented it as a mere matter of “discipline” with regards to the Director’s own men.

Krennik had laughed heartily then, and waved a hand. “By all means, portion out sufficient for coverings.”

“You see why I prize our partnership so, my dear Galen? Far aside from your estimable skills as a chemist and engineer, you simply take notice of matters that I would not. No doubt it is on account of having spent more time in the company of females of all classes and natures. I readily concede your point.”

The urge to kill the man with his own hands had nearly taken Mr. Galen Erso’s breath from him then, as he had no doubt Oren Krennik knew full well.

Krennik made most certain Mr. Galen Erso was never received into the Director’s company unaccompanied and had upon a number of occasions clearly outlined in his presence what the fate of the captive workers would be should some misadventure befall himself.

“Oh, Dr. Tarkin makes no secret that his first preference has always been to set the venture either further North or South and rely wholly upon Africans, no matter the up-front price in treasure. That this far more economical venture of my design with conscripted labor has real advantages even he must by now concede, but I assure you should I not be here to press my case, Galen all these stout fellows have standing orders to clear out double quick, cut every throat, leave the alligators to dispose of the corpses and set sail with all our hard work. Pray for my continued good health, my dear Erso if you are still a superstitious man.”

Mr. Oren Krennik’s personal interests lay in torment.

The circles of Hell could have asked for no keener workman.

Sera Fortesa might be almost eighteen years now, for he remembered her as a girl of ten or eleven, when they brought her here.

A little younger than my Jane’s age now. My little Jen. My star.

He recalled her father, Bartolomeo, as a large and strong man who had cut the stone until the dust of the work had shredded his lungs and hunger had wasted that great strength. The pleurisy had carried him off five years ago. The mother, Ana, still lived and raked the tanks, though by now the poisons had torn her breathing too as well as blistered her skin. He had seen her limping amongst the other women in the line and did not doubt the pain had begun in her joints. Women could bear what broke men and longer but it would not be long now.

“Ja sabeu què vindrà Sera. Hem de resar a Déu per força.” he said, laying a hand upon hers. “Tell your mother and the others to prepare themselves.”

The four hundred who remained were the strong, even the children, for the weak had perished long ago. This thin half-starved girl had grown to womanhood here.
She nodded. “Ocultarem les nostres llàgrimes,” Then she looked up, “In Hell they will burn,” she whispered, trusting him with her hard-earned English.

_This at least he could give her. This goal alone kept him from ending his own despair and shame all these long years._

“Yes, Sera,” he promised her. “They will all burn.”

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Chapter End Notes

Again, I cannot possibly beg the forgiveness of the New Smyrna chamber of Commerce hard enough. It is a charming and quirky place, go there on vacation...although I just found the really great Spanish River Grill had closed :(....Get the grouper sandwich at Breakers..... anyway. If you are crazy enough to Google stuff I am waaaaay messing with dates now and have condensed a lot of stuff and moved a lot of events twenty backdated ....or ahead. Also SciFi/Fantasy. Don't Google things it will only make you despise me.

It must be Florida because there are palmetto bugs and lizards that get in your shoes.

Historical Note: That said, the Minorcans/Greeks/Italians/Turks shanghaied into the New Smyrna colony were brave past telling and endured stuff that made even people of that brutally inhumane time sit up and go "what?"

Other Historical Note: Many wonder, if they know enough to wonder.... Why did Dr Andrew Turnbull, a vile person (aka Tarkin) not just use the labor of the enslaved like all the other vile people? Answer: He did, but the British backers of the expedition were only wiling to commit a small amount of funds toward the outright purchase of actual living breathing humans because said humans would then be the legal property of Dr. Turnbull and what was to prevent him from just absconding with them to sell at high price elsewhere in the Caribbean and pocket the proceeds? Slaves could not be bought
on credit for the same reason. Isn't the history of venture capitol grand? Also, the ships carrying the enslaved captives he'd bought with the allocated funds sank in a hurricane and most died, also a factor may have been the local native Floridians (probably the survivors of the Timucua who would shortly join forces with the displaced Muskogee Creek in a confederation later called the Seminole) who seem to have been willing to help some of the few surviving enslaved escape. Some however despised the Spanish to such a profound degree that they would murder on sight anyone they deemed even possibly maybe Spanish...and they did not ask to see passports....Turnbull had to practically wrap himself in the British flag to talk with them and advised his agents to do so anytime they took a long walk.
What Providence and Resource Provides

Chapter Summary

A brief and rather odd chapter in which Mr. Timothy Samson Kay reviews pertinent pages in his own notes and those limited sets of reference books he was able to bring with him upon the voyage, in search of various bits of information which may prove useful to them as they approach their mission in Florida. As he does so he considers many interactions he has had with the crew, including Mrs. Imwe and Malbus, and Miss Erso. He also finds himself experiencing a quite unfamiliar level of concern over the fate of Captain Andor.

Chapter Notes

Allah’a şükürlər olsun = Thank God. (Turkish)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Rogues Venture

at sea and approaching New Providence Island

and the port of Nassau

British Bahamas

December 1769 through the First of January 1770
Being uncertain at the time of their departure from Southhampton what the ultimate needs of the voyage might be and greatly restricted as to available space Mr. Kay had made an early estimation with regards to what printed volumes would be of most use. Uncertainty was a state of being which Mr. Kay most heartily disliked to endure, but such matters could not be helped.

He had obtained a few other volumes at Cadiz before they sailed. The rest of the crew were, he knew, unlikely to make use of any but the geographical studies...although Master Gunner Cor had expressed some professional interest in several of the texts regarding the preparations of Nitrates...... but he kept them available in the Great Cabin, should they be required. He himself had pursued translations and made voluminous notes during the course of the voyage.

Additional careful notes were taken by him also as he frequently took the opportunity to reinterview Mr. Bodi Rook with regard to a number of points in his narrative which seemed to promise future relevance.

Several volumes proved to have been, in his opinion, most fortunately brought by him. The first being:

[Elements of the Art of Identifying and Assaying Minerals, 1764, by Johann Andreas Cramer Translated and including notes and observations of particular interest to the English Reader By Cromwell Mortimer.]

Cromwell Mortimer was in fact one of the names under which Mr. Timothy Samson Kay sometimes submitted papers to the Royal Society. He chose it for no particular reason except that it was the most profoundly ordinary and English-sounding name he could manufacture. Captain Andor had agreed, and seemed to find it most amusing when Kay solicited his opinion as to its suitability.

Mr. Rook’s descriptions of the plantation from which he has escaped included accounts of persons held at labor there cutting a kind of damp and crumbling shellstone from the bluffs inland with nothing but hand knives and broken sword blades. The stone itself appeared light enough, to his astonished observation, so that large blocks of it could be carried on the backs of single men or small teams. Bundles of bricks square-cut from it were loaded into bags and baskets and carried even by small children. These, he described as being were laid out on wooden racks in clearings hacked from the jungle-like growth and allowed to dry. After a year such slabs hardened to a firmness exceeding that of common sandstone, yet retained their lightness. When skillfully shaped before their drying....it seemed likely that the conscription of skilled stone workers, or perhaps even woodworkers had been ensured at some point, no doubt these were the more individually selected unfortunates deceived at the ventures’s beginning in the Ottoman territories and some of these either survived or were able to pass on sufficient training to other survivors.... these could thus be fitted,
presumably without use of difficult-to-obtain mortars and were used to build all of the structures of the operation.

[MARGIN NOTE in Cramer's Elements…: The stone itself may be the key to the profound alteration in the capabilities of the explosive compound. A porous quality of the stone perhaps acting as a filter and removing the inhibitive matter from the distillation? Or is there perhaps some chemical content peculiar to the largely undissolved shell that storage within these tanks added to the material or the water used to prepare it. The prospect is intriguing. T.S.K.]

The Turkish gentleman reported that was being used both to build great cisterns and systems of canals that brought in the fresh water necessary to the manufacturing of both the indigo and that which the indigo was meant to conceal, being the explosive. The wastes drained from the production would be most poisonous of themselves, and while Mr. Kay knew full well that the health of the workers and spoilage of landscape by such methods was seldom a consideration for even legitimate manufacturers of wealth-generating commodities he considered that the long term concealment of the circuit of death and blight such toxins would render might be difficult to wholly conceal from prying eyes.

[from Cramer:.....The conglomerated material termed “Coquina” (/kəˈkiːnə/) presents an appearance of packed gravel composed either wholly or almost entirely of the transported, abraded, and sorted fragments of the shells of molluscs, brachiopods, or other hard-shelled denizens of the sea.

The term coquina comes from the Spanish word for "cockle" and "shellfish". Coquina can vary in hardness from poorly to moderately cemented and forms near current or recently receded shoreline, seemingly as some unique process of pressure and vigorous wave action upon particular well-sorted sediments.

The environments associated with coquinas include beaches, shallow submarine raised banks, swift tidal channels, and barrier bars...MARGIN NOTE: through presently associated most with the West Indies and territories of New Spain evidence in the form of ruins may indicate it may also have once been obtainable on Asian coasts, Islands of the Arabian and Indian Seas at //notes of my own relating to interesting papers published in Reports of Current Geological Studies in India: Papers of the Royal Geological Society, 1751 under the name of Mr. Lawrance Arian. Inability to locate or further identify this Mr. Lawrance Arian may be indicative either of the use of an alias or suggest this individual to have been suppressed or assassinated by our adversaries. T.S.K.

…..There have been within the last fifty years a number of sizable building projects undertaken with the stone in the Spanish controlled territories of the West Indies. It is said to form part of the walls of the Palisades at Havana and the near entirety of the fortifications at St. Augustine.]
Captain Andor had experience in both of these fortresses and upon his hopeful return might be able to provide observations. Mr. Kay found his absence more annoyingly inconvenient than he could quite account for.

Mr. Kay also began to compile a number of chapbooks on his own which he included as corollaries to the volume of Cramer:

**NOTES by my own hand concerning and pertaining to a rare mineral observed to be contained in Miss Jane Erso’s necklace:** Scrip stone or Arabic script stone, coquina jasper, marian jasper, elephant skin jasper, cobra jasper and other more fanciful appelations. According to the eminent Nicolaus Stenonis proposes (in his dissenting De solido intra solidum naturaliter contento dissertationis prodromus 1669) it is not a “true” a jasper, but a form of limestone with mysterious materials embedded in it, after the fashion of amber. Yet, he concedes that all other limestone is much softer and lacks the often reflective qualities seen herein adding the known specimens carried colors and sparks as of light…. it is more like a quartz than a jasper in that it has been transformed under pressure to something harder…..perhaps having a both biological and chemical origin. *(Mr. Timothy Samson Kay with additional observations by Mr. Chirrut Imwe late of Xi’an, province of Shaanxi)*

At several odd points during the voyage Mr. Kay had encountered Mr. Imwe, when not upon duty at the mast sitting in the Great Cabin or... with that lady's permission he knew... within Miss Erso’s often unoccupied cabin, with one or another of Mr. Kay’s books upon his lap.

He was a man most fastidious in his habits and took great pains to put the volumes back into proper order and place, so Kay had no objection whatsoever to his inspection of them but he was most baffled as to the gentleman’s reasons for so doing.

He peered at the Mr. Imwe for some time, upon first encountering him making use of the volumes, and observed his movements most keenly. He turned the pages at regular intervals but did not appear capable of actually discerning the print upon them.

"Are these books yours Mr. Kay?" the former monk asked, eventually seeming to become aware of Kay’s presence and closing the volume, “I am so sorry. I should have asked your permission, should I not? Please excuse me. I have wandered far since last I could partake of the joys of scholarly learning and may have proved overeager.”

"I do not object to their careful use by interested parties,” Kay truthfully assured the gentleman, peering as closely as seemed unobjectionable at the seated man’s placid face and clouded eyes, “But I had been of the understanding that you were blind?"

“ You are quite correct in your observation, sir," Imwe agreed amiably, "God in his wisdom deprived me of the sight of my eyes in early childhood.”

He then returned to his perusal of **An Account of Mr. Benjamin Franklin's Treatise, Lately Published, Intituled, Experiments and Observations on Electricity, Made at Philadelphia in**
America: By Wm. Watson, F. R. S, leaving Mr. Kay in a profound state of wonder.

Upon encountering Mr. Malbus on deck at the change of the Watch he enquired of him, “If your friend is, as I am assured, quite without sight, by what method is he reading my books?”

Mr. Malbus only shrugged and shook his bearded head. “Tall brother, I cannot enlighten you on the matter. Only take heed of a lesson that I learned as a boy of fourteen. When considering the actions of Chirrut Imwe, “How?” is a question of far less importance than “Why?”

One volume he had felt sure would be of use, even back in London was:

[L’Art de L’Indigotier by Pierre Claude De Beauvais-Raseau, Un traité sur l’indigo, contenant un compte succinct du bon sol, la culture et la préparation de cet important article de commerce. 1745 Académie Royale Des Sciences (Translated from the French as: “A Treatise On Indigo, Containing A Succinct Account of The Proper Soil, The Culture and Preparation of That Important Article of Commerce.“ T.S.K. 1769)]

[from De Beauvais-Raseau: Another ancient term for the dye is nil from which the Arabic term for blue, al-nil, is derived. Our name “indigo” comes from the Roman term indicum, for since the time of Alexander it has been a product of India and the secrets of its cultivation and preparation jealously guarded…. The Several species termed Indigofera tinctoria and Indigofera suffruticosa, are most commonly used in the East to produce indigo of most superior quality…..but that numerous varieties remain undiscovered it cannot be doubted……the leaves contain only about small amount of dye….it is here processed by methods almost identical to those observed in all the nations….all verdure is cut off, and the whole crop tied in bunches, and put into a very large tub with water, covered over with very heavy logs of wood by way of pressers: thus kept, it begins to ferment; the water seems to boil a yellow green, upon which are added most vile and unique compounds in specific measures until it becomes of a prized blue colour……this situation being successfully achieved the liquor is drawn off into another tub, which is something less, and the very noxious smell of this refuse is what occasions the peculiar unhealthiness always incident to this business. The mash is agitated by paddles adapted for the purpose, till by a skillful maceration all the matter separates from the water, sinking like mud to the bottom, as the greater part of the water is carefully removed, and all the remaining liquor is drawn off into a third tub. The sediment is put into proper vessels to dry, where being divested of its last remaining moisture, and formed into small, round, and oblong square pieces, it is become a beautiful dark blue, and fit for exportation.]
Also of interest was a slim manuscript pressed to his hand by Mr. David Draven himself prior to their departure:

[From the papers of The Royal Society of Sciences i Uppsala: ett förslag Fråga om Saltpeters alternativa förberedelser vid framställning av en överlägsen form av förbränning, med faktorer som tidigare obesvarats”, 1747 Sweden, Uppsala. (“Being A proposal Inquiring into the alternative preparations of Salpetere in the production of a superior form of combustion, with factors previously Unconsidered” attributed to Mr. Galen Erso. Translated, T.M.K. 1769)

[from that paper: .....Prometheus is often described as the " bringer of fire" for the benefit of mankind. But a study of the Greek and Roman fire-making sciences and myths suggest that this interpretation may be an incorrect one.

Yet Prometheus did not bring the flame itself; he brought the secret of "holding" a spark. Whether by the instruction of the divine or by mere chance Man discovered that some of the most common, useless, even base materials provide good tinder for kindling fires and learned to select those with which possessed some hidden yet virtuous matter for conversion….all nitrates present through the processes of decomposition and decay…..]

He had shown that particular volume to Miss Erso some week before their arrival at Jamaica considering that she might have some interest in her father’s work.

She had regarded it with a most curious presentation of emotion. Taking it from his hand without opening it, she merely ran her fingers over the words of the title page, for all the world as if she would derive meaning from them by touch alone, as it seemed Mr. Imwe did.

“Have you read it?” she asked keeping her gaze upon the paper.

“I have,” Mr. Kay responded, “In the original Swedish it presents quite clearly and with great economy of prose. Do you read Swedish?”

“No,” she said, seeming uncharacteristically subdued. “I cannot.”

“I have also included a translation of my own that holds quite well to the sense of the original. You could read that.”

“Is it….” she to seemed to hesitate and be decidedly less direct in her gaze and modulation of voice than he had previously known her to be….Kay wondered why this was and resolved to later inquire of Captain Andor who had vastly more experience of her than he.

“Is it, good?” she asked, "….I mean, is it ….clever?"

Kay considered. “If your inquiry is in terms of the quality of his scholarship, I find the conclusions are uniquely advanced but extremely well-supported. His proposal of inquiry is very exciting in
terms of the reconsidering prior alchemical researches with regard to practical industrial techniques. I was surprised to hear that he seems to have published little else afterward.”

“Thank you Mr. Kay,” she said quietly, handing the volume back to him, “I am most grateful to you for showing it to me but I am unable to read it presently.”

She left him then and went not into her own cabin but into Captain Andor’s and closed the door.

*This seemed presumptuous. She generally did not enter Captain Andor’s cabin until after dark and out of sight of other members of the crew.*

When he informed Captain Andor of her having done so, he seemed more concerned than annoyed however.

“Is she unwell?” the officer asked.

“I do not think so,” he said. Mr. Kay had not considered this possibility… *but that made no sense, surely if she were unwell she would prefer to remain in her own cabin?…* “Judging from the sound of her movements within. I believe she did no more than lie down upon your bunk.”

“Thank you Kay,” the Captain said. "That is quite enough. I will inquire after her shortly. Please say nothing more on the subject.”

He had returned to his cabin moments later after finishing a conversation with Mr. Antilles and so there had seemed no need to discuss the matter further. Still Kay could not rid himself of the sense of having missed something.

*It was only a near fortnight later, after the shore party’s failure to return from Kingston and when the altered situation forced the ship’s movement on toward the Bahamas without either Captain Andor or Miss Erso that Kay conceived of an explanation for Miss Erso's behavior that seemed to him plausible.*

He had come upon a conversation between Captain Rostok and Lt. Ruescott Melshi concerning the unoccupied officer’s cabins.

“Sir,” Captain Rostok had said, “The narrow boards of a ship hold no sentiment as to the allocation of quarters, as acting officer of command it would be well within custom for you to..”

“No,” Mr. Melshi said, evenly, ”It would hardly be worth my trouble to shift. We are but a day more from New Providence and the Port of Nassau and I have little doubt, given my experience with Cassian Andor, but that he will be there waiting for us with boots off and a measure of rum asking what delayed us.”

Captain Rostok saluted and went on about his work, for they had narrow paths to sail, skirting the patrols of Cuba in their sail North. Mr. Kay observed that Mr. Melshi stood in long and perhaps melancholy thought with his hand upon the frame of the cabin door previously assigned to Captain Andor, before finally moving to return to the upper deck..

Mr. Melshi was an exemplary tactical officer but lacked Andor’s wide experience in “unorthodox”
operations and direct engagement with the enemy. To be confronted with a situation in which one’s own inexperience or ignorance was a limiting factor and time might not permit the acquisition of the necessary skills was uncomfortable and demoralizing. Observing this a corollary thought applied itself to him.

Perhaps Mr. Kay had inadvertently caused Miss Erso distress by embarrassing her with regards to a lack of literacy in Swedish or perhaps even, taking her piratical education into account, deficits even in her mother tongue of English? Thus distressed might she not have sought shelter in a space of familiarity, that being Captain Andor’s bunk?

Miss Erso possessed admirable physical skills in numerous areas as well as a keen appreciation of maritime engineering and an useful command of New World coastal geography and verbal mastery of a number of languages including some dialects East African with which Mr. Kay himself was unfamiliar. There was no need for her to be left with the impression that he thought less of her intellectual capabilities

Yet this was certainly a circumstance that had bedeviled him before, the giving of unintended insult, and one he strove to correct when possible.

He determined to attempt to reassure her in the fortunate circumstance of she and Captain Andor’s return.

__________

They came up skillfully around New Providence Island and into the sheltered port of Nassau upon the morning of the first of January.

Nassau was not so much a harbor but a wide protected waterway between two Islands. A generation before it had been another “free” pirate stronghold, but where the wrath of Nature and cannons of warships had subdued wicked Port Royal, Nassau had succumbed to a less fiery adversary. A wealthy British governor had simply paid the buccaneers off and persuaded them by means of his own silver to take their anarchic trade to Trinidad.

Sparsely populated now, with it’s dockage spread out upon two shores and a certain House of
Orange efficiency, it was still less guarded than some British West Indian ports, no doubt because it was small, less lucrative and being far too shallow for any craft weighted with heavy guns or cargo little traded here in the way of sugar or human life, yet and as such was a frequent quick restocking port for smaller ships moving North or South.

*If there was no sign or word of Captain Andor’s party here, Lt. Melshi would have to make the decision whether to lose the time to pause again at Freeport or proceed directly to Florida.*

A place at Nassau wharf was allocated to ships in service of the Alliance whenever a flag positioned the end of Paradise Island’s point flew in a determined fashion so as to indicate safety. As Mr. Antilles received word from the watch on the mast that this signal was affirmative Captain Rostock gave the order and the ship was brought round and sailed in on the mornings tide.

Mr. Rook was most agitated and fairly paced the rail.

“May I stand by you Mr. Kay?” he asked, rather unexpectedly, for Kay might have thought him more interested in observing the docking maneuvers. Rook having been made rather an apprentice to Mr. Antilles and even been given a position upon the watch.

“I feel a need for company this morning.”

Somewhat mystified but glad to be of service, Kay bowed and touched his hat in assent.

Mr. Rook was a good man.

Trimming to make good use of the light wind they soon saw that a small and disreputable-looking sloop lay alongside their outside docking place. It’s position was of no inconvenience to the Rouge’s Venture, for they must anchor further out, but as it came into view Kay heard the sound of laughter coming from the mast above his head, where Mr. Imwe stood.

Mr. Rook had a spyglass and fixed it upon the deck of the sloop.

“Allah’a şükürler olsun,” he said, laying his hand upon the rail and holding the glass out to Mr. Kay to use.

Upon the deck of the smaller vessel could be seen a number of persons but to one who knew him well the form Captain Cassian Andor could be clearly seen sitting with legs outstretched upon the deck. A person in the garb of a male sailor but closely resembling Miss Jane Erso waved from the single mast.

Mr. Timothy Kay found himself exceedingly pleased at this turn of events.
More flagrant and self-indulgent use of antiquarian book-silliness. I found myself thinking, "Mr. Kay will be worried about Cassian....what would THAT look like?" and took a pause from the action to consider it.

In the more than likely case that I'm being too tricksy by half. Takeaways:

The production (nasty and smelly and dangerous) of lucrative Indigo is in several ways identical to the production of the nitrates used in explosives.

All of Europe searched for 300 years or better to come up with an explosive compound superior to gunpowder/black powder before nitroglycerin was first synthesized by the Italian chemist Ascanio Sobrero in 1847. Boom.

Coquina is some very weird stone with some very weird properties and key to events in the Spanish/English wars of the Caribbean.

"Coquina Jasper" or "script stone" is rare and just plain weird and I have decided to make it even weirder.

I apologize to everyone. No one expects an ill-informed chemistry/alchemy mash-up in their pirate adventure.

Next up: the Rogues meet the Falcons.
Chapter Summary

In which Miss Jane Erso and her party are reunited with their crewmates and friends aboard the Rogues Venture. Captain Solo and his crew bring forth several disturbing, even morbid objects, obtained upon the Florida coast and the meaning of these dreadful omens are considered by the crew. She considers the nature of her changed circumstances with profound emotion.

Chapter Notes

Sorry folks 18th cen. CSI warnings ahead. You surely know Mr. Kay's skills surely extend into the realms of early forensics. I will try to restrain myself.

Jezus huilde = Jesus wept. (Dutch)

Arrête mon ami, vous me gênes. = Stop my friend, you're embarrassing me. (French….the more formal “vous” used to denote a respected older female teacher or ally.)

àṣádì = child (Yoruba)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Rogue’s Venture

Port of Nassau, British Bahamas

January 1, 1770
When the dinghy brought them near alongside it was all that Miss Jane Erso could do not to yield to impulse and fling herself overboard to climb the side of the vessel by her own means.

As they finally drew near enough to lay hands upon the good ship's hull Captain Andor called up from the bow of the landing craft, "Permission to come aboard sir?"

"Permission granted sir," was the welcome reply.

Captain Rostock greeted them all with the demeanor of a biblical patriarch rejoicing at the return of his prodigals.

The degree of emotion she felt as the ladder was lowered and hands reached down to assist her aboard... Mr. Imway's hands as it proved... quite overwhelmed her. The sight of Mr. Malbus' broad smile as he tapped that pocket of his rough canvas vest which she knew to hold his pack of cards induced immediate laughter, and that of Mr. Bodi Rook, who took her hand with great affection brought her near to tears.

Midshipman Syndalla was greeted with comradely shouts from her messmates, and Master Gunner Cor was saluted by Second Gunner Timkin.

"Are my cannon still arranged as I left them Timkin?"
"They are as of Second Watch today, sir, but the day is yet young," that crewman answered with a smile.

"Welcome home, sir," Mr. Ruescott Melshi greeted Captain Andor and Jen saw a faint smile tug at the corner of her lover's mouth.

Captain Andor took it upon himself to introduce their companions. Captain Solo and his First Mate were accompanied by two members of his crew, a good-spirited youth named Luc Ceil-Marcheur and an older woman who gave her name only as Sabé.

The boy carried two bundles wrapped in oilcloth.

It was determined that the returning party and officers should proceed directly to the Great Cabin.

Upon their so doing less reserved welcomes were exchanged. Mr. Melshi in particular embraced Captain Andor with great good spirits, saying, “Thank God for the luck of Spanish cats.”

"You usually lose with less grace, Rue," the officer observed.

"That may be because I am usually not so immensely relieved of anxiety by the defeat, Andor," Melshi said.
The strangest expression of welcome may have come from Mr. Kay, who, standing behind Mr. Melshi, approached Captain Andor somewhat more closely than was habitual for him in her limited experience and removed his hat to bow with great formality.

If Cassian Andor found this greeting odd or off-putting he gave no sign.

"Thank you Kay," he said with a smile of such warmth as might pass between separated brothers, "it is exceedingly good to see you as well."

*Miss Erso wondered, not for the first time, how such different men had come to befriend each other.*

"My good friend, I think we will now have need of your expertise in several areas." Andor turned toward the smuggler and gestured with a hand toward the large table, "Captain Solo, if you would apprise us."

Solo signaled his crewman with a nod and young Ciel-Marcheur laid his burdens upon the flat wooden surface and proceeded to unwrap them.

Within one tied bundle of canvas lay a small tight wooden box, bound round with a rag of pirate’s red, of the size and sort that might have once have held small lead shot. When the blond youth loosened the lid a sheet of oiled paper within was unfolded to reveal a dark cake of pressed powder, the size perhaps of a child’s fist.

“What the devil is that?” Mr. Melshi asked, leaning forward.

“We found it in the mangle some distance from the shore well back in the coastal river,” the boy Luc said, “there seemed to be boats upon patrol and at the Captain’s signal we sailed into the jungled canyons of those inlets and and waterways to hide from them.”

“We might well have been lost there, had Luc not found a way back to the main channel,” the woman, Sabé said. “He is a most skilled pilot.”

The youth smiled modestly, “No,” he said, “I but felt for the wind and trusted to that.”

Captain Solo cast his eyes heavenward for a moment leaving Jyn with an impression that this sort of conversation was a source of long amusement among his crew and had begun to cross the limits of his patience.

“The lad had a gift for the maze, I will grant him that,” he said evenly, “One can sail a boat even the size of my good sloop well back into those forests on the tidal streams and by tipping a mast hide from the sight of an enemy but a furlong away through the brush.”

Jen remembered the twisting waters of the Saint Johns well enough.

“The Pirates made great use of them, I know, in freer days. I was always told that the greatest danger was not finding one’s way out again, sometimes for days. The Commander would take only pilots who would not be dizzied into such hiding places for within those walls of green the wind would vanish and the current turn so sluggish that a wrong touch could strand one upon a sand bar unseen until the next full moon.”

She found herself smiling at a child’s memory of the old pilot, Magva pointing out through pressing walls of mangrove the graceful black backs of dolphins, “Look little Jen, follow the laughing ones, they see the truth of it, they know the way!”

Yet they had come inland in only a light dory. The Onderean herself had remained moored at the
Matanzas Inlet, to have brought even such a sloop as the Falcon in and out of such narrow places spoke of skill indeed.

Solo and the boy both turned to look at her.

“You sailed with Gerrere?” Luc Ciel-Marcheur, asked with awed astonishment.

“For a time,” Jen heard a quiet voice say.  
*So strange were the words to her that she did not at first recognize the voice as her own.*

Captain Solo nodded as if some matter he had previously puzzled over was now made clear to him.

Mr. Kay lifted the item gingerly and held it, still upon it’s wrappings, to his nose where he sniffed it considerably.

“I would be most interested in your opinion Mr. Cor,” he said, and passed the matter to the Master Gunner.

That gentleman stood forward to inspect the parcel similarly, and his eyes widened as he did so.

“It looks like a dye-cake,” Jyn ventured, “Is it some variety of black powder? Have they somehow compressed it like a brick of tea?”

“Do you know the Hindoo scriptures?” Mr. Cor said gazing with a sort of horror on the object in his hand.

“Yes,” said Captain Rostok and Mr. Kay.

“No,” said most of the rest of the company.

“The God of Death shows his most awful shape to the warrior before battle and names himself “the destruction of worlds”

“ That is an overly simplistic translation of “loka-kṣhaya-kṛt pravṛiddho lokān saṁḥartum…” Mr. Kay began. “It might be better put…”

“Enough,” said Captain Andor. “You make your point Mr. Cor. I take it you believe this to be a sample of the explosive used by the Enemy on the Portuguese coast?”

“It is a powerful nitrate by appearances, yet seems bound in a wonderfully concentrated and stable form, I cannot say how,” the Master Gunner answered.

Solo tipped his hat back. “I would not concern yourselves over-dramatically,” he said. “Whatever it’s properties may have once been it must have stood long in the driving rains of that shore before we found it and is likely to have been kept none too dry in our holds these last two weeks. We have kept it from flames in an abundance of caution…”
“You wanted to strike a match to it the first night at sea….Luc was the one who protested that it might be dangerous and convinced you to wait,” corrected his female crewman.

“I would be reluctant to test it in any way within sight of this port,” Kay ventured, “lest we draw undue attention.”

“I am most reluctant to have it aboard this vessel at all,” Captain Rostok said. “We might secure it in one of the small lifeboats and let it off on a rope some distance away.”

So much fear for a cake of blue-black matter the size of a small apple, Jen wondered. It seemed almost comical.

“I cannot answer for the dangers of your little ink-block,” Solo said, “But near the shore where we found this object concealed as if being set out for some savage postal service, we found other objects more traditionally reminiscent of the Angel of Death’s passage.”

He reached forward to untie the other bundle that the boy had laid upon the table.

“The great alligators of these coasts, like every predator, will only swallow what their teeth can tear so like the tigers of the East they hide their unfinished prey in larders of their own devising for later more congenial dinners.”

Upon the wrappings lay a human hand and forearm, torn from it’s place roughly below the elbow, it seemed.

A grisly sight yet, battle-hardened company that they were, not a vision of itself sufficient to make most among them tremble.

Mr. Rook was the sole exception. That gentleman turned his face away and in a low voice asked Captain Andor’s permission to retire for a time to the upper decks. This the Captain with unconcealed sympathy granted.

As her friend passed by her Jen Erso reached out a hand to press his arm, moved by pity for that good man’s courage and pain. It seemed to her that though he did not speak or meet her eye he nodded in appreciation of the gesture.

Though clearly less personally moved than Mr. Rook the French youth also turned his eye away, Jen noticed.

He did so in sorrow, she sensed, more than fear. From the look of his downy cheek he seemed unlikely to have seen sixteen yet.

The dreadfulness of the object to her practiced eye lay in its preservation rather than it’s decay. It was tanned almost it seemed, the skin and nails stained the pure blue of indigo.

“Jezus huilde,” Captain Rostok said.

“Ja,” Solo said, “So one would hope. We found no more and cannot speak to the mortal fate of the object’s owner, save to say that we found a few scraps of rag dyed the self-same red that bound the box and marked the branches that drew our eyes…”

“Luc’s eye,” Sabé corrected.
"Arrête mon ami, vous me gênes," murmured the boy, eyes lowered.

Solo paused and lowered his head for a brief moment, as if to petition God for patience, then continued, "The sharper-eyed of our crew found the box and the other souvenir was visible beneath the roots exposed by the lowered tide."

"An inspection of these remains may give us some clues as the disposition of the persons held captive and the physical situation of the place of their confinement." Kay said, "if I might be allowed to...."

"We will set you up a place ashore Kay, and take a day for your investigations while we re-stock and make preparations to sail on. It is all that we can spare," Captain Andor told him. "And Kay.." he added as the tall man saluted and turned to go, "please be solicitous of the sensibilities of the crew with regards to the remains, most especially conduct your reports well out of the sight and hearing of Mr. Rook. Mr. Cor will no doubt be willing to assist you with regards to an exploration of the box and it’s contents."

Captain Solo reached across and covered the pitiful object with it’s drape of canvas again.

"I hardly know what name to call you by any longer sir, but I would ask what remains for you and I to conclude our business and terms of payment. Since my ever -slender prospects for long life are now greatly diminished I think it best to settle affairs with my crew sooner rather than later."

"My name is Cassian Andor," the gentleman he addressed said, "I am a Captain commissioned in the service of the Alliance, "as you have no doubt ascertained."

"I am greatly honored Captain Cassian Andor," Solo replied with an exaggerated bow, "I would say that I feel better knowing the name of the man who hands me my earned coin, but in point of fact it is of only moderate concern to me."

Syndalla had sized him fairly back at the Ferry Inn, the fellow could not forbear to speak the rascal’s part even as he acted with honor.

Miss Erso still thought him a strutting fool but could not neglect a thought that came uncomfortably to her.

And how was the pantomime stage you set up any better, àşádì? Where it not for the grace of God and Mr. Kay’s quick grasp would you not be playing an even less noble part?

“If I thought that true, Captain Solo, our business would have concluded much earlier and much otherwise,” Captain Andor returned, “Bring your charts of the Mosquito Inlet and the Rivers thereaboot and answer for us a few question on points of navigation and we will give you the price we agreed on, along with our thanks. If you have no matters that press you to sail or depart sooner bring such of your crew as wish to and can be spared by you and join us for a dinner tomorrow, if you will.”

It surely presented an odd tableau, she considered later, Captain Andor looking somewhat the rogue himself in muddied shirtsleeves and tattered vest, his dark hair tied with a cord and several days unshaven having nearly restored his beard, proffering a polite dinner invitation to an overextended smuggler in a battered hat while a tattooed cannibal looked on and weapons unspeakable lay beside
pitiful relics upon the table.

*It was one of her lover’s surprising virtues,* she realized, *that he could speak and act in a such a way as to treat even the meanest situation with the dignity of a drawing room.*

*What was it he had said he admired so in Mr. Kay, those weeks….a lifetime…ago at Lisbon? “An equality of regard,”* he had said.

*No, you do not see in yourself that which you prize in others, my dear,* she thought, *but I see it in you.*

Captain Solo agreed to consider the invitation and returned to his sloop with his crew. Disposition of the objects he had brought was seen to and the members of their party and other officers of the Rogue’s Venture went to their quarters and tasks assigned.

Miss Erso looked for and found Mr. Rook above decks and was gladdened to find him in a discussion with Mr. Imway that had much comforted his turmoil of mind.

She asked for and received a portion of the fresh water the crewmen attending their re-supply had brought aboard in barrels refilled at Paradise Island and checked her store of lye-ash, eager to wash the remaining traces of Jamaica from her as she had not been able to do in the confines of the Falcon, later overhearing Captain Andor ask Mr. Kay to obtain for him a measure of the same substance, with a secret smile.

Cards were played and lost upon the deck.

As evening fell and it’s Watch set to she waited until all was quiet in the Great Cabin and slipped once more to the door beside her own. Within Cassian Andor took her in his arms with nearly as great an ardor as he had upon her first visit.

*Six months ago she would have sworn herself walled from all attachments and turned her back even upon the sea that had been her only native place. Yet here she was aboard a ship again whose very boards felt familiar and amongst men and women she knew, and admired.*

*All might well be swept away by the danger that lay before them, vanish as if a dream, she knew, yet here it was now.*

There must have been tears upon her cheeks for he kissed them away and asked her, most troubled, “Jen, my dear, what is it? What is wrong.”

“Nothing,” she said, laughing at her own confusion even as she kissed him in return, “I….I hardly know…I am unaccustomed to coming back to any refuge after I have left it I suppose.”

“Welcome home,” he told her.
Yes. Gratuitous references to the Bhagavad Gita....because I am shameless....and of COURSE Kay reads Sanskrit.
Shadows

Chapter Summary

In which Sabé, former Handmaiden and Bodyguard to the Queen of Portugal and presently sailor in the crew of Captain Han Solo's ship considers her situation as they wait at Nassau Harbor for the pay Captain Solo is promised by the Alliance. She remains suspicious of the Alliance crew, especially Captain Andor, who she feels may have become aware of her disguise. She recalls with sadness the way in which she learned of how young Luc Ciel-Marcheur came to be cast adrift upon the world. Captain Solo extends Captain Andor's dinner invitation to the crew. Driven by curiosity Luc Ciel-Marcheur goes ashore to make the acquaintance of Mr. Timothy Samson Kay as he is engaged in a rather unorthodox investigation. Young Luc considers this unusual gentleman and recalls both the personal tragedies that have driven him to sea and certain intuitive abilities that have begun to both aid and trouble him. He recalls the Falcon's disturbing passage of the Mosquito Inlet upon the Florida coast and is afflicted by a dark portent in a recurring dream.

Chapter Notes

Luc meets Kay. 18th century forensics happens.....or at least gets talked about.

Senhora Sabé você se lembra de mim = Lady Sabé, do you remember me? (Portuguese)
Rainha = Queen (Portuguese)
Irmã fiel = faithful sister (Portuguese)
Pa = a title of respect (Maori)

Mon Dieu, qu'est-ce que c'était que ça, Pa Khaeuri? = Dear God, what was all that, Pa Khaeuri?

mōkinokino = misery, desolation, something dreadful. (Maori)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Falcon

and ashore

port of Nassau

New Providence Island

British Bahamas
The boy sat alone upon the Falcon’s deck watching as the sun lowered. Solo and Khaueri had gone ashore into Nassau port to see about supplies. The twins had taken an opportunity to walk up the shore as well, ostensibly to check the other ships upon the wharves and make inquiries about which captains might or might be taking on extra crew from here but also Sabe knew to speak among themselves of whether they would go or remain.

“If Captain Solo truly means to send us on our way and take on another crew they must find two new places, since wherever they go they must go together,” Luc said.

“Aye,” Sabe agreed, “and Darian must choose carefully. The world is a wicked place. Few captains in these waters now will knowingly engage a woman, even one who who sails in a man’s garb, and even if the captain will turn a blind eye, the chance taken amongst an unknown crew is cruel. Nassau is a discrete and independent port, at least for one held within the British fist, but it is a small one. If their intention is to return to Europe, as I have sometimes heard them say, it might be better for Zachary to take passage alone to VeraCruz or Havana and for his sister to book paid passage and meet him in one of those busier ports in some women’s guise, if she can bear it.”

“No,” the fair-haired youth demurred, “Whether it be better policy or not, they should stay together. Blood is a foundation that builds a stronger wall than any other. I have heard each of them say many times that they were never afraid save when they were parted to be sent away to school. He was told she had died but knew in his heart it was not true and went as a soldier to find her in an army camp.”

She sat beside him on the deck. With his blond hair bound back in a scarf, as it was now, she saw his mother’s face outlined in his. The good are often thought simple by the wicked but it was not so. They had a wisdom and a strength Evil refused to see. The boy knew somehow. His heart felt the shape of even those truths the cruel world demanded be hidden forever.

Dyan had come and found her at the Abbey. She had been bringing the cattle in when one of the
younger nuns came to tell her a common woman was standing in the milking barn and refusing to leave.

She had not known her for a long moment.

“Senhora Sabe você se lembra de mim?” the matron asked quietly, in the first Portuguese she had heard in fifteen years.

Feckless little Dyan the chamber maid was now a charcoal-burner’s stout wife, gray before her time from hard work with five children and a grand-child on her hip.

Sabé wept, knowing there could be no good news to come.

“Diane’s” son Tosh had been sent up to the little slate-sided village once a year to the saints-day market, set the task by his mother to lay eyes on a certain farm family there and return with news, a task that had been his father’s before him.

“Did they never ask you why?” she had asked as they sat amongst the brown cows and the babe sipped a little milk from a tin cup. “Oh no,” Dyan, said with a shade of her old saucy laugh, “He knows far better than to do that.”

Tournmere had been spared the worst of the predations of the border towns, saved by it’s poverty, it’s remoteness and the fact that slate roofs do not burn, but the people were still in terror of a brutal raid on one of the local farms a few weeks before. The Lares family, husband and wife, burned alive in their house while the nephew they had raised as their son was out with the flocks in the hills.

“There were whispers that both bodies bore signs of torture,” Dyan said, ruffling the little one’s yellow hair as she slept upon her ample lap, and a number of goatherds and farm boys were found murdered in the hills over the same three days….all blonde and of an age… but the Lares boy returned safely for all that he was only a mile away. They did not give him up.”

No, Sabé thought, God forgive me. They swore before the Virgin that they would not.

Tosh knew the boy, named Luc, he had met him at market so it was not thought strange that he had inquired. Brokenhearted, the youth had buried his family and walked out of the hills, away from Tournmere. “There is nothing for me here now,” he had told the neighbors who offered him shelter. Like many young men he spoke of going to the coast.

Sabé, had bowed her head, ten years and more within these Abbey walls and she still could not pray, though in her sorrow she did try.

“Senhora,” Dyan laid her calloused hand upon the Handmaid’s own rough and chapped one. “While my boy was there, a few weeks after the burning and the murders a wandering hermit came into the village, dressed in rags, leaning on a staff. To see the relics he told people, on a pilgrimage, but he showed much interest in the recent sufferings of the people thereabouts and asked the way to the burned farm. My child has been warned since birth to stay away from such men and left at once but…”
Her heart turned cold. *To leave the prince to wander, to find his way as a man anonymous, alone, might be the safest thing for him, who was she to say? But not Kenobi.....not that, never.*

“Irmã fiel,” she said, “Who knows what powers that old fool still commands? He may find you.”

“Let him,” Dyan said, “I cannot tell what I do not know. If he plays his tricks on me he will at least have to listen to me tell him what I think of his sanctimonious ass.”

*They had walked mountains together, risked death, two young women little more than girls with babes in arms. When brigands had menaced them in the Pyrenees little Dyan had struck one in the head with a bench to buy Sabé time to stab the other with his own knife. Dyan had clutched the rail of the fishing boat seasick and in utter misery while Sabé had held her hair even as she once held that of her beloved Rainha Mariana. Nobility lay in the bone and the heart. All else was but show and chance she knew now.*

They embraced each other then, the nun and the charcoal-burner’s wife, and parted.

“We are the last Handmaidens,” Sabé said, “Faithful unto death. When you come before God I will meet you there with your gown and dagger and you will stand among the bravest.”

Each knew that they would never meet again.

She had stolen clothes and money from the Abbey hostel and departed before dawn. If the boy would go to the coast, all roads in time would lead to Marseilles. She had found him on the docks at that venal port, just one more country boy displaced and orphaned by war.

“Will you stay with the Captain?” Luc wished to know.

“He has not asked,” she shrugged, “Who knows which way that weather-cock will turn?”

“The Captain would not have taken me on at all, green as I was, if you had not said you would not sign without me. If he casts us off I have no desire to stay in the West Indies. The days of the pirate
are done it seems. Whaling is a dogs life, I hear but I thought maybe to go North and try it. What think you? Would you go?”

She could not help but smile. “I will go where you go, for now cher Luc. I think you are lucky for an old woman.”

“Have you any family Sabé,” he had asked her as they sailed out of Marseilles and he watched his childhood recede behind him with the shore.

“I had sisters once, but they are all dead,” she said.

“Yet you never married?” he asked, “Never had a child?” At once he blushed and began to stammer an apology for his blunt country manners in asking such a thing.

“No,” she had said, with a laugh, “I never met a man I trusted enough to lend a dressing pin to, much less marry.”

She found herself adding, “I had a child once…for a little while…but I had to give him up.”

That kind boy, ever solicitous to avoid unnecessary injury to any, had asked no more after that, only nodding as if he understood. Perhaps in his way, he did.

“Besides, the Captain has always treated Darian fairly, and yourself as well,” he said.

Aye, there is a certain fairness in a man so self-involved he never looks past the curtain for the window, she supposed. She was fairly sure he could not tell one of the siblings from another and herself he had taken on after he had seen her drop a Customs guard with an elbow strike and when she said she would share her pay with the farm boy.

Still a man who did not abuse his crew was rare enough.

The Dutchman did not disturb her, it was the shadow that swirled around the Alliance and these dark doings on the Florida shore that set her on edge.

That dark-eyed Spaniard, “Avelar” Solo had said, then changed to “Andor”, had a look she had seen somewhere before.
Not of himself, he was far too young for that, but of his kind. The clever poor boys were the dangerous ones, the ones who became the spies, the agents, the assassins, the pirates, the Jesuits.

As they had disembarked the Falcon to come over to his fine ship he had turned and held a hand out to her sideways, as if to aid her in climbing into the dinghy. It was a gesture she had not seen in many years. The way a gentleman servant holds his hand to assist a lady of rank, so that she might use him for support without the impropriety of actually touching his palm. She had laid her hand upon the back of his without thought, betrayed by some long-forgotten reflex. Those shrewd eyes had snapped up to meet hers then and she cursed herself.

He knew and he wished her, in that instant, to know that he knew. If not who she was at least what she had once been.

Maybe he was a good man. Some of them were. Certainly that quick-handed pirate girl loved him with a fierce love and he looked at her as if she were the last line that bound him to shore. Whatever cold deeds he had done he still had a soul in him.

Sabé would withhold judgement so long as he posed no danger to her prince. The Alliance were the Enemy of her Enemy, but that did not make them friends.

By the time Captain Solo and Khaueri came back with a wagon of supplies to restock the Falcon’s depleted stores, Darian and Zachary had both returned seeming still undecided

“Fix yourselves as you may for this last night,” Solo said. “I have seen the coin that will pass briefly through my hands to yours tomorrow. Before you sign any contract or drink your pay away, you are invited to wash your ears, tie on any clean scarves you have remaining and attend a dinner yonder, at the invitation of our late passengers.” He waved toward the brigantine, moored some little distance off. “You may find yourselves made offers of employment thereafter you wish to consider, or you may not. At least you can dine one last time together as a crew upon our late employers expense.”

At dawn Luc watched from the deck as the very tall…nearly as tall as Pa Khaeuri!…Englishman rowed out with a a short sailor to the shore and set up a small tent with a table under it. The sailor
returned to the brigantine shortly after but the gentleman remained.

Curious, Luc took himself ashore as his watch was done to go see what the goings on where.

Peering inside he spied the tall man, his shiny grey waistcoat covered with a large white surgeons apron and snowy sleeves rolled up high and gartered with ribbon, laying out a number of items upon a folding table.

He would have thought he made no sound audible over the surf but the man turned his head to look at him. His eyes were wide and the palest blue Luc Ceil-Marchuer had ever seen.

“You are the boy from the sloop,” the giant affirmed, as if to himself, “I remember you. Why are you here?”

“I beg pardon sir, I was merely curious as to what you were doing.”

“Oh, I understand,” the man said and turned back to his task.

Then he paused, as if abruptly recalling some task he had left undone, turned back and bowing his head said, “I am Mr. Timothy Samson Kay.”

“My name is Luc Ciel-Marcheur,” the boy returned in answer.

“Bonjour Monsieur Ciel-Marcheur,” the man said with cool courtesy.

Luc laughed, “I am but a common sailor, sir you ought better to call me Luc.”

“Very well Monsieur Luc,” Mr. Kay turned back to the laying out of the tools, a set of small knives, scissors and pins, with utter unconcern. Upon another bench laid behind him lay a canvas-wrapped bundle Luc recognized.

“Is it your intention, Monsieur Kay,” he asked, half in wonderment and half in horror, “to cut up the arm we found?”

“Yes,” the man said, removing that sad object now to lay it unwrapped upon the table beside the implements. “My goal to make an anatomical study of it.”

“Why?”

“It is our mission to make an assault upon the Florida plantation near to where these remains were found. We require as much information as possible on the disposition of the place, the condition of the people held as bonded labor and hostages there and the nature of the materials produced. Physical remains may hold extensive intelligence about conditions prior to expiration as well as means and manner of mortality.”

Luc found himself very unsure as to whether it was his inadequate command of English that rendered the man unintelligible and considered the possibility that he was not speaking English at all, rather after the fashion of Khaeuri.

“The man who left the box wished for it to be found,” the boy ventured. “He was willing to die in the hope that we might. Do you mean to say his poor arm is a message he has left us too?”

The tall man turned again. His expression was most strangely devoid of emotion, almost like a
smooth mask, yet Luc could not escape the sense that it was not purposeful aloofness that made it so.

“How do you know the box was placed as a message, or even that the arm belonged to it’s carrier?”

Luc found he could not explain, probably not even in French. As always it had not been a dream or any sort of vision, it had come to him the same way tracking the kids and lambs had come. You saw the layout of the land, you saw the tracks, felt the bending of the grass, the wind. The silly thing had gotten stuck in the rock at the tip of the ravine, came to you clearly. Or you lay a hand upon the ground and felt the sense of footsteps on it like an echo fading and you assembled the picture in your mind. It was not always a happy picture. Sometimes it was a fox, or a slip above the stream and a frantic ewe bleating.

He had thought these things happened to everyone….well, everyone who knew goats and sheep anyway….but he was learning they did not. He had found himself able to find a dropping breeze, the current at sea, and a clean shot with the musket.

As they came down river the sense of a thin old man struggling painfully through the sharp sticks and tearing thorns of the mangle, untying threads from a red rag that was somehow precious to him to mark the way, had come to him as clear as the picture in colored glass in the window of the little church at Tournemere.

Yet I did not see the soldiers come for Tante and Oncle. I found the two little Mâchoire boys with their necks broken on the upper meadow and all their sheep gone. I thought it was bandits and stayed to bury them. It was not until I returned the next day that I even smelled the smoke.

What good is it to see things if I could not see that?

What good were the nightmares that plagued him after they floated, masts down, hardly daring to breath in the foggy dark past that dark foul-smelling shore, with only the flicker as of a few candles or lamps back from the forested shore to tell them where the danger was?

Zachary had held his sister’s hand and Sabé had reached to hold his.

Solo said that it was nothing but another plantation where rich men, or even less-poor-than-very-poor men who were willing to kidnap, maim and murder in order to get rich, made something people wanted to trade coin for and didn’t care how they got it.

“In other words, children, the standard state of affairs, save a little more so.”

Yet for all that even Solo’s face had looked shocked when they pulled up that arm, even he had looked frightened lying down in the dark as the slow tide had pulled them out the Mosquito Inlet with the tide.

As the wind and motion of the boat had told them the sea had taken them back and Luc had looked
up to see the stars open above them between the shreds of cloud. Solo had tapped all their shoulders and they had set to raise the sails quickly.

“Mon Dieu, qu'est-ce que c'était que ça, Pa Khaeuri?” he had whispered as the Mate had boosted him up the mast to tie off.

“Mōkinokino,” Khaeuri had hissed, under his breath, “mōkinokino.” He had not asked for a translation from the Captain. He did not think he needed one.

They had sailed for Jamaica but since that day the dreams had returned, almost every night. The same dream he had first had the second night after he left Tournemere, of a black ship on an empty sea and a lone figure in shadow at the helm.

The first time it came to him he had never seen either a ship or the sea.

“The man was shot, but he was dying anyway and he was not sorry because it meant the men hunting him would go away and not find the box he had hidden. He fell into the water…..after that….I don’t know….I expect the alligators ate him,” Luc said.

The strange gentleman paused with his knife and stared at him again.

“You are not incorrect that the man was dying. He was seriously poisoned by the nitrates, to the point of damage to his joints and bone.”

“Is that why the skin was blue and did not swell from the water like other drowned things do?”

“Yes. That was from prolonged exposure to the concentrated indigo. It would have effected the permeability of….” The man halted and blinked very slowly, rather like an owl.

“Wait,” he said, “How would you surmise the man was shot pre-mortem?”

Luc shrugged. “I almost see things sometimes.”

“I do not believe you,” the man asserted bluntly.

“That’s alright,” the boy said, “Most people do not. I am growing accustomed to it.”

“There is an extra apron upon the trunk,” said Mr. Kay, “If you are interested you can assist me.”
Chapter End Notes

I can't help myself.

What if Luke and K2 had met?

What if Obi-wan had had enough sense to give Padme's children to the bad-ass Handmaidens of Naboo?
In which Mr. Oren Krennik prepares to meet with the dreadful Frieherr Vader and approaches that gentleman's legendary ship. He also reviews his cruel deeds, even reveling in the timely arrival of a witness in the form of a Governor's officer from the Fort of Saint Mark at St. Augustine. He informs Mr. Galen Erso of the death of Saul Gerrere and the catastrophic use of the explosive and that gentleman is brought to the brink of despair. However, just as Mr. Galen Erso feels that all light is lost he finds that one star still shines.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the delays am on the road again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Smyrna Colony

Mosquito Inlet

British East Florida

aboard the frigate Devastator

off Mosquito inlet

Coast of British east Florida
Class: Frigate (British Naval designation 5)

Tons burthen: 1,277 bm
Length: 159 ft 3 in
Beam: 42 ft 7 in
Draught: 15 ft 8 in
Speed: Over 14 knots running;
11 knots close-hauled
Complement: 300

Armament:
Upper deck: 26 × 24-pounder guns

QD: 14 × 32-pounder
Fc: 2 × 9-pounders + 4 × 32-pounder carronades

Had the few eyes that chanced to watch her made note of such things it could be seen that the dark frigate sailed under the British colors as she held position off the coast of East Florida. It was by no means the first time the Devastator had done so, though she had flown an equally counterfitted Spanish flag for many years as well.

Her keel had been laid, upon a time, in a French shipyard, but she was rebuilt nearly to the beams in the Netherlands some years after and yet again in England most recently.

She was a ship whispered of rather than spoken about and almost unique in her arrangements of full sail and armament. No ship she had drawn to in battle had ever escaped her..... those few who whispered of her said, in that winter of 1769....save only one, the Onderean, at Tripoli some years previously.

She was not a stranger to American waters, through she had sailed of late mostly in the North and Mediterranean Seas and before that been an object of terror off the costs of Africa and the East Indies.

Those few watchers from the inlets cared not at all for the dark ships history and even had they heard
the name of her dread Commander would have been unmoved by it.

In their experience, no European ship carried anything but death and in this assessment they judged her truly.

Mr. Orren Krennik considered himself a bold man.

Certainly he was not a coward, at least in the traditional sense any European gentleman of the class he aspired to would ascribe to the word.

To willingly place oneself in the physical proximity of Freiherr Vader presented no small amount of bodily risk. Men had died for no greater crime than the displeasure or inconveniencing of his Lordship. Yet the brutal and mysterious Commander of their consortium's fleet was Mr. William Tarkin's only superior in their Master's council and esteem.

To gain one must risk and to retain control of his life's work and gain the power he sought at this last throw Krennik was willing to gamble even his life.

The frigate had arrived in the night, on the 3rd of January, and the uniformed officer who came ashore to escort him made it clear that Captain Monferrat was under clear instructions from Lord Vader to sail her out before the following dawn. The officer, one Mr. Bircher, made clear that whatever overtures Krennik desired to make must be accomplished within that span.

So it was that the Director dressed with extreme care for the interview. The white silk waistcoat and fine wool coat with death's head buttons were spotless and of excellent quality but not ostentatious. The coat's cut bespoke soldierly efficiency and resolve, rather than luxury.

Hushed rumor held that Vader had himself risen to rank from humble birth, some said as a bastard son born of a servant, others a defrocked junior priest who dabbled in witchcraft, still others as a common soldier whose spectacular skill with a sword had so impressed the Master that he was raised at once.

Perhaps some combination of all three? Krennik wondered.

The question as it lay was whether Devastator's Commander was among those who favored fellow strivers, or those who despised any reminder of shared common earth.

In the end Mr. Krennik decided to split the difference, choosing a white neck stock of fine linen but not lace and a black hat with ribboned cockade but not feather.

He would present himself as a supplicant but a worthy and soldierly one, a gentleman but not a fopp or courtier.
Krennik also wished also to allow sufficient opportunity for Mr. Bircher to observe the scene, the ingeniously constructed canals of the plantation, the well-built wharves and warehouses all stacked with crated bales of indigo, the impressive facade of the "governors" palace, the corpses of the seven returned escapees hanging still upon the gallows.

This doubtless would all be reported back to his lordship, and hopefully to desired effect.

The seven men had been much too weak and downtrodden to show much emotion over their impending demise. The ringleader Forni in particular stood in stony silence. It occurred to him to have the former ships carpenter Oliveros be the one ordered to pull the plank on the makeshift gallows. He had been a friend of Forni's and sternly questioned at the time of the escape. The fellow had wept copiously and begged to be excused but Forni and the other men had embraced him one by one and told him it seemed, that they bore him no ill-will, after which the matter was completed in full view of all the workers and officers. It proved an affective demonstration. The dispirited workers seemed to take the lesson to heart well enough and departed in silence. Even the usually apathetic Mr. Galen Erso appeared chastened.

Mr. Krennik only wished that Lord Vader's representative could have arrived in time to witness it and thus make personal report of what must surely stand as a display of authority in every way equal to Tarkin's example in the original management of the transport ships crews. At least one of the officials from St. Augustine had at been present, having arrived that very morning with cursory dispatches from the new acting British governor at the fort, so there was the likelihood that word of his firm hand would reach their Master's ear from that quarter.

*The previous Governor, Mr. James Grant, had been a most congenially corrupt fellow, invalided back to the more kindly climates of England after one bout of flux too many. Pending appointment from England one Dr. John Moultrie had been placed as acting authority on the presumption that a physician could manage to keep himself healthy for a season or two.*

This messenger, a raw gangly Scottish officer by the name of Lt. Evan Casrich had arrived by packet with the notifications and observed the disciplinary proceedings of with dispassionate British attention and departed with his bribes pre-packed. The overly solicitous young redcoat even made a point of shaking the hands of all officers above the rank of private, including that of the morose Mr. Erso, before departing to carry the new governor's dispatches to the struggling plantations further south.
The colony at New Smyrna was becoming quite a busy place. After months of storm and isolation that had received a fair parade of Christmas visitors. Now he himself was sent for to meet with a great frigate skillfully held at the mouth of the Inlet.

The letters from Portugal received in time mere days ago and reporting success beyond his wildest hopes, were safely stowed within his coat.

*How he wished for some supernatural means by which he might have preserved and bottled the look of grave acceptance upon Mr. Galen Erso's face upon of this news.*

"*We must allow ourselves the luxury of celebration, my dear Erso. You must join me in my quarters after dinner and Tarkin's long-hoarded brandy shall brought forth.*"

*The ever-infuriating man merely nodded but even that could not diminish Mr. Krennik's pleasure in the reportage.*

*I promise to have copies sent you Erso. The Academy itself could not ask for more glowing reports. The pirate Gerrere, his band of fanatics, one of their fortified strongholds and by verifiable accounts half of an Iberian cliffside obliterated by two shots fired five minutes apart. Not two rounds dear fellow but two balls, each containing less than 5 measures of the compound. What better field test could even your near-womanly over-caution demand? It is time to begin production in quantity Erso. All our labors and sacrifices have come to fruition.*"

Mr. Oren Krennik's interests in design would have put him in awe of the frigate even had he been insensible of all other matters pertaining to her. The arrangements of sail and engineering of bow and keel had not been his direct study but he had an eye of some skill and never seen a ship whose lines bespoke speed so clearly.

*A look at her cannon ports at broadside would have struck rank fear into the heart of any with knowledge of armament.*

*These of course had become his study of late.*
Brought aboard with terse ceremony he was introduced first to the sailing captain one Captain Montferrat, and then escorted by a junior officer to the main cabin where he was told, Lord Vader awaited him.

*He swallowed his resentment at not being met personally, and followed without a word.*

As he was brought within the cabin, the youth informed the Director, "The Lord Commander is engaged at present in private matters and will address you shortly" then bowed and excused himself in a manner that seemed to Krennik overly quick.

Ones eyes took a moment to adjust after the bright glare of the sun upon the decks which made the cabin seem dimmer than it truly was.

Great maps were laid out upon the tables and beyond them a man of truly impressive height, dressed in deepest Hapsburg black, waistcoat, trousers, boots, cravat and fine shirt, stood with his back to him. A valet in red was buckling by means of leather straps bound to his shoulder and forearm a black gloved hand onto the standing gentleman's left arm. The servant then helped his master into a black silk coat with onyx buttons and black brocade. The right hand, identically gloved, reached for a black beaver hat, rolled in the Italian fashion and placed it upon a head not wigged but wrapped in a scarf of black silk. This accomplished the right hand was extended again and yet another scarlet liveried servant stepped up to place within it a mask, looking like nothing so much as one of those required of Venetians, being of stiffened black silk. This object was firmly placed to cover all save the eyes and lower part of the mouth of the gentleman who now turned to face him.

Krennik bowed almost to the floor, removed his hat most respectfully, "Frieherr Vader," he said.

"Director Krennik," said a slow and deep voice of fearsome authority. "What is this matter you wished to speak of so urgently?"

________________________

Mr. Galen Erso arose even earlier before dawn than was his habit.

He had lain awake the previous night and for much of two nights prior. Now he knelt before the small fire that burned in the fireplace of the house allotted to him on the plantation. The paper he had held, opened within his shirt so that the very letters could be pressed to his heart, he now took into his hands.
Three unconscionable days he had kept it putting them all in danger beyond belief by so doing because he could not bear to part with it. Now he found the strength. Kissing each word of the message, having committed them long ago to memory he laid the paper in the fire.

He had stood as a man insensible through the public murder of the seven desperate escapees. Each of them men he knew, admired, telling himself that he was steeled for what he knew would come next.

Krennik's order that Oliveras be the one to pull the stand from beneath the condemned men had been an unforeseen cruelty. Forni and Oliveras had been as brothers once. He had been close enough to hear the condemned man whisper to his unwilling executioner, in his own tongue, "Do not be afraid. You set me free."

_Erso had hardly noticed the foolish British soldier, just another uniformed toady, as complicit as the officers from the Jamaica patrol who had brought ragged men back to starve in bondage because that was what dutiful habit bid them do._

If asked he would have answered that nothing could be worse that to see the faces of ragged nearly bare children and the sagging shoulders of the women as they turned, dry-eyed, to return to their huts at the conclusion of the murders. Men put arms around the weeping Oliveros and led him away, reciting prayers in Catalan and Greek beneath their breath.

Across the clearing Galen Erso saw caught Sefla's eye and could do nothing but bow his head.

_One other ordeal would traditionally be demanded of him after the officers and overseers were dismissed to their dinners._

After having hands shaken in friendly farewell by the departing St. Augustine officers, he repaired, as was required of him to the rooms reserved for Krennik's use within the monstrosity of the "palace" held in perpetual readiness for Tarkin's visits and infrequent periods of residence.

There he pressed the commanded glass of brandy to his lips and heard words that turned the last hope in his heart to ash.

Krennik had smuggled the compound to Europe....used it.

_Men were dead, dead at his hand as surely as if he had killed them himself, with countless more to follow...._
Saul Gerrere was dead and the last of his army with him.

Oh God. Oh Lara. Was she there? Had he murdered his own child?

By some means unknown to him he walked back afterwards to the dark house, unseeing, blind, escorted by one of the guard. When the door closed behind him he stood motionless in the middle of the room.

For how long he could not say, hours perhaps.

In the dark of the night a wind from the seashore rose and blew through the house, slamming the shutters. Startled, some animal reflex finally caused him to move then and began to take off his coat by habit, in much the same way ghosts are said to mimic the actions they took in life.

It was then that the folded envelope fell from his sleeve pocket into a square of light cast upon the rough floor by the full moon outside.

Mr. Galen Erso

it read.

He'd not known the writing and yet there was something almost familiar in the hand.

A seal of red wax was pressed to the back. Broken and resealed again, it seemed to him.

Within a small sheet lay folded, written in the same hand that had addressed the envelope.

Father,

I hardly know what to say to you, nor how you should even regard me after all this time. Mr. Saul
Gerrere has died, murdered by his enemies and yours.

After a life at war I hope he has at last found peace, but I know that he has at least found rest. Before his death he passed to me the gift of your message. The young man in whom you placed your trust, Mr. Rook, has proved both brave and true.

There is no point in speaking further of the past. Put your mind at ease in this at least and know that I am alive and free. Be assured that I am provided with skills and resources most women my age do not possess, enough to make my way in circumstances that might daunt others. We have endeavored to gain assistance from agents of the Alliance and others sympathetic to our purpose. We have passed your message on to them. This hideous venture will be thwarted and our loved ones avenged.

It may be that this letter will never reach your hand. But I will send it, to wait for you, in hope at the fort of St. Augustine, which lies in British hands now. If you by some miracle reach the fort in safety and hold this in your hands I will know that Providence is indeed merciful.

Dearest Papa, do not despair. I am coming for you. Stars are constant, even when hidden from sight.

Your Jen.

He knelt down upon the boards then and wept for the first time since they had taken his dead wife from his arms and dragged him to the ship.

My daughter is alive.

Chapter End Notes

Actually IN Saint Augustine, curiously enough. Screwing with all the dates of British governorships by the way.
More historically accurate period cruelty though, sorry.

But finally! A letter gets through in this fiction!!!!
Chapter Summary

Another exceedingly brief chapter in which the ships cook, Mr. Decks, begins preparation of a belated New Year's dinner aboard the Rogue to which Captain Andor has invited the crew of the Falcon. Captain Andor and Miss Erso discuss his motives in extending the invitation to Captain Solo and his sailors and, as that lady suspects, his motives are not confined to gratitude for recent assistance. Miss Erso is invited by the captain to review the charts supplied by Captain Solo and their combined knowledge of the features and history of the area lead them to a cautiously hopeful conclusion regarding their mission. Also, both of them being young persons of lively mutual regard they find themselves occasionally distracted.

Chapter Notes

Eng. geweren = "English guns" (abbreviated Dutch)
lijk = corpse, or carrion (Dutch)
Sí, mi querida pirata = Yes my dear pirate. (Spanish)

Too short, only slightly flirty and perhaps containing more 18th cen. Florida history/geography than wished for but writing on a small iPhone screen in crowded airports on bumpy flights with several books of Spanish Colonial History in your carry-on and the "Guide to the State Parks of Florida" under your arm will do that to you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Fresh supplies were brought aboard at Nassau.
Captain Rostock gave orders that a good dinner was to be set out. The crew had been delayed by the necessities of concealment in port at Kingston and upon the requirements of speed immediately thereafter from enjoying any festive observance of the New Years, so extra ration was to be made universal and guests were to be entertained in the Great Cabin.

Mr. Jesper Decks was an Englishman by birth, a true dockside son of the rough and tumble commercial port of New York, although his mother's people were of Dutch and African genealogy. A different turn of Fortune’s wheel might have seen him spend his life there, working in his father's tavern, had that profligate man's debts not claimed it soon after his mother's death. A strapping youth he worked the busy docks for a time, but finding that city a place where his complexion placed most cruel constraints upon him he signed on with a whaler at eighteen in search of adventure. The pursuit of oily leviathan impressed him as a vile trade that left many a common sailor just as poor as he started but it gave him his first taste of a place where...for the span of a deck and the length of a voyage at least.....a man might make his way on his own merit. When the old cook on the Cormorant took an apoplexy and died the skills he learned in mother's kitchen brought him his first promotion and respite from the juggling of blood and blubber. A ships cook he became and never looked back.

His coming to the cause of the Alliance was a circular route involving, amongst other adventures, a shipwreck off the coast of Mali, a couple of sea-battles, and the finding and befriending of a bearded young Jesuit missionary hidden in a crate of pepper followed by the colorful adventure of smuggling of him out of Ceylon.

Mr. Decks grew both stout and old tending Alliance ships and homely ventures ashore. In time he even took a kind of retirement to tend a tavern of his own at Southhampton, but when he heard that Mr. Merrick and Captain Rostock sought a crew for a chancy American venture he tossed the cellar keys to his grandson and signed on again.

How old Kanata had laughed and laughed when she saw him stow his cooking pots and knives below decks.

"You fat old fool! You are just like me eh? That Starbird printed on your skin will not let you rest ashore!"

True enough. Once you have seen the truth of the world's turning you feel a coward if you turn aside for the easier end.

The ship had a good iron stove after the new English fashion and for all his grumbling about short notice, Decks took a professionals glee at the notion of cooking a menu of good dinner in her.

Rostock was much pleased with a Strasbourg pie and Decks knew a toothsome manner of making it so that the potted liver was leavened with some pressed duck as well as buttered onions. This he would serve out with Braised parsnips, apple pudding, some spiced rice and peas, and a number of baked cod pies after the Greek fashion to provide those who must shun the meat. It being New Year's a lemon syllabub in the English style would be made up with sherry, eggs and the small vat of cream Young Tonc had procured ashore as well as spotted dog with custard. A great box of the Spanish marchepane that had been laid aside at Cadiz would be opened as well to treat all the crew on the holiday.

"To work lads and others!" he called to the little ones he set to work below decks. "They also serve who only peel the carrots!"
"Why did you invite him aboard?" Miss Erso asked. For it seemed to her mind a very odd time and place to host a party.

"We will need the day at least to prepare," Captain Andor told her. "Kay has taken a boat around to test the material on the far side of the Island and we may better equip ourselves based on what he learns. It will also be necessary to rearrange our ships papers before sailing and time our tides well if we mean try to make for Fort Saint Mark and the Matanzas or their near vicinities."

They sat largely alone in the Great Cabin during this discussion. Her early turn at watch was now done yet she wished to put off the laborious process of dressing in gowns again for as long as possible. Captain Rostok and Mr.s Rook and Melshi being on deck for duty she and Captain Andor found themselves with a moment of near privacy, private rather save for the coming and goings of the cabin boy Toby and the vigorous snoring of Mr. Antilles as he rested in his cabin from his late turn at Watch.

"Aye," she said, "You answer well enough as to why we wait,"

_The words "my love" she uttered in thought yet did not add aloud._

_How very strange it was to feel an endearment lie upon her tongue held like a sweet to make it last a little longer._

They did not speak to each other so in daylight and even within the dark of his cabin they still did not do so save in whispers. Captain Andor's face was half-turned from her as he surveyed a map upon the table, yet it seemed to her that he held a smile with the same impulse by which she held her words.

She continued, "You do not inform however, as to why Captain Solo and his crew are invited to guest with us. Would it not be easier to simply pay the man or shoot him and thus either way be done
with him?"

"Solo may be a lost cause, or he may not," Captain Andor said, deliberately ignoring her bloodthirsty
provocation, "but to recruit his crew to our venture could prove most valuable."

True enough, Miss Erso could not but agree on consideration. They had seen this dreadful
plantation..... seen it moreover and sailed away safe to tell the tale.

"You think to recruit them?" she asked.

Her lover shrugged. "The three young sailors all show some promise, but I should most like to know
the tale of the woman, Sabe."

This greatly surprised her, for, though a deft enough hand, Sabe had seemed no different to her eye
than many a she-buccaneer of the Commander’s old crews. Women who sought a freedom from law
and custom at sea that would ever have been denied them on land and were willing to risk both
comfort and bodily safety to gain it.

"I would have thought the mighty Mate's the more colorful saga."

She spoke lightly to tease him but he raised his dark eyes quite thoughtfully and seemed to consider
her words gravely.

"I doubt we have any amongst us who could understand the telling save Solo and I wonder how
much even he knows? That Khaeuri will go wherever his captain goes seems a given matter but how
some young East Indies Dutch freebooter ever came to earn the allegiance of such a man is hard to
imagine."

Is it sir? Miss Erso thought wryly, Surely no more difficult to imagine than tale of how an un-
categorized youth from the shadows of New Spain came to be blood brothers with a gentleman giant
of an Englishman with the marks of shackles on his wrists.

"Come now, look at these," Captain Andor said, laying a hand-drawn chart upon the table beside
Kay’s Royal Navy maps of the coasts and waters of the East Florida coast. "What do you see?"

Miss Erso looked over his shoulder.

Solo's charts were drawn in slate pencil, marked over here and there with ink. Little was labeled save
several lines “rivier”, and an edge “zee”. Inked squares with faint lines drawn out from them were
marked in small print “eng. geweren” and a cross well down along one thin line was penciled faintly
“lijk.” Numbers that must be sounding marks were clear enough as was a skilled enough compass
rose and the solid and broken lines of shore at various tides.

Jen Erso recognized the outline of the northeastern Florida coast and the Matanzas.

The Onderean had never sailed into Saint Augustine in her time, only skirted Fort Caroline to moor
off the Talbots and venture a party up the river called the St. Johns. She did remember hearing often
how Commander had sailed there in long years past, braving the kingly bounty Spain laid upon his
head, to join with other captains in a failed attack when the fort, called San Marcos then, still lay in
"If this square marks the Fort of St. Marcos....." she ventured, pointing with a finger, "and this, as I think it must, the island called the Anastasia..." she traced along an oblong shape. "But what does this represent?" she indicated by gesture another smaller square fixed by some round dots to represent something unmarked at the Southern end of the island.

"Some thirty years past," Captain Andor said, moving aside other papers to show her an older Spanish map, "One Mr. James Oglethorpe laid siege to the Fort at Saint Augustine and but for the disadvantage of a mighty storm would have taken her. He nearly managed what a dozen failed pirate raids had ventured by the bold plan of getting into the inlet beyond the Anastasia and finding draft enough to sail up the Mantanzas River and her tributary the St. Sebastian to attack from the rear."

"The old Pirates cursed that fort at San Augustin," Miss Erso said, laying her other hand upon his shoulder and bending her head quite close to his for a better look. "It was said she perched like a hawk above her view to the Great Stream and had a fiendish arrangement of overlapping cannon that could tear to shreds any ship that ventured in her sight. My Oloru used to say it was the cleverest contraption ever built by a Spaniard."

This worked his smile free of it’s bonds at last and with a swift movement he took the hand she had used to trace the maps and laid a kiss upon her fingertips, to her surprised pleasure.

Little Toby chose that precise moment to make a somewhat noisy entry into the Great Cabin carrying trays and pitchers.

Miss Erso had been fond of the child previously but considered just then an impulse to throw him overboard.

Whatever other recompense he might have paid her for her teasing thus interrupted, Captain Andor released her hand and returned his attention to the charts.

"Clever is as clever does," he said, a slight cough his only concession to a discomposure he seemed far better at concealing than she. "Schooled in the sole weakness of their position by Oglethorpe the Governors of Saint Augustine quickly built another very small fortress, of the same unique stone, as a miniature of the San Marco at the inlet that had given his ships access to the Mantanzas."

He indicated the square she had noted on Solo’s chart.

"As her parent was devised to guard the near passage of the silver galleons this infant was built to guard the rear passage to the tidal rivers that canal along the coast and prevent their ever again giving access and shelter to pirates. By account she did her work very well."

"No true pirate will ever sail these waters again," Jen Erso said quietly, surprised to hear her own voice sound more resigned than bitter, "those who remain are nothing but vultures and ghosts."

Captain Andor looked up at her then meeting her gaze most directly for a long moment.

To her boundless gratitude he neither corrected her nor offered any commiseration, only nodded.

"Yet," he ventured, slowly turning back to his study, "Solo somehow got past these legendary
defenses.”

Miss Erso remembered the Dutchman’s careless boast of how he had reached the plantation via the Mantanzas.

“‘The British claim to man it now but the poor fellows keep dying of fever, it seems…’” those were his words,” she said, “I thought he must be lying or else have mistaken his direction and circled round the old fort the free Africans long manned for Spain on the northern branch of the Marcos.”

“As did I,” the captain agreed, “and was not surprised, for the African men at Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mosé, claimed rights as soldiers and repaired to Cuba as Spanish citizens, when all Floridians were bid to flee or bend knee to King George of England. Those who fled the British lash in childhood knew well enough what awaited them had they stayed. That fort of wooden palisade has not been manned in seven years, the British having no need for defense from Georgia. No doubt the jungle has swallowed it as she swallows all the works of man.”

Jen Erso’s heart beat fast at the thought, “So…if this fool truly took that sloop all the way to the plantation from the southern inlet off Anastasia he must have left the Mantanzas hard after and then found another way. ”

“Sí, mi querida pirata,” Captain Andor agreed, “Solo’s lucky Falcon found an unmarked channel river no smuggler or English enemy ever did, in from the sea and south from the Mantanzas Inlet and the Halifax. If the British indeed are not manning the stone fort there we have a chance to reach the plantation by water without braving attack by sea.”

*This was what tore at Mr. Rook’s heart, she knew and haunted her own.*

*How does one assault a powderhouse packed to beams with the most terrifying of explosives without taking the life of every hostage held within her?*

She turned his face toward her then and kissed him full on that handsome mouth.

*If young Toby cared to gossip to the rest of the crew of her bold manner he was more than welcome to.*

The Bells chimed above decks, marking the beginning of the next Watch. From within his cabin, Mr. Antilles could be heard to stir and shout, “By God, was there not to be a dinner aboard, Toby? What time?”
“Well then Captain,” Miss Erso said, “I suppose I shall go and make myself ready to present a lady again, a process that requires considerable time, as you know. Mr. Kay seems to have placed a new gown and accompaniments in my cabin, I suppose so that I should put some good face forward as the only woman who sits among the officers.”

“It is the sort of matter that would concern him,” Cassian Andor concurred with a now unreserved smile. “He will not join us, being uncomfortable in such situations and wishing to take all remaining opportunity to continue his experiments in daylight, but he will surely demand detailed reports.”

Miss Erso proceeded to the door of her cabin while Captain Andor rose and began to stow the maps and charts again safely within their cases before the great table was laid for the dinner of the officers and their company.

“Sir,” she said, looking back “I have not yet made inventory of the costume prepared for me but should I require assistance with the back-lacing of any fashionable stays do you know of any aboard with experience as a lady’s maid who might be assigned to assist me?”

“I am sure a volunteer can be found Miss Erso,” he said with a bow.

Chapter End Notes

Upcoming: A dinner party aboard ship. I get to describe 18th cen. food AND clothes. Please forgive me.

In the name of god, if you are in Economy class think very hard about what you are doing to the people behind you when you tilt your seat aaaaa-lllllllll the way back.

Unasked for History Moment: At the end of The Seven Years War (aka the “French and Indian War” Spain traded Florida lock-stock and barrel to England in return for Havana and guaranteed un-harassed trade up the Jet Stream currents off the coast for the silver ships out of Veracruz to Europe. The people of Santa Augustine learned that their input mattered not at all to wigged men at a bargaining table in Paris and were given only weeks to abandon a city of 500 homes, some of which had stood for five generations. In 1738 escaped enslaved Africans, many who had fled from Georgia and Carolina
plantations in the English North, were promised their freedom and full Spanish
citizenship in return for manning “Fort Mose” (the first legally sanctioned free African
American settlement in North America) to prevent attack by pirates and the British on
the northern access to St. Augustine. A free black community grew up there. When the
Spanish evacuated, the soldiers and families of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mosé
who had formed strong bonds with and even intermarried with families in St. Augustine
demanded and were granted evacuation with them as Spanish citizens. They knew full
well the British-Americans had no intention of honoring the emancipation that Spain
had guaranteed them in return for their service. Most relocated to Havana and never
returned to Florida even after it was traded back to Spain. Fort Mose was abandoned
and reclaimed by the swamp as Cassian foretold, but is now a Florida State Park. Btw
Florida State Parks ROCK! Google them.
Upon Dressing for Dinner

Chapter Summary

In which Miss Jen Erso dresses for the dinner party in an ensemble chosen for her by Mr. Kay. The occasion gives rise to diverse reminiscences on her part as she reflects upon previous experiences at meals aboard the Rogue, as well as her education aboard the ships of Commander Saul Gerrere and her difficult journeys after parting company with that guardian. She reflects as well upon preparations for the recent dangerous masquerade in Kingston. In particular she considers the wedding band she wore upon that occasion and how the ornament recalled to her yet another painful episode in her past travels, this time in Italy. Her impulsive retention of this ring takes on, perhaps, a more hopeful meaning when Captain Andor pays a visit to her cabin to assist her in dressing and other matters and she makes an exceptionally subtle proposal to him, which he in his turn accepts with indirect diplomacy. An earlier confusing but mutually complimentary conversation with Mr. Kay is also recounted.

Chapter Notes

Jen recalls a heartbreaking chapter of her wandering life, as well as her current fragile but sustaining happiness.

Jen and Kay bond...sort of....a little...despite mutual incomprehensibility over their shared love for Cassian.

Cosa fai! Cosa state facendo voi uomini? Assassini! Briganti! = What are you doing! What are you men doing? Assassins! Brigands!

Sei pazzo? Sei cieco? Questa è mia figlia. lei non è un ladro più di quanto tu non sia un prete! = You are mad? You are blind? This is my daughter. She is not a thief any more than you are a priest!

Tanith, mia cara, vai dentro = Tanith, my dear, go inside.

"Tu chi sei?" = Who are you?

Nessuno affatto, Chiamami Gianna Guerra = Nobody at all. Call me Jane Guerra.

Ho fatto una promessa a Dio. = I made a promise to God.

Lei è la figlia di qualcuno = She is someone's daughter.

(all Italian)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Dinner manners for officers aboard an Alliance brigantine must be somewhat different, Miss Erso supposed, from those aboard a vessel of any other fleet, though if pressed she would have been forced to admit that her direct experience of manners aboard any ship save those of Mr. Saul Gerrere was largely limited to that of a common sailor aboard fishing boats and freight packets.

*When at sea on the Onderean the Commander had dined alone most often, either in his cabin or out on deck. In the later darker days he did not seem to eat at all. Yet always he fed his crews well, as was the acknowledged key to both peace and loyalty at sea, never stinting on generous rations and large measures of decent rum or arack, though it was on every third day watered and boiled with lime leaf, as another peculiarity of that ship, for Saul Gererre had strong views about the health of his sailors.*

Previous dinners at Captain Rostok’s table with the officers aboard the Rogue's Venture had been assembled at numerous points through the Atlantic voyage. Miss Erso found them proper and entertaining affairs even if lacking the formality she had heard to be common in the naval fleets of the great powers, or perhaps because of this.

Clean uniforms were resurrected upon occasion and Captain Andor usually wore a dark blue wool
coat with matching waistcoat, self-covered buttons and a simple white folded cravat which, in her opinion, suited him most handsomely. She most commonly wore her pale blue or yellow chintz wrapper and jumps. Sometimes having just come from the Watch with her breeches directly underneath.

After such dinners many rounds of cards were played at which Miss Erso and Mr. Melshi competed keenly and Captain Andor, when he deigned to play, was unbeatable. Mr. Rook preferred cribbage and had passed what might have been innumerable fortunes back and forth in wagers with Master Gunner Cor using that gentleman’s brass and whalebone board. The greatest treat of the voyage thus far had been the revelation, after the opening of a series of particularly fine bottles of Madeira by Captain Rostok upon the occasion of the feast of St. Nicholas, that Mr. Antilles had a fine singing voice for old Scots ballads.

During one particularly sad and pretty one, which held to the style of every other Scottish song she had ever heard in being about murder, in this case taking the form of an ancient lament about soldiers killing people who’d given them shelter in a snowstorm, a pleasant if plain tenor was heard to join in quiet accompaniment from the far end of the table.

Miss Erso looked back for the unfamiliar voice and was utterly astonished to see that it came from Mr. Kay.

She found upon such occasions that she began to recall with lessened pain the details of matters and events she had walled from her memory years before.

One reminiscence surfaced of being put in a clean if too-large ensigns jacket when very young, and sent to serve at table when other captains and dignitaries came aboard to parley or conference. She learned at such gatherings to how to pour wine and eat with a fork, skills she would never have either retained or learned in the common mess below decks.

On yet other occasions the Commander would send her along with others among the crew to work ashore at various ports where he had havens and allies….Ireland, Tunis, Portugal, Italy, Trinidad and Campeche came to her mind. There she would sometimes be ordered to put on women’s clothes of various fashions.

Dear God she how she had hated it as a girl of eleven, but in those days would never have dreamed of refusing an order. She showed great skill at some of her tutelage ashore, the picking of locks and pockets especially, and was most pleased to learn to ride a horse and drive a carriage.

Marie it was who taught her how to dance in the European fashion and how to costume as a lady of the better classes in order to enable the carrying of messages or concealment during the survey of a proposed robbery’s site.

On other occasions the work was less appealing, as in the learning of various types of servants work, the cooking and cleaning and tending of fires.

Still, all these skills had served her well when forced to make her way alone.

Was that your purpose all along Oloru?
After her abandonment off the coasts of Spain, Jen Erso had walked starved, footsore and so broken in spirit that she considered now that only rage against he whom she thought betrayed her had prevented her laying down upon the shore to perish of hunger and thirst. In the nearest little fishing village her Spanish proved sufficient to convince a sympathetic old fisherman to let her work for no pay but passage. If he recognized her as anything other than a small rather undernourished boy of 14 or less, he gave no sign of it and let her haul sardines aboard the battered boat and sleep among the nets to the next port.

She was not so lucky on the Sardinian coast and had to dive overboard after killing one sailor and hopefully maiming another.

Thereafter her wanderings were mostly ashore as a thief, bandit, or servant for hire. A knife always within her reach awake or asleep, she migrated every few days or weeks in whatever clothing could be stolen and gave whatever name suited safety or whim, most often no name at all. Thus she made her way alone through events and adventures as scattered and meaningless to her now as gravel tossed from a wheel.

The one night before they disembarked for Kingston, when Mr. Kay had sorted out for her the garments and accoutrements of her masquerade as Mrs. Charles Avelar, and so bluntly quizzed on such subjects as whether she knew how to properly pin a hat and open a fan that she retired in nervous annoyance to her cabin, into which she knew him unable to fit himself without considerable discomfort. There she had opened the box of dress pins and pearl drop earrings set to decorate her costume only to find a small gold ring within.

A sudden memory came to her then of a woman's hand wearing such a ring with words inscribed on it, though she could not now remember what they were. The ring had been just loose enough that her infant fingers could turn it curiously.

A wedding band?

Of course, she thought, I am to present a married woman am I not?
Hard upon that acceptance came another recollection, the pain of which she had turned her face from for two dark years, and she bowed her head ashamed, for this was not the first time such an ornament had been placed within her grasp.

The soldier at Livorno had pursued her with a vengeance. Most assuredly she had picked the wrong pocket upon the docks that day, or grown careless in her misery. When she had tried to give him the slip by ducking behind an empty market stall that she had hopefully estimated to back upon an open alley she found instead only a closed gate yard.

When the soldier, now joined in the chase by two of his comrades, knocked over the covered table to confront her she had turned to fight, cornered.

Suddenly the gate opened to reveal a stout middle-aged woman with a basket of bread. This lady stared at them all in great surprise, then abruptly began to shout, at the soldiers it seemed.

“Cosa fai! Cosa state facendo voi uomini? Assassini! Briganti!”

The men at arms also began to shout accusations but the woman now threatened them with a loaf from her basket as if it were a cudgel. “Sei pazzo? Sei cieco? Questa è mia figlia. lei non è un ladro più di quanto tu non sia un prete!”

As she was pursued from the docks Jen had cast aside the shawl her head had been covered with. It was hopefully enough alteration to allow her to feign innocence and she began to sniffle and wail like a frightened and wrongly accused market wench.

The shouting went on and on as the soldiers began to contradict each other. One of them, it seemed, knew the woman who was now shouting amid curses about a daughter only just returned from living with her aunt and known to be a virtuous girl who should not be insulted this way.

La matrona threw a yellow shawl over Jen’s astonished head and pushed her toward a door, “Tanith, mia cara, vai dentro!”

Inside the dim little taverna beyond the door she found herself with little choice but to wait until the woman returned.

This the lady did after some quarter of an hour, evidently having come to some agreement with the soldiers that involved parting with some of her bread.

Laying down the now-broken loaf she had previously brandished like a sword of justice the woman eyed Jen sharply.

"Tu chi sei?” she asked.

What was a name anymore? Did it matter what she called herself when no one knew or cared who she was?
“Nessuno affatto,” Jen answered. “Chiamami Gianna Guerra.”

It was at least a lie with a few broken bits of the truth in it.

The woman took a knife from her pocket but before Jen could react defensively used it to skillfully slice the cracked loaf in twain. Returning the blade re-folded to her skirts she silently laid a slab of cheese from a nearby shelf upon it before handing it to the girl. Miss Erso ate hungrily.

For the rest of the day she worked in the booth at the front of the taverna, dispensing food and watered wine to the passers-by on the dock and ate gratefully again with the widow in the evening.

The astonishment of Signora Ponta’s grown son upon returning home to find his long-dead “sister” returned to life was profound.

Mother and son proceeded to argue in Italian so rapid even Jen’s fluency was challenged.

“Ho fatto una promessa a Dio, Renato!” the lady pronounced Imperially to her son at last, slapping a hand palm down upon the table. Then with a glance at Jen, who had remained silent in the corner through this exchange though habit twitched her feet with the urge to run, she added more quietly, “Lei è la figlia di qualcuno,” and that was the end of it.

Sr. Renato Ponta was a well-favored, intelligent youth of nineteen and under normal circumstances most devoted to his mother.

That first night he warned Jen sternly that if she stole or otherwise abused that lady’s charity he would drag her to the guard himself. He repeated this threat every day for a month and then gradually stopped. They all three worked, almost as a family, she and the Signora side by side in the taverna, Renato working with captains upon the docks of the port, supplying wine and goods to the ships cooks, all of them at the street stall and in the small garden. Miss Erso remained a hopeless cook but proved a deft hand at selling in the market and managing the family accounts.

Why Signora Ponta had protected her was never truly explained. She was asked no questions and asked very few in return.

The real Tanith Ponta she learned from Renato Ponta had died ten years before at the time the family still resided in their ancestral home in Genoa. Some tragic circumstance surrounding her passing had brought such sorrow upon both her family, younger brother, grieving mother and now-deceased father, that they had left their home to flee painful memories, eventually moving south to Livorno.

So it was that a twice-abandoned former thief and pirate came to call Signora Ponte “madre,” to sleep beneath a dead girl’s blanket, wear her tenderly saved clothes, re-sewn and mended, answer to the name Tanith and live out what should have been that girl’s life.

Each night for almost six months she lay on the little pallet on the kitchen floor looking at the moon and stars through the small window above the unlocked yard door and told herself she would leave before dawn. Each day she did not.
One morning, at the end of winter, as the apple blossoms bloomed on the stunted tree in the small kitchen garden behind the street, Renato knelt on the stones by the hearth and professed that he loved her. He showed her the gold ring that had been his grandmothers and kissed her with great sincerity.

To her lasting shame Jen Erso told him that she loved him in return.

She was not insensible to the young man's embrace, or the sudden awareness of her aching loneliness as she returned it. Yet she knew in her heart that these were also, if not unmitigated falsehoods, at least not truth. This borrowed life, this forged answer that she made to a decent boy's earnestly offered affection was but a few broken pieces of something that might have been true but was not.

She loved his mother, was moved with humble gratitude of their unspeakable kindness for her, and awed by the sense that some power that she thought to have wholly abandoned her now offered her refuge.

All she needed to do was take a honorable man’s hand and live a good and quiet lie forever under another’s name.

Renato had made many plans. To marry one’s “sister” would never do of course, so he insisted they must return to Genoa. His aging uncle’s only son had died and he now wrote and begged Renato to return and learn the management of his boatbuilder's shop.

They were young to marry, even by the local custom but the shame and sorrow of his sister’s death would surely be healed in the joy of bringing home a new bride. He was an ambitious and hard-working young man who had lived for years under a shadow of sorrow he now yearned to cast aside and provide for his mother and himself. English shipping companies were taking over much of the trade on the Western coast of Italy as Venice's influence crumbled. It was a time of great opportunity. A clever and beautiful wife, he said with a flawless command of English would be a greater gift than any dowry.

The girl called Tanith Ponta and Gianna Guerra lay awake that night and fingered the unconsidered talisman she still wore day and night on a string upon her neck.

In her mind she composed many notes,

“I am sorry”

“Despise me, be happy and find another who deserves you.”

“I cannot be she whom you need me to be.”

“I was told to trust in the truth, I will rather die alone than live a lie, even a good lie.”

“Forgive me.”
In the end she wrote nothing, but left without a word.

Well before dawn she took from the mending basket some old boyhood clothes of Renato’s that the Signora had set aside to cut down for the servant boy. She also removed from it’s hiding place beneath a floorboard the wallet she had stolen from the soldier six months before. So dressed and provisioned she went to the docks and found there a ship needing a deck hand and asking no questions. If she hung in her hammock and wept at night she was surely not the only sailor boy to do so.

Her heart empty of all save guilt and despair it had seemed to her then that she went toward darkness rather than light.

By a series of short passages, she began to work her way back toward England, though she could not then have told herself why.

“We must go up soon. Are you ready?” Captain Andor had quietly asked her then at Kingston Harbor, standing at the open doorway to her cabin.

How long had he stood, clean-shaven in his fine merchant's coat, watching her sit upon a bunk fully gowned with a gold ring in her hand?

“How have you ever been married Captain Andor?” she asked him then. My dear unrecognized orphan of New Spain, my truthful counterfeiter and honorable assassin, has anyone ever offered you safety and you turned away from it? Have you ever done wrong in your own eyes and broke another’s heart because something within you needed truth more than safety?

He had looked at her in his measuring daytime way, as if carefully considering his answer.

“No, Miss Erso, I have not.”

“Good” she had said, “I should hate for either of us to be committing bigamy,” and slipped the ring upon her own finger, then held out her hand to him to lead her out and above decks to enact, for the sake of the venture, a lie that cased truth at the heart of it.
Afterward when Mrs. Avelar’s clothing and luggage needed to be abandoned in their escape from Jamaica, Miss Erso had retained the ring only, slipping it for safety onto the same leather cord that held her mother’s cross.

She had meant to formally return it to the trunks of borrowed finery aboard the Rogue, yet somehow, overtaken by events, had not yet done so. Captain Andor had surely observed or at least felt its presence there upon her necklace yet he had also not made any mention of it.

Now as she laid out the green patterned silk closed-front gown and matching outer petticoat that Mr. Kay had chosen for her and managed to tie her petticoats over the ingenious front closing stays …dearly hoping that they were not something of that gentleman’s own design….she slipped the little charm inside the neck of her shift but removed the ring before doing so.

A soft knock at her door gave her warning of the quick and silent entrance of Captain Andor.

"Forgive the intrusion," he fairly whispered, "I came to see if you required assistance." Her swift smile gave him assurance of welcome.

By some miracle it seemed he had managed to enter boldly unnoticed while all within the Cabin were pre-occupied. He already donned a handsome black silk waistcoat, white shirt and black moleskin breeches but had not yet donned his coat and cravat. Appearing most disappointed that the design of the new stays rendered his expertise less necessary, he contented himself with stepping carefully behind her to help at least in the slipping on and closing of the long gown.

Both of them finding themselves curiously unwilling to speak aloud while others were awake and about in the outer cabin, she allowed his skilled ministrations in smiling silence.

After some pleasant time of this she reached for his hand, where it rested at her waist in the rearrangement of her skirts.

Through his visit she had held the little ring tightly in her left hand, now she placed it in his.
“Keep it,” she whispered, “for now,” most genuinely glad in that moment that she could not see his face.

The boning of the stays and snug pinning of the bodice left her unable to feel the direct sensation of his hands against the front of her gown but the pressure of his arms around her from the behind held her tight against him for a little while and she could feel his breath against her neck.

“For now,” he said.

A moment later a lull of sound in the outer cabin signaled a discrete moment to leave and he made use of it, without another word.

Indeed, she could have made no more headway in dressing had he remained within the tiny room.

Chiding herself at the foolishness of feeling so utterly breathless, which she attributed to a slight mistying of the stays, she tied round the filmy lace neck-kerchief and made use of the little mirror to pin the small lace cap and attach the small garnet drop earrings.

All clothing is costume for some theatrical, she remembered someone saying, perhaps poor lost brave Marie, and we prize them because they are our only chance to win the favor of the audience, it being in vain once the curtain is up to bargain with the playwright.

It was undeniably a pretty ensemble for a holiday occasion and flattered her rather specifically, Miss Erso could not help but see, even in so tiny a reflection.

Why Mr. Kay had carefully set out out garments for her so perfectly supportive to the role of a rising and prosperous young officer’s wife she hesitated to venture, and wondered if the strange gentleman even knew himself. She felt quite sure, however that whatever his acknowledged or unacknowledged reasoning that he had similarly laid out Captain Andor’s clothes and that these would perfectly compliment her own.

An hour prior to setting out in that morning by small boat to the deserted far shore of the barrier island with no escort save another of the cabin boys, sturdy little Arthur, and the announced intention or performing some several hours of tests upon upon the blue matter brought by Solo, Mr. Kay sought her up on deck and informed her of the disposition of clothes in her cabin.

Miss Erso had thanked him,…. for indeed, what else could one do?….but the gentleman had
remained standing still after his speech, regarding her for several minutes as if in uncertain thought before abruptly stating.

“I regret any unintended discomfort your misinterpretation of my meanings may have previously caused you.”

What the bloody hell was he talking about now? Surely not the clothes again?

“Do not concern yourself, Mr. Kay.”

“I wished to apprise you that my original assessments regarding you have proved largely erroneous. Miss Erso and I have fundamentally revised them. You have presented yourself as a consistently skilled and valuable operative.”

The powerfully tall man then bowed, which she had come to realize was a gesture he used to convey thanks or some other positive emotion.

Oh Heavens.

As they stood by the rail various members of the crew passed them nearly by, some glancing up as if to wonder what could be holding her so long in conversation with the notoriously odd gentleman before moving discretely on to their assigned duties.

“Thank you,” she felt obliged to say and, as Mr. Kay had strangely not yet either straightened or returned his cockaded hat to place, found herself adding, with awkward sincerity, “Our first acquaintance was less than congenial I agree but I have come to well understand and share Captain Andor’s enormous regard for you, Mr. Kay.”

This seemed to please him, for he stood upright again and replaced the hat upon his close-cropped head.

“It is difficult to conceive that the mission before us can be accomplished without significant or even universal casualties, but in the unlikely event we both survive Miss Erso I would be quite willing to undertake to teach you Swedish.”

“That is a most generous offer, Mr. Kay, I will consider it.”

He nodded. “I understand. I will, if spared, revisit the question at a more convenient time. Your company had been beneficial to him quite beyond my expectation and as his friend I am most grateful.”

The gentleman’s turns of conversation were so abrupt that she wondered if she ought to be concerned about the state of her own mind that she had followed one at last. He spoke of Captain Andor

As has his to me, she thought but did not say.
With this statement he turned from her and left to make ready the dinghy he would take for his investigations. She heard faint laughter far above her head and looking up realized that the keen ears of Mr. Imway at his station upon the mast must have overheard the unique conversation.

Miss Erso stuck her tongue out saucily in the monks direction.

The gesture was but a futile presentation of her own vexation of course, for she knew well that her friend could not see it.

Her reflection in the small square mirror now looked back at her consideringly. For all his strangeness, Mr. Kay’s assessment was not unlike her own. At the near end of this journey the fearful plantation at New Smyrna lay before her, days at best away, and she knew that the odds that anything lay beyond it for either herself or Captain Andor were poor indeed. Yet she found could not wish undone any action that had brought her here. Though she bitterly regretted now the years she had wasted and the harm she had done to those who had tried to help her, she could misgive nothing else.

What she had found in the streets of Lisbon and Kingston and claimed aboard this ship was at least not a broken thing of pieces. It was a whole truth.

Upon her shelf beside the mirror was laid a small silk ribbon rosette, gold in color, with the thoughtful addition of an extra pin to hold it. She considered placing it on her cap but in a holiday spirit pinned it instead upon the bodice of her green gown, then went out to find either Midshipman Syndalla or Mr. Melshi, who must have been quite the dandy ashore for his views on ladies attire were extensive, to seek their opinion as to whether all her pins were set straight and her shoes buckled properly, for she could not sufficiently see them and the guests would arrive soon.
This is a lot of flashbacks within flashbacks, even for me. Sorry.

More clothes romance. I can't help it.

The Scots ballad in question would be a version of "The Massacre of Glen Coe".

Coming up: dinner party with the Falcon crew. Accidental explosions. A dark shadow on the horizon. God as my witness our next stop is Florida.
Dinner Within the Great Cabin

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Andor finishes dressing for the officers dinner aboard the Rogue to which he had invited the Falcon's crew. He considers the clothes Kay has laid out for him and occasions in which his friend's interest in clothing revealed more than it seemed. The former Royal Handmaiden Sabe also dresses for dinner and considers her past and her devotion and duty to young Luc. The crew of the Falcon is welcomed aboard the Rogue. Old Kanata the Assistant Quartermaster observes and eavesdrops upon the officers dinner with a shrewd eye and considers the words and actions of many of the crew and guests in light of her vast and peculiar experience. There is an explosion

Chapter Notes

Yes. Captain Andor may possibly have just proposed to Miss Erso, albeit in a circumspect fashion.

I love stories where lots of different conversations are overlapping. Hopefully it works. Oh I worry.

Muy dificil = Very difficult. (Spanish)

Dit zal nooit gebeuren in duizend jaar! Loop naar het eten en steek niemand neer. = This will never happen in a thousand years! Walk to the food and do not stab anyone. (Dutch)

binti = daughter
Una miaka mingapi? = How old are you (Swahili)
Jeuri roho = Rude spirit/ghost (Swahili)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Captain Andor surveyed the coat laid out upon his bunk. Black velvet and black brocade with selfed buttons. The buttons were new, they had been silver upon a previous occasion it seemed to his memory, but otherwise he recognized the coat from a venture they had completed in London in the Spring.

Jesus. It seemed a lifetime ago.

The black silk waistcoat as well? Dear God Kay, am I to look like a Hapsburg? What are you thinking?

His friend's inexplicable insight into the influence and message of the tailors art was unequalled and he would not dare to question it.

Some years past Mr. Kay disagreed with Mr. Mandine upon some fine sartorial point pertaining to the uniform proper to a striving French soldier of rank but poor pocket who had recently returned from the American Wars and the Frenchman took great affront.

"Come sir! Is there no one whose word you will yield to on matters of dress?" Mandine asked, most put out at being told his own assessment of a fellow Frenchman's garb was insufficiently subtle.

Mr. Kay had tilted his head as if considering seriously.

"With regards to European dress? I would presently accede superiority to the researches of Madame Rose Bertin, Lady Mary Monmouth and Sr. Giacomo Girolama Farussi Casanova," he answered with considered gravity.

The blind were said to be gifted with sharpened hearing. This being accepted as so it was hardly surprising that the tactile and concrete communication afforded by variations of dress should form a keen study for his friend Kay, when so many other matters pertaining to the clues of social discourse between men and women of all manners and ranks remained clearly mysterious to him.

Captain Andor recalled another occasion, when he at the age of perhaps fifteen been obliged to impersonate a Spanish official's groom in order to procure information for Senor Dodanna at Madrid.

While buttoning his own gold brocaded coat Andor had observed the also-young Mr. Kay sitting doubly bent on the planked floor of the tavern room sanding the soles of a pair of polished Iberian leather boots in order to approximate the correct usage and age, and asked an impulsive question.

"Kay, do you remember how old you were the first time you wore shoes?"

The older youth kept at his work but answered, "My exact age is unknown to me, but I would think it likely I was near to thirteen."
Any reckoning Cassian might make of his own age would also be a necessary estimation, but he ventured one in kind.

"I think perhaps I was nine."

Then brushing of the sand-cloth paused and Kay, to Andor's surprise for he had never previously heard him do so to anyone, asked him a personal question in return.

"Did you dislike them?"

I nearly cried, he thought of answering, but instead merely laughed. "Si. Muy dificil."

"I also found them most distressing and uncomfortable," Timothy Kay said, nodding with the air of someone making a profound discovery, "it required great self-discipline to accustom myself to an action I found so painful and unnatural but I persevered, because I considered that for once my sufferings were in the service of a much greater good."

He had looked up then and blinked slowly, as was still his habit, "do you consider this a matter we two could be said to share in common Mr. Andor?"

"Yes," Cassian Andor had agreed, "I suppose that I would."

It was shortly after this exchange that Kay began to consistently refer him as "my friend" in conversation with others.

A fine white linen cravat lay pressed ...when did he manage such things aboard ship?....and folded beside the coat and a small quartered note lay atop the snowy cloth.

When Captain Andor opened the paper he found small and precise drawn diagrams and written instructions in his friend's neat handwriting detailing the best and most appropriate way that he should tie the garment about his own neck.

When he recovered from the disability of the laughter this missive caused, he tied the cravat as
skillfully and exactly to instruction as possible and put on the fine coat.

Once attired he took the gold ring that Miss Erso had returned to him from the shelf above his folding desk and turned it over in his hand.

It was small and, unlike most rings exchanged by fashionable couples in these more modern times, quite unmarked, still symbolizing hope but asking no questions and outlining no promises.

*Perhaps I have taken so many painful and unnatural actions since those days Kay, he thought, that I am become unaccustomed now to what ought to be natural. It seems to me almost like another man's garment.*

After several minutes of consideration he kissed the golden thing lightly and placed it in the waistcoat pocket.

He then went out upon deck to greet their guests.

Miss Erso stood by the rail already in her green gown and as she turned toward him with a smile, he could not but note that yellow ribbon rosette at the front of her gown matched the lining of his waistcoat most exactly.

*Who would have taken you for such a damned romantic, Kay? he thought.*

The poor boy had worked diligently at cleaning his untorn shirt, rinsing it as he could in salt water and hanging it to dry in the sun on the ship's ropes.

All three of them proved almost endearing, Luc, Zacharie and even Darian in their eager efforts to dress well. Solo scoffed but she noted when he walked back up from the docks of Nassau port that his battered good hat had been blocked back into shape and had a tab of red ribbon tucked into the pinned corner.

*Charmed off some lady ashore, she ventured, for she knew his pockets to be empty.*

Charm was surely the only currency he had left. He must have taken time to brush that blue coat as well, out of sight of the rest of the crew.
Sabé herself looked below the deck for her small sailor's trunk, tied beneath her rolled hammock. It was but a simple locker purchased a few years ago at Marsailles for the price of a stolen silver cross. The little she called her own lay within it. Two spare men's blouses and a blue scarf of spotted India cotton, a sewing kit, two pair of woolen stockings, and a set of workmanlike boots taken from the convent shed. Also within was a woman's wool and hemp petticoat of faded brown and a woolen shawl of checked red, seldom worn save when upon some errand ashore, nothing there not befitting a woman of the docks or countryside.

Two treasures only did she retain that told of any other life. A small Spanish silver medallion of Our Lady, given her in childhood, such as might name her as a former Catholic but communicate little else and, most preciously, a folded and torn rectangle of scarlet-orange silk, lined with what had once been white silk velvet. The fine cloth was aged now by moisture and rough storage…...almost like herself, she thought… until it had shredded nearly into ribbons.

Wrapped now in a rough linen bag, it was all that remained of a once costly hood worn in that distinctive color by only seven women. This fragment was all that remained of a cloak that marked the Handmaidens of the brilliant Mariana Victoria, Infanta of Spain and Queen of Portugal. In a world that seemed to her eyes reduced to a cartoon drawing rendered in shades of grey, only two colors revived her heart. One was the flame-color still held by the scraps of that hood, first laid upon her bowed head by the Infanta’s own mother when she as a girl of thirteen had completed the three trials and taken her vow of fealty.

The other was the blue in the eyes of her prince, the firstborn of she who she had honored as queen and loved as friend.

Many babes are born with blue eyes but that sky-blue which did not fade would have damned the babe and his noble mother as surely as any old wizard’s prophecy of destiny.

Sabé was to have taken the boy to Seville. That had at least been Kenobi’s first desperate plan, that they would say the child had died.

None of them had asked how this deceit would be managed. The vultures that circled would expect it surely.

“He will be safe,” the Bishop said, “I will train him there, in secret.”

She had seen then the longing for redemption in his eyes.
“As you trained his father?” her lady had whispered between her spasms and fixed a dark eye on him so that even he looked away in shame.

Such was Her Royal Highness Mariana Victoria, little more than a girl herself, lying weak on her bed after dangerous hours of travail, heart-broken by the utter betrayal of a man she had once loved past reason, with the bruises of his fingers still upon her neck.

Hollé gathered them together for the last time suggesting prayers and the drawing of lots, but when Sabé looked down at the broom straw in her hand she had already known that it must be her.

Of the seven only she had no family living, no parents or sweetheart to question her disappearance. She alone knew the mountain passes from childhood. They steeled themselves for what God would bring as, without a cry, her lady at last delivered her son.

Then the midwives brought forth the second child, the unexpected twin and everything changed.

In that hour Rainha Mariana must have seen revealed a way that the girl by mere fact of her existence could provide the screen of safety necessary to save her brother. She must have seen too the years of suffering and strength of will that would lie ahead if she was to save her dark-eyed daughter as well.

The false one who had betrayed her…dead they thought then, for who survives such burns? Rumor had it that Hell itself had come for the handsome traitorous beast, Oh how she had wept when dark Rumor whispered again years later that by some black magic he had not…he and his evil masters desired only boys. Even the spies of Rome and Spain and the jealous courtiers of Portugal would think a girl babe too unimportant to scrutinize carefully. Ineligible to ascend the throne a girl might be ignored as useless decoration until she grew to marriageable age.

That dangerous time was near at hand, surely.

When Kenobi, latching on to this new scheme as a drowning man to rope turned to speak briefly with his men outside the curtains and modestly averted his priest’s eyes from the doings of the midwives, her Queen had reached for Sabéna’s hand as she bent to mop her brow.

“Not Seville,” she had whispered. “Faithful one, take him out of their reach.”

And so she had.

Somehow the monsters have learned that he lives. How? My sisters went silent to their graves, this I know. One of the midwives? Kenobi’s people?

They look for him but they have not found him yet and while I breathe they shall not.
With a sigh Sabé put on the cleanest shirt, her petticoats and clean stockings, tied the white scarf around her hair with the ends in after the fashion of a cap and wrapped the shawl crossed in front to tie at her back. She then took a thin strip of the bright precious silk and pushed it through the hole of a pierced shell Luc had given her as a when they had walked ashore at Trinidad. Tying it around her neck with the pride a noblewoman would wear a drop pearl upon a velvet ribbon she proceeded up onto deck to brush the boots.

*Let that cunning Spanish spy take whatever he would from it, she told herself.*

“You look well, Sabé” Darian said to her, and the older woman returned the compliment. The Corsican had dressed herself in a blue and yellow striped petticoat and pinned a red scarf about her shoulders and blue one over her head.

Captain Solo stared at both women in astonishment.

“Damn it Darian!” he cried, “How long has this been going on?”

Luc and Zachary laughed very hard.

Newly shaved and in their clean shirts and almost-fitting waistcoats, traded back and forth twice in an attempt to see which fit which one better, both youths looked as handsome as any princes she had ever seen.

Even Khaeuri had combed out his freshly dressed hair and bound it into a roll at the back of his head.

“Does anyone else plan to surprise me by putting on women’s clothes, or can we go to dine now and get our damned money?”

So it was that they boarded the borrowed dinghy and went together across the short distance to where the Rogue’s Venture lay at anchor.

One red-cheeked and bearded Captain Rostok welcomed them aboard politely there as they stepped off the ladder and Zachary offered his sister his arm to walk the deck. To Sabé’s surprise Luc then copied his motion to offer her his, a little awkwardly but with a wide smile. She took it with as much dignity as she ever had any ambassador’s.

*Khaeuri looked down at Solo quizzically.*
“Dit zal nooit gebeuren in duizend jaar! Loop naar het eten en steek niemand neer,” the captain snarled. The towering mate merely shrugged happily and walked on.

Thus their ragged band passed the crew and officers of the brigantine to go to the dinner laid out in the large cabin.

My Queen, Sabé thought, he is humble, clever, well-spirited and brave. His sufferings have made him more likely to treat others with kindness than it’s opposite.

I cannot claim the credit for this miracle for it surely belongs to a flaxen-haired girl who lies now in a hillside grave in France, but I promise you no mother could ask for more.

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Mr. Decks had called upon the cabin crew to aid him in the setting of the dinner. Toby was assigned to serve at table.

Old Kanata came up to assist in the cooking...out of pity for the great fool whose pride in his skill and faith in that dreadful iron box of a stove may have exceeded his good sense.... because it pleased her to do so, not least since when the work was done she might sit inside the galley and watch on a chair while Toby and Decks served the meal

She had seen the same eyes in many different people, the same fire in many hearts and the same story told a hundred different ways. Even so she never wearied as she sat and peered through the door with a fine mug of watered wine and a bowl of well seasoned rice and peas to watch all and listen.

A ship of their Alliance could not nor would not be bound by rigid ladders of place and rank, but there was an order to the seating even so.
Captain Rostok sat at the head of the table with Captain Solo upon his right, for the Dutch boy was the highest officer of the guesting party.

Captain Andor sat upon his left in tribute to his rank as superior of the venture in a coat of rich black as befitted the shadows he had spent his young life wrapped in.

Miss Erso, the binti of the mighty Saul Gerrere...may he rest...sat beside Captain Andor, swathed and pressed like an English woman in sweet China cloth the color of a new leaf. They spoke directly together very little, save with glances. They touched no more than was ordinary for two people side by side at a crowded and talkative table of Europeans.

Such reserve signified nothing, of course. Whatever they did and whoever they spoke to they were bound together like a chord of music that wove in and out of whatever tune played around them.

Mr. Bodi Rook sat beside the binti and they leaned together and spoke often. He was a beautiful youth who shone like a steady fire. His accent was Turkish but he had the look of the sea of India about him somehow.

“...maps,” Erso was saying to him quietly, “You must look at them. We have formed a plan, it seemed clear there is a way in...there is hope...”
Upon these words he looked at her with the eye of a hunting falcon turned loose. Such a heart once set upon a task, whether it be to find an object, reach a place, or keep a vow, never failed

This Solo fellow waved his hands and smiled charmingly when he spoke to Rostok. His manner presented a confident carelessness that could not wholly hide some great fear or lasting shame, at least from her old eyes. “...You will forgive me sir, when I tell you I have not immersed myself any such venture out of allegiance to your noble cause, nor for the friendship of man or the rescue of fair maidens. My expectations are and always have been to be paid...”

Beside him was a towering muscular man who ignored all conversation and focussed his attention most profoundly on the dinner rolls, piling them high on his plate like the heads of his conquered enemies. His gleaming hair was most impressive but the markings upon his face, mighty neck and wide hands were a marvel. This was a man whose skin spoke multitudes, of stories, wars, rivals slain, miles traveled, dreams remembered, tales told.

Oh Kanata, she chided herself with a chuckle, Every time you tell yourself you are too old and wise for such adventuring you see one last boat you wish to sail in. This fellow would be like reading a book, a very wordy book from the look of him. Oh my.

“Toby,” she called, as the boy passed by her with a tray, ready to bring out the next course. “Keep that handsome decorated fellow well supplied with bread, I will see there is an extra almond sweet in it for you.”
An older woman sat beside the beautifully written giant, and through dressed like a sister of the sea and the open road, she alone save Solo himself seemed quite undaunted by the silverware, holding the crystal glass as if it were not perhaps the first such ware she had ever touched. Her eyes stayed mainly with her own crew, the brother and sister, Solo himself and mostly the yellow-haired youth at her side.

Once or twice the woman hazarded a glance at Andor with the look of one who notes a pistol upon a table and tries by sight alone to judge whether it is loaded and cocked.

*Ah poor sister. It is always loaded. The question to ask is whether it is pointed at you.*

The yellow-haired boy inclined his head and whispered a question.

“*...no, mon cher,*” the woman said, taking back one of the three rolls of bread the boy had put upon his plate, “*This is only the first course, there will be more, much more... mimic Zachary or, God forgive me, Solo for manners. Do not try to eat like Khaeuri here you will surely regret it.*”

The sister spoke like the boy’s mother, though it seemed to Kanata that she was not.

Then the yellow haired boy turned back she saw his eyes clearly for the first time and nearly fell from her stool. She knew those eyes.

Never in blue before, but she had seen them many times.

*Ah, all the god and spirits of every nation help them if they were in THAT story now.*

Some beautiful twins sat beside the one with the hero’s eyes, the short-haired one in boys clothes showed the hero how to take the salt from the bowl and they laughed together all three as friends.

Twins...those were always rich tales.

Brave Syndalla was there, invited from below decks in a jacket of blue and with a light in her eye again.

She spoke with the officer who sang beautifully, the Scottish one, who drank too much but might outlive them all.

The very handsome Master Gunner sat beside the one called Rook, and leaned across to talk to him and the bold pirate Erso.

“*...no, no,*” he was saying, “*If, as you say, they have by some means rendered it inert under general conditions, and it is clear they have for such a devastating compound would be useless otherwise, it is essential that we discover what activation triggers other than fire are in play.*”

His mother must have come from the West, from one of those nations that harnessed the gifts of iron and fire, for he had the spirit in his eye of both.
An officer was missing, she noted. Kay, the tall one who was more than half a spirit and stalked about as if but lightly held to the earth. She was sorry for this absence because he spoke with her in Swahili sometimes, having visited that coast once and being a scholar of the old Arabic trade routes and charts.

This pleased her as it reminded her of the busy cities of Zanzibar in her younger days and ships of many nations that thronged there.

In addition to being by far the whitest man she had ever seen not actually living in a cave his discourse was most original.

“Una miaka mingapi?” the fellow had bent almost down on his knees to ask her upon the occasion of their first meeting.

“Jeuri roho,” she had said, “Nine hundred and twenty three years.”

“That is not possible,” the pale giant had said.

“Do you call me a liar, boy?”

The fellow had tipped his head, “It is possible you are lying for some dramatic effect but equally possible you are grossly mistaken or using some divergent system of measurement.”

She laughed hard. ‘You remind me of my fourth husband.”

He had stood upright then and bowed deeply, to her even greater amusement.

As was not uncommon with spirits he did not like to be touched so she made sure to hand him the small fruit jellies she saved for him wrapped in paper.

She enjoyed her wine and listened to snips of conversation as they passed like leaves in the wind.

The hero to his shipmates. “…it sounds as if it would be awful to tell of it but I thought of the poor man who had suffered so and considered that it was done to aid him one last time and it did not seem so horrible. Mr. Kay is an interesting man….”

The clear-eyed Turkish pilot to brave Melshi, “…the canals were laid to be dug far back into the jungles. By now they have surely been built…..no, cost means nothing to him…..difficult to navigate… move into the back channels save the guards and they feared greatly to do so even when ordered for fierce Indians were said to still dwell back there and…”

Cor to Andor “…San Marco….the same arrangement of guns is laid out at Havana. I must admit I
would be curious to see it. My…an employer of mine in my youth…. always recommended it a a pinnacle of land-based defenses…and the effect of ordinance on the stone is said to be remarkable.”

That son of New Spain answering, “…if you have suffered siege in any other castle the effect is quite unearthly….no, it was used only for small items such a troughs and molcajete… on the few islands was it suitable to quarry in size…some mystery….”

Brave Syndalla to the twins, “….because I could not do otherwise…..when a bird flies it sees no boundaries of nation, only the earth as God sees it, from that distance that gives all things beauty… not a contract one retires from, consider carefully….”

Solo spoke in heartfelt Dutch with Rostok about arrangements of sail.

Melshi recounted some story of a boyhood escape across rooftops in London that brought a smile to the lips of the dark-eyed Andor and a delighted laugh from the pirate’s daughter.

Rook was telling the hero and the older woman beside him a tale of the Maharini of Agara and the moon-white tomb built in her honor. Solo listened in.

As the dinner progressed, and the main courses all consumed….bless the little hero for he had clearly never been confronted with so many choices of food at table in his life. His guardian kept quietly removing items from his plate…..chairs were pulled back and various other conversations begun as persons moved about the cabin. Sweets and wines were passed round by Toby as good Rostok proposed the toasts.

Below decks the crew was enjoying their dinner as well, with extra rations of meat and good rum, the sweets must have been passed out there too for she felt the cheer beneath the floorboards.

The European feast of the New Year was being toasted in both places.

Such toasts held an extra poignancy always on an Alliance ship, perhaps on this ship and in this present hour most of all.

Rostok saluted the company, and bright day itself and the hope for more that might be beyond it, but as was the custom in their fraternity they raised glasses for the future of others not themselves.

Solo bowed his head and seemed to whisper something under his breath in Dutch, although she could not hear it over the voices.

The blue-eyed youth listened to Rostok with open admiration, while the woman who sat beside him looked at the boy with pride and concern blended.

The beautiful warrior whose stories lay patterned and complete on him took for himself a half-eaten tart from Solo’s plate.

The pirate girl in her gown of spring-green laid her hand upon the shadowed arm of her lover as she listened and though they did not look at each other it seemed to Old Kanata that the young man trembled a little.

That one had always reminded her of a sharp blade of finest steel, plain but beautifully made,
dangerous but itself unstained by the blood that other hands used it to spill.

From where she sat she could see Andor slip his hand into the pocket of his waistcoat and take something from it which he then placed within the young woman's fingers, lifting the small hand to his lips for a moment as if to disguise the action in the movement of a somewhat intimate and private toast between they two.

Though they still did not look at each other directly, from the angle of their arms it seemed to her singular vantage of sight that they clasped hands beneath the table.

The attention of most of those present was rightly upon Rostok as he spoke, so that few eyes noted the pirate and the assassin and any who had likely did not understand what it was they saw. A lone exception was Hera Syndalla whose gaze it seemed caught the motion of the captain's hand and turned away discretely blinking back tears.

Ah, heaven help them all. In a story such as the one they sailed in now what course was more dangerous than love?

Looking back through the doors toward she saw that Mr. Decks lingered still by the ladder to the mess and nodded to let him know that all went well within. The good fellow smiled broadly. From the sound that carried up from below the crew found their dinner most convivial below decks as well.

A blessing on Decks, he was a happy man in this hour. What greater satisfaction was there for an innkeeper in this wicked world than to provide care and the respite of a few hours joyful nourishment to such courageous souls?

It was suggested that Mr. Antilles sing and that young man obliged with a song about a shepard tricking a girl, or was it about a girl tricking a shepard? His voice was most pleasing whatever nonsense came out of it.

Why were so many European songs about the amorous adventures of sheep herders? Was it a euphemism? She had always wondered.

"Sabé should sing as well, she knows lots of pretty things, even if they are mostly in Italian." Solo said, having applauded heartily with the others when Antilles finished.

The wine had placed him in an expansive frame of mind it seemed, though in truth he was far from as drunk as he played.

The manly Mate was much in favor of this proposal as well and slapped the table loudly with his palm. The woman demurred but the blue-eyed youth urged her.

"Sabé has the voice of an angel!" he said, sun-tanned cheeks flushed from the wine and Madiera, "Please sing."
The sister looked around not so much shy as uneasy and Kanata noticed that her eye fell briefly upon Captain Andor, with a strange look almost half of defiance. That gentleman met her gaze but merely raised an eyebrow.

What Solo's crew-woman would or would not have sung they never knew, for in that moment a might retort sounded and shook the very boards. The crystal glasses rattled and the battle-hardened crew of the Rogue leaped from their seats at once, man and woman all. Most turned swiftly to rush to their set combat stations by a reflexive instinct.

Kanata leaped also, but sense returned to her and she stopped herself.

*Old fool! We are at Harbor. That is not a cannon.*

Mr. Cor, with fire in his bones, never lost his sense.

"Hold!" he cried, "Not a gun, an explosion, unconfined. It came from over the island."

The pirate girl Erso was on her feet with a hand flung out as if she would somehow protect Captain Andor but that gentleman, though he took her wrist and held it, looked toward the thick aft windows...*one now cracked...* facing west toward the water and the sand bar of the Providence Island beyond. His handsome face was pale even as he looked down at the woman.

"Kay," he said.

Those officers not already moving toward the stations assigned to them in all emergencies moved quickly to the upper deck.

Chapter End Notes

Kay will be fine....I say this because you looked worried. He did not blow himself up at this time.
More clothes! But they all mean something.

Yes, somehow Kanata is dispensing wisdom, contraceptives and candy. Because every ship needs all these things.

The giving of rings to mark betrothal or as a wedding token was a tradition that went back to the Romans and was still a common, if not universal practice in most European countries among those who could afford them. The fashion in the 17th and 18th centuries was for exchanging various types of "poesy" rings, that is rings with engraved messages, literary quotes were popular too.

I have been dealing with moving and not being able to post chapters of anything for three days is nearly killing me. Computer back up and running. Hopefully you are all still out there wading through this lunacy.
Wounds of War

Chapter Summary

Captain Andor, accompanied by Captain Solo, Mr. s Cor and Basteren and the sailor Luc, move swiftly to determine the fate of Mr. Kay and the cabin boy Arthur after the accidental detonation of the explosive material taken from the indigo plantation. In an episode not for the faint of heart, Mr. Kay in his offices as ships surgeon, is compelled to perform surgery under less than optimal conditions. Captain Andor suffers pangs of sympathy as his eccentric friend wrestles with self-blame with regards to the painful incident.

In the aftermath the departure of the Rogue from Nassau must be carefully managed. Captain Andor has a frank conversation with Captain Solo, at least to the extent that it is possible for anyone to have a frank conversation with Captain Solo, and makes an offer to that gentleman. Upon returning to the Rogue he is reunited with Miss Erso and reflects on the profound change this mission has wrought upon himself and others.

Chapter Notes

18th Cen. Surgery warning: Not detailed or gory....at least compared to most of the discussions of the subject I routinely get involved with but be warned.

If you've made it through the first 15 minutes of the Master and Commander movie you'll be fine. I steal shamelessly. Otherwise just skip a paragraph or two from the middle section.

Venez avec moi = Come with me! (French)

Es el color equivocado = It is the wrong color (Spanish)

Doux Jésus, aie pitié = Sweet Jesus have mercy. (French)

mi hermano = my brother (Spanish)

Nǐ dàibiǎo wǒ shuōhuà ma? = Do you speak for me? (Chinese)

Ik was het bijna vergeten. = I almost forgot. (Dutch)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
In the end an elaborate explanation had to be devised. Some unlikely fiction regarding a sizable wagon of gunpowder left hidden and unseen by pirates, or perhaps the French in the late wars, near to the old watchtowers on the far side of the barrier island and then accidentally ignited by a cabin boy who had wandered off bird-hunting.

Captain Cassian Andor despised elaborate explanations. They invariably became colorful stories and colorful stories were passed around by the garrulous and bored denizens of provincial seaports acquiring extra decoration and interest in eager and endless re-tellings. It was his professional experience that lies and deceptions worked best when kept as mundane and plebeian as possible.

That said, there were few ways to phlegmatically explain the massive explosion that had been heard by the whole port of Nassau and was later found to have left behind a crater visible at low tide in the sand of the barrier beach that remained twenty feet across and eight deep even after the action of the waves had diminished it. The smoke and water spout was seen by half the ships at anchor.

Only the preternaturally mild countenance of Captain Rostock, under his present guise of "Captain Stillwell", could have even hoped to drain such an unlikely tale of its preposterousness so Captain Andor left the deception wholly to that officer's experienced manufacture.

Upon reaching the decks he had immediately pulled off the fine coat and passed it to Mr. Melshi along with a brusque instruction to that gentleman to "take command." The shallop being already alongside he climbed down to it directly, calling for Cor and Basteran to accompany him. To his annoyed surprise Captain Solo followed directly behind.

"No sir," he snapped, "This is our business."

He found he had neither the temper, time, nor patience at present for this fool and his bravado.
"I carried that trinket here, Andor," the Dutchman insisted stubbornly, "and I mean to know what deviltry I hosted."

Miss Erso's many suggestions to knife the man and toss him overboard flashed through his mind but he mastered himself with difficulty.

Very well, the bastard was supposed to have a hand at fast sail.

"Get the canvas up and get us out then! To it!"

"Luc, Venez avec moi!" Solo called, and the youth fairly leaped the rail to reach the ladder.

At his order Mr. Basteran quickly recovered Mr. Kay's surgeons bag from his cabin and passed it down as he climbed into the boat. Captain Andor and Mr. Cor untied and pulled up anchor while Solo and the French boy swiftly put up the small sail.

"Captain Andor!" came a call from above and he looked up to see the green-silk clad form of Miss Jane Erso leaning over the rail to toss him down a grey haversack.

He did not need to look inside, from the feel and weight he knew at once what the bag contained. Several extra rolls of felt and linen bandage, and several small bottles, no doubt of spirits, all recovered additionally from Kay's cabin along with a rolled shape he recognized as his best long knife wrapped in oiled leather.

*He did not doubt Miss Erso already knew of the short blade concealed in his boot but she clearly still distrusted Solo to such the degree of feeling an additional weapon required. It was a strangely wifelike gesture, he supposed, if one's wife were a pirate.*

He had no more than the quickest glance of her as the item left her hands, for she then turned swift as a swallow away from the rail, vanishing behind the rest of the crew.

*She fled back to her cabin he knew, with a certainly that he might have marveled at had he been less pressed, to rid herself of the gown and don again her sailor's clothes in readiness for whatever this emergency might bring.*

They moved away from the brigantine and made for the main channel moving swiftly out toward the open water.
The winds they felt as they rounded the harbors mouth were already moving the column of smoke up and over the outer island.

Captain Andor had previously heard Mr. Kay outline his plan to set up on the seaward side of the harbor island, in order to be both well out of sight of the town and docks and to potentially measure the effects of wind on any smokes of vapors that might ensue should he succeed in igniting small amounts of the substance. But in the clear afternoon light there was no need to search for the placement of the disaster. Solo handled the rudder and Luc and Cor the ropes to move them swiftly along shore toward the place.

"What in the name of God?" muttered Mr. Cor, standing up in astonishment.

Cassian Andor had seen the white smoke of black powder constantly since boyhood, lying in thick haze over battlefields, twisting in ghost-like forms from single pistol shots fired in moonlight and in the mighty thrusting clouds hurled from cannon.

*Es el color equivocado,* he thought, feeling as a child for a moment in his confusion.

This smoke rose in a thick column, bending with the wind, that looked almost solid, like a tower of shredded dirty grey rag.

Upon the white sand of the beach and behind to a tumble of boulders that had marked the seawall of a long abandoned guard post he could see the little canvas canopy Kay generally set up to shield himself and his projects from the glare of sun and the small rowboat he and little Arthur had come round in lay pulled well up upon the shore nearby. As they came in toward shore the tall, unmistakable form of Mr. Timothy Kay could be see walking toward them from up the beach with the boy in his arms.

Even as he jumped from the boat to wade ashore, the surf swirling well above his knees, he could see that Kay’s yellow waistcoat and aprons were quite soaked with blood.

Young Arthur lay pale, eyes closed, in Kay’s arms. The large canvas coat was wrapped around the cabin boy and itself spattered with gore. As he drew near enough Captain Andor recognized at once the purpose of the sodden loop of cord and stick of wood that twisted it tight like a windlass above
what might have been the child’s elbow.

“Doux Jésus, aie pitié!” he heard Solo’s boy gasp, for the French sailor had imitated his action and was close behind.

“The arm cannot be saved,” his friend said, loudly yet calmly, as if to be heard over the roar of the surf was his only consideration, “his situation is quite dire yet if the bleeding is arrested soon and infection can be subsequently prevented in the limb and other wounds there is a possibility....”

“Kay!” Cassian said, reaching for the man’s arm, quite desperate to stop this speech... “Kay, must you do it here or should we take him back to the ship?”

The gentleman paused and looked down at the hand upon his arm, as if unsure of it’s purpose, then blinked his large eyes slowly.

“Timeliness would increase the likelihood of success....however....” he paused and looked back up the beach...*any other man would be profoundly shaken if not incapacitated by such a situation yet Cassian found even such momentary hesitation on Kay’s part most unnerving....* “my instruments are aboard the ship,” he said.

“I have them here sir,” Basteran, called out, moving toward them now through the surf with Kay’s bag above his head.

Solo and Cor were working the shallop-boat further up on the sand by means of the small anchor and rope.

“Mr. Basteren,” Captain Andor called in turn, “Get to the canopy and clear the worktable....carefully by God!...set up Mr. Kay’s instruments but do not touch them directly. Go!”

“Msr. Kay.” Young Ceil-Marchuer held out his arms “ Give him to me. I will carry him, sir. You must prepare yourself. “

To Captain Andor’s surprise his friend nodded, and carefully lowered the limp child into the French youth’s arms.

“Keep him as level as possible. It is essential that the tourniquet not be loosened or dislodged.”
Cassian assisted in the transfer, steadying the grievously wounded limb while Kay held Arthur’s head. Solo’s crewman was far stronger than his slim frame suggested, for he took the burden more lightly than Captain Andor would have thought and moved toward the little work camp behind Mr. Basteren.

As they followed to the waters’s edge Kay stripped off the bloody apron and shirt and laid them upon the sand. Stepping back into the surf he washed his arms and hands and splashed the seawater over his pale head.

“I have a clean shirt in the small trunk beneath the folding desk,” he said, as he returned to firmer sand. “Will you obtain it for me while I set up for the procedure?”

“I will fetch it,” the captain assured him.

*Cassian Andor was deeply concerned. It occurred to him that though Kay might appear little moved to any other eyes but his own, in all their long partnership, fraught with violence as it had often been, he had never seen his friend so shaken.*

“Kay…Tim.. are you injured?”

“I? No.” his friend looked at him more directly than was his custom, “I placed a portion of the material on a tripod some distance out into the shallows….with an enclosed oiled wick timed with the intention of….We were both to have remained behind the wall…and in what had seemed an over-abundance of caution…but I meant to observe the first ignition with the aid of a mirror in the event that…….” then shaking his head as if mortally confused, “….but the boy stood up and must have extended his arm beyond the edge of the wall and….Cassian..Cassian, why would he have done such a thing?”

*Because he is a boy of ten…. perhaps he was curious, perhaps his hat flew off and he reached for it without thinking….any one of a thousand boyish reasons.*

“It was an accident, Kay.”

“Not wholly,” the man said, his bland expression un-altered but his posture tense with what Cassian recognized as pain. “This is a terrible weapon, truly terrible…” he continued, shaking his dripping head, “But I clearly underestimated the force and did not account sufficiently for variables. Part of the fault is mine, that conclusion is…..unarguable.”
Kay turned away from him and strode swiftly up toward the rough shelter then and Cassian Andor followed.

For all the years of their acquaintance he had envied his friends armored spirit. If Kay were, as he sometimes seemed to be, immune to much experience of human companionship and affection, triumph and joy, at least he was spared regret and the shame of guilt.

*Welcome to the sinful world mi hermano. I am so sorry.*

By the mercy of God, Arthur remained largely unconscious through most of the proceedings, though Kay assigned Mr. Basteren, Captain Andor and Captain Solo to the tasks of restraint against those involuntary movements and spasms that ensued.

The procedure went as swiftly and cleanly as Captain Andor had ever seen it accomplished. Mr. Kay’s skill was exceptional.

Young Luc Ceil-Marchuer acted as assistant, and he could not fail to find himself impressed with the sailor’s self-possession.

Mr. Cor, through no stranger to the cruel injuries attendant to explosions was assigned to the simultaneous task of assembling Kay’s notes and equipment and well surveying the damages for whatever clues could be gained. The alarmed officials of Nassau were no doubt on their way to investigate the site even now, though their survey would hopefully be misguided by Captain Rostock’s false representations. The gruesome and pitiful prospect of catching sight of the swift life-saving actions of a ships surgeon who had happened fortunately to be near the scene would delay the suspicious and curious citizens of Nassau only briefly if at all.

“She did well to include the bottles of spirits,” Mr. Kay intoned as he proceeded quickly with the work of suturing his young patient.

*Captain Andor did not bother to question who he meant by “she.”*

“I am aware of the controversy regarding what some criticize as over-scrupulous attention to cleanliness with regard to surgical instruments and procedures but I have always found the Turkish methods to be efficacious, or at least not detrimental. In the absence of boiled water I agree with the learned Mr. Bell that strong clear spirits may have a cleansing effect almost equal to that of good
Despite the serious nature of the task he assisted Cassian Andor could not help but be relieved. Kay was clearly returning to himself.

While young Arthur lay at rest, watched by Kay and Basteren, Captain Andor accompanied Captain Solo and his crewman down to the advancing edge of the tide to wash before assisting Mr. Cor in concealing all the remaining equipment not required for Arthur’s care into their small boat.

“Is that your surgeon’s customary style of address?” Solo asked, rolling down his sleeves.

“Yes,” Andor replied.

“Thank God. Being mad would not, of itself I suppose, preclude a man from performing a successful surgery but it seems more hopeful if the condition is habitual rather than sudden.”

Captain Andor ignored the smuggler, and cast his eye instead on the rising waters churning in what looked to be a deep trench newly scoured in the shallow beach. The surf tore away at the smoke blackened sand but even Rostok’s stolid fictions and the scouring mercy of the sea would not wholly hide the evidence of some unnatural event here. The Rogue must sail as swiftly as could be arranged without fanning the already smoldering tow of suspicion.

Four small boats could already be seen coming around up the coast out from Nassau port. Two clearly transported authorities of the town, he could spot the glint of sun off their brocade. One at least was manned by their own fellows, recognizable as one of the several other small shore boats carried by the Rogue.

Captain Andor folded the damp and likely ruined black waistcoat over his arm as he watched the boats advance and caught sight of Seaman Maddel and Mr. Porkins as well as, remarkably, Mr.s Imway and Malbus.

The weather being mild it was suggested that Arthur would be best left unmoved for as long as possible until the danger of shock was past, then carried carefully back, hopefully to recover, back aboard the ship or in town.

Unable to do more for the child, Kay gave extensive and careful instructions to those who would carry the boy by stretcher up to a less exposed portion nearer the harbor’s mouth and remain with him. It was agreed that Casrich and the others would remain with him until morning at least.
Whether the boy would live or die was a matter only days or weeks would reveal.

“We will rejoin you before you depart, but there is no need for either of us to attend your discussions of strategy, Captain,” Mr. Imway told Andor, as Maddel and Porkins placed tents up and set a fire to prepare for their night’s watch with their wounded young comrade. “We know where we must go and how we get there is of no matter.”

“Nǐ dàibiǎo wǒ shuōhuà ma?” Malbus queried from behind them where he worked at unloading.

“No, brave heart, I only speak the truth as I know it,” said the blind man with a knowing smile.

Malbus grunted and rolled an eye but only sat himself at the wounded child’s side like a protective lion and said no more.

Hands were shaken all around.

Chirrut Imway did not release young Luc Ceil-Marchuer’s hand at once but turned it over in his own as if, though sightless, he read the palm in an oracle’s fashion.

“What is your name, young man?” he asked.

“Luc, if you please Frère,” the sailor said with properly Catholic humility.

They sailed out then, back into the harbor before darkness fell utterly. Six men in a small shallop along with such gear might have made for tight quarters even had one of the men not been Mr. Kay but Solo’s skill clearly was sufficient to the challenge of a loaded boat in poor light. Kay sat in shirtsleeves up near to the mast, silent. Captain Andor positioned himself near to the rudder by Captain Solo.

“Your pay, in accordance with our renegotiation, waits for you aboard my ship," he said, "in Spanish real as agreed.”

Solo, gave a short laugh. “Ik was het bijna vergeten….a first for me, I’ll grant you. Good then. I can pay off the crew and have a good laying-out suit fitted for myself in Nassau town. These English merchants in the provinces pride themselves on their clothes.”

“Where will your crew go?” Captain Andor inquired conversationally.

“They will go where they can and will. Khaeuri will stay with me, poor heathen, at least through the arrangement of my remains. He has been instructed on all the particulars of my funeral…and a fine
show it will be. It is too bad you will miss it but I expect you will be elsewhere by then arranging your own.”

Andor shrugged, “All who live must die and few have any say in how or when. The best any man can hope for is some chance to affect what he dies for.”

“Spoken like a missionary of the Alliance faith,” Solo sneered, “and here I had come to think there might be a mortal man beneath that priestly garb.”

“If you think any of us, myself especially, angels you are a fool, sir,” Cassian retorted sharply. 

_Damn! Tired as he was he had let the bastard get under his skin._

The Dutchman’s smile was visible even in the shadow, clearly pleased with his hit.

“Come Andor, forgive me, some men grow glib beneath the gallows,” _No doubt that smile had served him as apology for many times in many places, although Andor suspected that even Solo held little faith in it's efficacy anymore, it was mere reflex._ "Whatever we may think of each other sir, I respect you as a fellow veteran of the Fall from Eden and I hope you will do me the same courtesy."

He lifted his chin toward the bow where the French youth held the lantern. “Make your offers. Luc is as good a lad as I have ever seen take a rope for all that we seem to have plucked him from a basket of apples at Marseilles. He looks for a place for his heart to work as well as his hand, I think. The Leonitus children have fled one army and may desire to put their soldierly virtues to some better cause than the riches of kings. One of them is now a girl sometimes, or so it appears, but that will not bother your more sensible recruiters. Sabe might be a harder sale but that rough-handed auntie carries at least as many secrets as any of you wrapped in those scraps of fine silk, can read and no doubt write in at least six languages though she thinks I do not know it, and could put a dagger between even your skilled ribs I’d wager, were you careless enough to cross her purposes.”

“No recruiter, could give a better report Captain Solo. Thank you.”

Andor came to a conclusion then on a matter that he had passed back and forth in his mind since Kingston. “May I ask about your own plans sir, beyond the advance order of the refreshments for your wake?”
When they reached the Rogue the moon was up.

The first hand that reached down to help him aboard up the ladder was hers.

Captain Rostok and the crew generally were informed of Arthur’s condition and it was arranged that a conference of the officers would convene after the dawn watch.

Solo and took his money and agreed to go back to his own ship to consider the Alliance's offer.

Captain Andor undressed and washed as he could in the confines of his cabin, surprised at the ache in his shoulders, then lay upon his bunk in the dark listening through the murmur of wind and sea and the endless creak of board and rigging for other sounds.

The sound of the scraping of Kay’s chair upon the boards could be heard even across the cabin. His friends lamp had been lit as soon as the door had closed. Kay would spend the night going over his notes and cleaning and drying his surgeon’s tools.

At last, hard upon the bell came the soft and now familiar sound of bare feet at his door and the turning of a handle to open and close again.

“You should rest,” she whispered as she slipped into his arms like mercy and relief.

It seemed as if she were unaware of the contrary nature of her words with regard to her actions.

“This is rest,” he whispered in turn against her forehead, her lips.

As he moved her hands with his own he felt the ring upon her finger.

*Live or die, Kay my old friend, we will neither of us end this journey the men we began it.*

*It was only later, before dawn when Miss Erso tiptoed away to the other cabin as Captain Andor lay*
awake for a few moments to gather his thoughts for the day which lay ahead that it came to him to wonder how young Ceil-Marchuer had known that the exotic Imway, dressed as he was in sailor’s garb, had been a monk.

Chapter End Notes

Yes I’m sorry. I had Kay amputate a cabin boy's arm. Did I mention Master and Commander? After all this is the Star Wars saga. People lose arms all over.

As I have stated before with tearful and heartfelt apology my sailing terminology is limited and probably 70% wrong, but in this case "shallop" would refer to a small open boat propelled by oars or sails and used chiefly in shallow waters and sometimes carried aboard larger craft in two pieces and used as landing craft or tenders.
Chapter Summary

In which Acting Governor of British East Florida Mr. James Moultrie, who is not in fact that gentleman at all, considers his orders regarding the dangerous situation at the New Smyrna plantation. Gathering information from his agents he prepares to assist Captain Andor's mission.

Chapter Notes

Gesù Cristo in armatura! = Jesus Christ in armor. (Italian)

Que se celebrará por la mano o el representante aceptado del Sr. Galen Erso = To be held for the hand or accepted representative of Mr. Galen Erso" (Spanish)

O perché così sorpreso vecchio? Pensavi che non sarei venuto? = Oh why so surprised old man. Did you think I would not come?" (Italian)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Residence of the Governor of the British Colony of East Florida

King Street
Port of Saint Augustine

January 8, 1770

It must have been some half past the tenth hour of night he judged, even without sight of his watch, for he had stood out upon the landing since just after the bell tolled in the eternally unfinished Basilica across the plaza. It was the quietest hour he had spent in a day filled to the very brim with tasks both public and discreet.

Acting Governor John Moultrie gratefully took the hour to stand with his own thoughts on the dark walkway above the courtyard of the former “Casa del gobierno,” and set his gaze west toward the water. The white moon shone down from a clear sky to scatter shards of flickering sliver across the dark water of the Inlet and beyond that upon the black sea herself.
Even from this shielded landing it was a fair view.

By government mandate, the fabled "Law of the Indies," in each port city of New Spain the mansion of the highest Royal officer must perch at a proscribed angle to the plaza below, open to view of and from the sea. Each of the government offices was also by ordained plan laid around the open park and placed at a pleasing and optimal distance determined to maximize air and light, diminish noise of the marketplace, facilitate commerce and increase the ineffable sense of Spain's wisdom, rationality and most importantly power.

It strove for the additional virtue of humbling the non-Iberian mind, he considered, and making other cities feel rather untidily haphazard.

*Leave it to Spain to find a way to make even beauty slightly oppressive.....Ah well, the breeze was pleasant.*

The city of St. Augustine lay mostly shrouded in darkness to his leftward view, as did the ships moored at the inlet upon his right. Only a small gleam of candle here and there showed some scribbling secretary at work upon an upper story in the offices beyond, or some lamp of a sailor or watchman at work in the town streets or on the docks.

*Behind his back, within the well lit upper floors of the house servants were still awake and awork. Amidst the sound of moving crates and furniture, his housekeeper Mrs. Jita could be heard swearing heartily as she went over the house lists and accounts for the fortieth time.*

"Amilyn!" he could hear her shout, "There are supposed to be twenty-four silver plates here... twenty-bloody-four! Count again!"

Poor woman. His predecessor the Honorable James Grant, until lately governor of this British Colony of East Florida had, it seemed, reinforced his reputation as a particularly acquisitive fellow by relieving the house of anything that struck his fancy before his removal back to England. Apparently his fancy had included everything from bed-hangings, and silver plate to the pressed brass handles of numerous linen chests.

This petty theft amused rather than troubled the new Governor. He had more pressing worries with regard to his new-won station.

*Chiefly, how much time did he have to take advantage of it?*

The false identity of “Dr. James Moultrie”, physician to the corpulent previous Governor Mr. James Grant had held water seamlessly these last three years and now proved successful well beyond the Alliance’s short term expectations. Governor Grant’s intemperances had rendered the tinctures that facsimiled the ravages of gout successful months earlier than predicted, precipitating a voluntary removal by that gentleman back to his beloved England and placing his former doctor at a temporary pinnacle of authority. Though it was only a matter of time before London dispatched another official events in the Americas were in such political tumult that he might well be able to remain covert in the position for a year, perhaps even two.

Yet this success might have come too soon, for now the situation in East Florida had grown so suddenly fraught that he could have wished the old libertine to have held on a few weeks longer. As the newly installed Governor Moultrie could hardly move about unnoticed much less leave the city
without drawing comment. To rectify this situation and enable him greater freedom of movement he had sent for his brother, last known to have been still in the Carolinas, but there was no way to know if "Thomas" had even received the message yet. He might arrive within a day or two or not yet for a month.

Events were moving more swiftly than communications could serve and without the aid of his double he was held as firmly as if chained.

Weeks ago a fast sloop marked by the Alliance had appeared at the harbor sent from England with messages ordering him to gather whatever information could be obtained regarding the secretive New Smyrna venture and hold it. Though uninformed of his “promotion,” the Council instructed him nevertheless to provide all necessary aid to an identified Alliance officer who would appear sometime between the end of December and Twelfth Night.

Tarkin’s venture on the coast was more dangerous than previously conjectured, far more dangerous.

Much to the new Governor’s annoyance the saucy captain of the sloop had refused to wait even a day for him to ready another ship to accompany him but headed straight out to carry further orders to operatives set to arrive in Jamaica.

Even as he considered whether his position was concealed enough to allow the indulgence of a pipe, the Acting Governor of East Florida became aware of a movement on the darkened stairway to his right.

His guard had been positioned as in the courtyard below, but “Dr. Moultrie’”s hand moved by reflex to the sword at his side.

Mr. Highsinger, his secretary, appeared at the top of the stair with a lantern in hand, which was quickly doused upon the Governor’s nod of recognition and replacement of his blade. A figure then stepped from the shadow behind and threw back the hood of a light cloak.

Through the figure was dressed in the breeches, jacket and shirt of British Naval pilot, the Governor recognized the visitor as a woman well known to him.

“What is it Bay?” the Governor asked, “Where is Casrich?”

“The Lieutenant comes as soon as he may change ships and coats,” the pilot said. “He sent me up alone in the single masted sloop to report urgently. Upon departing the plantation at the Mosquito we encountered an enemy frigate off the coast. Rather than risk being seen he sent the Lady Tantive down toward the southern coastal settlements as a decoy.”

The young pilot handed him a document case. The papers within were sealed with the mark of the Crown. Further concealed within the false lining of the case he knew who expect another thinner sheet, this one sealed with the mark of the Starbird.
Bay was sharp, quick, dark of eye, and a bolder sailor than he had seldom seen, despite her years and sex.

Therefore the faint tremor in the hand that passed him the leather pouch….upon the word “frigate”….struck him at once. The night was not cold to cause such trembling, however brief.

Casrich’s mission was well-disguised, and his movements unquestionable. Why such caution with regard to being seen?

“What enemy frigate you say? What colors does she fly? Is the ship known to us?”

Even in the poor light it seemed to him the girl paled, but after an instants hesitation gathered herself to answer firmly, “Aye sir. She flew British colors but Captain Dreis identified her as the Devastador.”

Gesù Cristo in armatura…Vader? Here? What the hell was happening at that indigo plantation?

“Are you certain you passed them unseen?” he asked and was treated the confident flash of a smile that belied the careful humility of the voice that answered.

“Aye sir, I do earnestly believe I did.”

God, he felt old….something he had in all honesty never thought to experience.

“Good,” he said, “you are dismissed then. Find your husband, he is still at the house on Aviles Street. Take what time you can but tell him I will send him to Fort Mantazas tomorrow night.”

Naval Officer Shara Bay saluted and turned to depart with a swiftness just this side of insubordination.

The new Governor then returned within doors. First dismissing his secretary and then as he passed through the public rooms ordering Mrs. Jita and the exhausted servants to bed as if by Royal decree….which, it occurred to him he now had some actual authority to do.

At the mahogany desk in his private apartments he lit three candles and, sitting back in the well-made chair, drew from a drawer the older message in cypher that the abrasive Captain Han Solo had brought him a fortnight before, unfolding it to lie beside the new missives and maps that Bay had brought from Casrich outlining the horrors newly observed at New Syrmna.

He re-read the older letter first.

September 6, 1769

Captain Fetta.
Tarkin’s venture in East Florida has proved neither a moneymaking venture, nor base for movement for or against the interests of Spain or England. It is confirmed now to be a manufactory for a weapon of extreme hazard. If possible obtain additional information through Grant but do not risk exposure. If you or your agents have opportunity reconnoiter but approach the plantation only with extreme caution. If in doubt forbear. A mission is being sent commanded by Captain Cassian Andor. He will contact agents in Kingston for late orders and may move to you directly or by messenger. Andor is commissioned to act on his own authority in this matter but should he fail to arrive or contact you by January 30, remove your people directly to Fort Carolyn and wait for further orders. This venture supersedes all others.

Mr. David Draven
Tavin Park.

Below sat an elegant signature and a seal in gold wax.

Sanctioned by the Authority of the Alliance Council
Lady Mary Monmouth

Cassian Andor was known to him slightly. An almost unnaturally self-possessed young man, skilled spy and assassin of last resort….the sort of weapon one drew when one’s back was well and truly pressed to the wall.

Cristo….. “This venture supersedes all others.” Those words struck him most forcefully for Mr. Draven he knew to be a cool fellow, not given to hyperbole.

Fetta was here being ordered to potentially abandon a mission eight years in the building.

He had at once upon the receipt of these orders dispatched an "envoy" to the coastal settlements, an action that would be fully expected of a new Governor. Given the British devotion to both endless documentation and clerical order in the transfer of powers no better cover occasion to surveil the secretive plantation was likely to present itself. Casrich was an astute and likely young agent with a face other men promptly forgot after seeing it, a priceless virtue.

A day before he’d dispatched the Lady Tantive however another message arrived at the town docks by way of a small fishing packet from the Bahamas. A boy aboard had gone directly to Aviles Street and delivered a letter personally in to the hand of Mr. Kesare Dameron. He knew this only because Dameron had brought it to him. The young merchant was one of the few Spanish householders to remain in the city after it’s trade to the British. The Crown authorities credulous belief in the transformative power of a rote renunciation of the Catholic faith and a Protestant "baptism" enabled the man his freedom and acceptance as a citizen of the re-nationed colony. Grant had been so impressed with the strapping fellow as to recommend him as a trusted British sympathizer.

Spain of course believed the young man to still be their agent. In truth Kesare Dameron had served as a soldier of the Alliance since his boyhood in the hills of Puerto Rico.

"Que se celebrará por la mano o el representante aceptado del Sr. Galen Erso" could be read upon the outer envelope. Within lay another smaller note, sealed and inscribed in a woman’s hand.

"What does it say?" he had asked Mr. Dameron, but young Spaniard's eyes had only widened.
"I have not read it sir," he said with utter straightforwardness. "It is sealed."

_Bless the boy. How had he lived this long?_

With a cynical sigh, Acting Governor James Moultrie, known once as Mr. Rex Fetta, carefully opened the note and read the small neat lettering that conveyed a daughters fierce and desperate message of redemption to her lost father.

_Surely this did not follow as some feint of a famously careful agent. What was Andor up to? Why had he passed such a dangerous object on without alteration or instruction?_

Instinct told him to burn it. Wisdom told him to keep it safe at the fort until Andor's arrival or until some other information appeared to clarify its purpose.

Instead, for reasons he could not articulate even to himself, he dismissed the sturdy, brave and shocked Mr. Dameron, resealed the small note and took the paper down to where the Lady Tantive made ready to sail. Placing the missive in Lt. Casrich's hand he instructed the young officer, "Use your own discretion, if you see the man and deem the situation secure, pass it on. If not, return with it. If compromised destroy it at once."

_Had he done wrongly? God forgive him he could not say._

Mr. Galen Erso's name had appeared only once or twice in the patently false records of budgetary reports pertaining to the New Symrna Colony but never in conjunction with Tarkin's. The mention of a Turkish messenger gave the letter credence and corresponded most exactly to the rumors of cruel execution of the escapees from the plantation over the years, such as would birth the notion that the people held therein might seek aid through desperate means. Even the mention of the death of Gerrere rang true for smugglers detained at Bridgetown most recently had been reported wearing black armbands as if in mourning.

_Yet all these rationalizations came to him later. It was emotion that made him place Miss Jane Erso's letter in the Lieutenant's hand._

Now it seemed that even the wooden young Casrich's heart had been moved, for amidst the details regarding the condition of the plantation ("we were not allowed further back than the waterfront camp but indications are of a vast expansion inland even to the Duncan allotments and more") the workers seen ("half-starved wretches") and unseen ("...even so assuming, surely no more than 600 of the Mediterraneans remaining...of the Africans tragically nearly all missing and likely dead....") the lists of guards and musket estimated, schooners at anchor, tonnage of material that might or might not be indigo packed and warehoused for shipment, came his recounting of a risk taken.

"Being painfully unable to do more and fearing under the circumstances to press, for this Krennik seemed a man both cruel and observant to any unexpected action we made ready to depart. I took it upon my own authority to pass the letter you had given me to Mr. Galen Erso. I must admit that I was moved largely on impulse for tho' no opportunity presented to speak with the gentleman privately his demeanor and condition as well as the manner with which Director Krennik seemed to address him made me feel assured that he was more prisoner than participant. I am certain that my action was unseen but can only pray that I have not given the enemy warning by so doing." Casrich ended his mostly dispassionate report with an almost plaintive question to himself as his commander, "I hope I did right sir?"
What have we in the Alliance but hope? Fetta thought. And if we cease to believe in it, or forbear to share it with the desperate has the Darkness not already descended? What do we become then?

The Governor remained reading and pouring over maps for some hours longer, then said his prayers and lay down upon the well-curtained bed only half-undressed as remained his soldiers habit when unwatched and uncompanied.

Upon awakening with the early light of dawn he sensed at once that he was not alone in the room and reached by reflex for the concealed knife, then quickly stopped his hand. The shape of the shadowed figure resting in the chair by the gauze-curtained window as not one that he could mistake.

Once there had been three of them, now there were only two, but when a man does not recognize his own face then he is truly lost.

"Codomo," he said, more moved than he had thought to be.

"O perché così sorpreso vecchio?" his brother laughed, as gruff as ever, "Pensavi che non sarei venuto?"

Chapter End Notes

Rex and Cody because.....clones! Also, despite my fudging his dates Dr. James Moultrie, Acting Governor of East Florida had five brothers.....not quintts, nobody would have survived that in the 18th cen. So I had to go with triplets, which was rare enough.....and my, they all seemed to turn up in all sorts of places and all sorts of military action on all different sides of the wars.

A small handful of Spanish merchants did remain in St Augustine under British rule, in order to manage business and real estate issues. The British permitted it on the condition that the men converted to Protestantism....the Seven Years wars, F&I, and far southern and northern portions of the American Revolution were religious wars to a degree largely forgotten now.....the Spaniard's attitude was pretty much, "ok, sure, like I care which side of the communion wafer you people are buttering, I'll take it for the team" and the heart-broken families of Spanish St Augustine kept in touch with the men for news and many even secretly left copies of their house keys with them in the hopes that someday they would be able to return to their homes.
The Cathedral Basilica of St Augustine was "under construction" from 1583 to 1793 and burned down with regularity. The Spanish government micromanaged the layout and town planning of its settlements in New Spain to a ridiculous degree in the "Leyes de Indias"
Chapter Summary

In which Captain Cassian Andor, having taken the ship and crew of the Valkerie van Duizend into the service of the Alliance leads a party to explore the entrance of the Matanzas Inlet whose defenses may help or hinder their plan to access the Tarkin plantation from the inland waters. He speaks with the young French sailor Luc and considers the nature of the contract he has made with Miss Erso.

Chapter Notes

¡Ante Dios! ¿Hubo alguna vez tal mujer? = Before God! Was there ever such a woman?
Todo el camino = the whole of the way. (Spanish)

Kati te whakakake. Korero ki te wahine kamakama mo nga tinana. = Stop being proud/boasting. Tell the clever/knowledgable woman about the bodies. (Maori)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The boy Luc stood at the bow as they brought the sloop up the inlet north against the current on the Greater Matanzas. Having so far hugged the shore of Anastasia Island in the dying light of afternoon they now trusted the cunning sails of the Falcon to bring them quick across. The plan had been to come up within reach of the little channel island fort that guarded the narrow passage while the light was dim enough for some concealment but not yet so dark as to risk grounding them.

The French youth frowned as if considering something, “The name.. “Matanzas” …it means “le
“No,” Captain Andor said leaning against the rail with a spyglass in hand, his eye upon the shore, “Cela signifie des massacres. “La Matanzas” meaning slaughters, killings, the shedding of blood.”

A distressed look crossed the boys face.

“Pourquoi…” he asked then shook his head, determined to work on his English, and amended the inquiry, “Why?”

Cassian Andor suppressed a smile, remembering another boy…not much younger than this one…struggling to master languages in the midst of events that required them. Best not to tell him that this little channel island itself was marked "el crótalo," or "Rattlesnake" on some charts.

“The event commemorated was not a recent one,” the captain answered with a shrug. “Some two hundred years ago, in the days when the Americas poured gold like a proper fountain up the great current yonder, Spain and France both contended for this section of the coast, the one for defense of that mighty stream and the other as a base to siphon a share from it. In the midst of their bloody contention it is said that a Spanish commander, one Menéndez de Avilés, came upon a band of French sailors and colonists whose ships had been beached and broken by a mighty storm. In the businesslike fashion of the times he accepted their surrender with full ceremony and then murdered them to a man and hung their corpses in the trees.”

Ciel-Marcheur raised an eyebrow, boy enough to resent Captain Andor’s test of him with such tale, man enough to half-reason the officer’s purpose in telling it.

*Good.*

For all the youth’s unguarded expression and rural accent, his nerve seemed firm enough. He must be harder than he looked at any rate, it being most unlikely that a mere sense of adventure had sent him to sea. Even had the tragedies of the Bishops Wars somehow spared whatever part of …Auvergne? the Monts du Cantal? …the youth came from, he had no doubt seen corpses aplenty venturing the West Indies for a year in Solo’s company. Moreover Kay had drafted him as apprentice surgeon without hesitation and though Kay was a poor judge of human frailty in many capacities he was seldom wrong in his assessment of a steady hand.

*All this of course lay aside the mystery of the court-bred lady. She whose weather-beaten hands now braided scraps of orange silk that must have once cost the worth of a racing stallion into Pyreneean knots and watched over a French Alpine farm boy like a broody hen while casting Andor as the hawk.*

“Aye Luc,” Captain Solo ventured as he moved forward, having yielded his place at the tiller to Rook and Khaeuri, “And that charming antique fable presents a moral to warn all Frenchmen against placing trust in Spaniards.”

Captain Andor let the jibe pass like a breeze.
“Two hundred years is a long time to bear any grudge and like most orphans of the Americas, I cannot venture to guess whether the majority of my forefathers tied the ropes or hung from them.” Spying the shallow sand bar he sought the captain closed up the glass, “Both, I expect, but I can answer in God’s present daylight only for myself and assure you that should the men of Carlos III find me under any of a half dozen names I would dangle of a certainty.”

And that was as much of the precious truth as Cassian Andor intended to barter for a Dutchman’s usefulness and a French youth’s promise.

He pointed to the shallow landing bar, just visible as the river’s tide reached it’s lowest point. “There,” he said, handing the glass to Solo, “Bring us up there and we can make our way to the Fort on foot across the beach.”

The solid white-washed stone of the small fortress, more of a watchtower in fact, stood on the grassy shore some half mile from them in the fading light, hard upon the channels inner shore.

“If it is your intention to go south as we did sir you had best hope that she is still unmanned.”

“You have stated again and again,” Jen spoke up from her seat near the mast, "that you marked the Fort as empty when you passed down from St. Augustine, Captain Solo, yet you have remained vague as to how you determined it's state.”

Once again in sailor’s garb with her chestnut hair bound in a scarf she had sat quietly enough until now.

At least she had stopped calling the man rude names.

The Rogues Venture lay at anchor outside the inlet, trim brig though she was she could not venture through these passages. Further, this reconnaissance required a smaller vessel and fewer hands set at risk. Much depended on the situation they found at the entrance to the inland waterways. Solo's account of his passage weeks ago here raised a question that must be answered.

So it was they brought had a crew of seven in on the borrowed Falcon:
Himself in tense but workable command.

Solo who alone had already mapped some part of their way and in any case would never have left his “mistress” in another man’s care.

Brave Mr. Rook, who would not forsake his quest so near its end and as a skilled pilot hoped to refresh his knowledge of the waters hereabouts directly from Solo’s maps and tutelage to further the next step of their venture.

The boy Luc was brought not only because his were the keen eyes had marked the message left in the form of the box of explosive but because, by Solo’s admission, it was he who had picked a course through the labyrinthine meanders and creeks of the Matanzas and the Halifax, now swollen by the winter rains, that had enabled them to work inland around the dreadful plantation.

Mr. Core who attended for reason of his technical skills and gunnery.

Lastly, Miss Erso, ostensibly for her knowledge of the nature of the swamps hereabout, having travelled the rivers further north with Commander Saul Gerrere’s band, though were the truth told, he would have had to tie her to the Rogue’s mast under guard to have prevented her company and that he could not do.

Up these waters lay his mission and sworn duty, but for her they led as well to revenge, which he did not grudge her, and a hope of redemption.

Moreover he had given her his word.

When he found Miss Erso in the gunroom armory of the Rogue, after his conclusion of arrangements of departure with Captain Solo, she had already chosen for herself a pistol, and an oiled pouch for cartridge, powder and flints. She had been trying the stored blades for a cutlass of length and weight suitable to her arm and upon finding one that satisfied her belted it in the scabbard low and a little front forward in the pirates fashion, with but a thin lace tying to her right thigh.

His time since that urgent conference of officers and principals upon their swift departure from Nassau had been taken up by argument with Mr. Kay, a confrontation with Solo’s crew-woman Sabe and numerous other arrangements. He had had no real occasion to speak with her privately before meeting her as she turned to face him below the open rack of weapons.

Perhaps that was why she addressed him plainly there, allowing no time for discussion or even admittance that such might be needed, only saying, “I require your word, sir.”

“Upon what?” he asked, knowing better than to prevaricate long when fixed with those fierce green
eyes.

“That there shall be no nonsense in this matter. I need your sworn oath here and now that every step you take toward this place, toward my father, I will go with you.”

“...a full partner in this endeavor and to be both apprised and held responsible as such...” Had he not told her weeks before, when he and the world were different? Miss Jane Erso but held him to his own words.

Ah, and she knew well what she asked for. Who else knew, if not all that he had done, at least all that he had become in order to do it? A liar foresworn ten thousand times over, a murderer and a betrayer of some in order to save yet others, a bastard boy become a grown assassin who had again and again walked away from that he wished to God he could forget in order to further the cause he believed in.

Of a sudden an off-hand line from some witty comedic play came to him with a laughable incongruity.

He had accompanied Lady Mary and Mr. Draven to a series of plays in at the Theatre Royal, Druy Lane in London, chiefly as go-between the Alliance and an Irish agent who was actor in the company, one Charles Macklin. He had seen little of the action on stage, the artificiality of theatricals always annoyed him in any case, but he had much admired the flow of the language as he stood in the darkened wings..... “When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.”

“What would you have me swear by, Miss Erso?” to some hearer off the stage the line might have sounded lightly spoken, but she knew better. She was ready.

“By lamps lit and unlit. By fire and dark nights. By letters lost still unread, painted charts torn to shreds and little girls without names. By false garments worn true.”

¡Ante Dios! ¿Hubo alguna vez tal mujer?

No quarter asked and none given.

They stood in privacy for a moment within the gunroom, though by doors open to the lower decks
on one side and the junior officers cabins on the other they could hear the movements of the crew.

*Second Gunner Timker was shouting out to Seaman Calfou and Kanata could be heard up the ladder arguing with Mr. Decks.*

Reaching a hand toward the collar of her sailor’s smock, his fingers displaced the plain linen and blue scarf to brush the skin beneath. It seemed to Captain Andor that her heart beat fast but even so she stood without moving, eyes fixed still upon his face, while he found the cord about her neck and lifted the little charm it bound.

The gold ring he had returned to her the day before lay threaded alongside her little wooden cross with its core of India stone.

*Captain Andor understood now the glance of keen pity that Captain Hera Syndalla had cast toward them in Kingston when she thought he did not see.*

*Did he have the strength to risk that she should die in front of him? He had not had enough in Portugal even before he knew he loved her.*

*Somehow he would have to find it now.*

“They have the strength to risk that she should die in front of him? He had not had enough in Portugal even before he knew he loved her.”

“A number of clues recommended themselves to even my untrained eye,” Solo answered, “No flag of any nation flew from the tower though dawn was well up. The morn was cold yet there was no smoke or light of fire visible from the Castillo’s little child-fort yonder. Those five six-pound cannon visible from the platform were not set forward to face the seaward channel and placed to cut apart any boat bold enough to attempt passage beneath them, as you can perceive they are now, but rolled haphazardly back….and then there were the alligators gathered on the near shore in argument about…”
“Kati te whakakake. Korero ki te wahine kamakama mo nga tinana,” called the Mate up from the stern.

“Who is telling this story, sir? You or myself? Captain Solo snarled, much offended.

“We stand but fourteen miles from the Castillo de San Marco and St. Augustine,” Captain Andor said. “A flag of distress flown from the walls here is easy visible from her walls. Even in times of expected calm in these waters a supply boat comes every three to four weeks. How well did it seem to you that those alligators were dining Captain Solo?”

“Two men, perhaps three, English to judge by the scarlet of the rags ….”

Mr. Core spoke up, “This defense must be manned by six to eight at all times to serve it's purpose, such cannon in that arrangement being impossible to manage otherwise.”

The red, white and blue of the British flag flew now from the round corner tower in the last rays of sunlight. A thin stream of smoke rose from the topmost platform. Fort Matanzas was manned and not, it seemed, by the ghosts of long forgotten betrayals. A figure in a scarlet coat could be seen on the platform raising a spyglass toward them.

A chance must be taken.

“Jen,” Captain Andor said, “Raise the colors.”

Luc tossed her a bag from the stern and Miss Erso climbed the single small mast swiftly and surely. From the top she loosed a flag of white on which a painted emblem in red portrayed a bird with wings spread wide. The breeze from the sea unfurled it plainly in the last gleam of daylight for but a moment before she pulled it down.

Up on the watchtower the darkening figure moved, perhaps to raise a hand and the English colors began to lower, then paused in their descent to raise slightly again…a signal of tribute….before being drawn down properly to mark the daylight's end.

Mr. Core lit one lantern for himself and young Luc lit another which he passed to Miss Erso when her feet reached the deck again.
The tide had receded sufficiently so that they would scarcely wet their boots in climbing ashore.

“Mr. Ciel-Marcheur, Mr. Rook, Khaeuri, stay with ship. If we have not returned by dawn get back to the Rogue and report to Mr. Melshi.”

*The cannibal Mate looked to Solo for confirmation of the order and upon the Dutchman’s nod secured the tiller and began to spread the tarps.*

“Who do you expect to meet?” Solo asked.

“We shall see.” Captain Andor said, and the four of them walked up the beach of that tiny island toward the tower.
Finally on the mend and ready to continue toward the end of this mad historical venture! Full speed through the outline!

Yes. I am also now throwing Shakespearian references into the mix because a.) I am crazy. and b.) if Jyn and Cassian do not suggest a badass battle-couple version of Beatrice and Benedict from "Much Ado About Nothing" I'll be a monkey's uncle.

("Empire Strikes Back"/"The Last Jedi" mashup with Hamlet anybody?)

Charles Macklin was indeed a mysterious Irish actor who helped David Garrick revive Shakespeare on the popular stage at the Drury Lane Theatre Royal in the 1760's...a pretty cool dude who may have lived to 107 depending on who you ask.
A Gathering Storm

Chapter Summary

A short chapter in which Sabé, former Handmaiden of the Queen of Portugal, and presently a sailor aboard the Falcon in Nassau Harbor, waits for Captains Andor and Solo, the sailor Luc and Mr. Cor to return from their investigations of the mysterious explosion and has an enigmatic discussion with Mr. Imway in which she finds some fellowship with the wandering monk. She considers with growing apprehension the changes in young Luc upon his return and his determination to join the forces of the Alliance. She also recalls with sorrow the circumstances of the boy's parents and reviews her memories especially of her last contact with his father.

Chapter Notes

Jǐngjiào bēi = The Stele of the Luminous Religion (simplified Chinese)
Lǎo shāguā = old fool (Chinese)

Ka hoki te rangatira = The captain/owner returns. (Maori)

Sus ojos no me vieron primero como un premio de la política. ¿Qué otro hombre puede verme así? = His eyes did not see me first as a prize for politics. What other man can see me like that? (Spanish)

Meninas = little girls
Senhora da Boa Estrela = Lady of the Good Star
Oh irmãs antes de mim, todos os anjos do céu = Oh sisters before me, all the angels of heaven (all Portuguese)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Upon the rolling sound of the explosion the brigantines crew had begun to scatter and move with admirable efficiency.

A odd thought had come to her then.

What sort of ship allots stations and drills of action set in advance to proceed from the random sounding of hellfire? This was an Aliança ship and crew, down to her very boards, it seemed, a fact they had made no attempt to conceal from the Falcon’s crew.

Luc and the Captain having gone out with the Spanish assassin and another man, the English- accented African gunner, in the little borrowed transit boat, the only options open to herself, Khaueri, Zaccarrie and Darian now were to swim to the Falcon alone or to wait here for their return.

“Zia Sabé,” Zaccarrie asked, for so they called her, “where should we go?”

Poor thing, he remained a soldier in his heart and longed for the comfort and order inherent in hierarchy. She understood the impulse though she had learned long ago to distrust it. By rights they should have asked Khaueri anyway as he was the more senior but none but save Solo could understand his speech.

As it was the heathen merely shrugged, a gesture Sabé recognized as his usual abdication of responsibility with regard to any mad act of Captain Solo’s.

Besides, had Solo not all but dismissed them? Did they not merely stand waiting for their pay? It was most confusing.

Her private impulse would have been to stand watch until Luc at least returned, but the deck was too crowded with activity in which they had no part.

Of a sudden, Sabé felt a hand laid upon her arm and turned to find a strange man at her side.

He has of good but not exceptional height, bare-headed with close-cropped black hair peppered with
grey, tanned and strong of jaw but with small features and a pleasant expression. Like most others around them his clothing was that of a common mariner being a short grey jacket with turn-back cuffs, a pair of wide linen breeches, a dark blue hempen shirt and red neck-tie.

“Honored lady,” the fellow said, “Come with me if you will. I will show you a place where you can wait for your friends.” Unable to fashion a better option she could only nod and the man led them surely up toward a place just past the foremast, a gap beside the bowsprit where they might at least sit upon some lashed bundles. He did this while dodging and weaving most confidently among his fellow crewmen and around various obstacles, all despite the silver caul that marred his eyes.

The man must be quite blind.

Sabé thought for the first time in long years of her own grandfather and how he had walked his flocks and dog in the hills above the Mondenego with utter surety in each step even after his sight had dimmed so that he could not tell day from night.

Darian and her brother wedged against the rail to speak quietly together in their country Italian, while Khaeuri leaned himself against the mast standing and looked out across the tide thoughtfully chewing on one of the several rolls he had pocketed at dinner, presumably to await like a pillar the return of his captain.

Seating herself upon a lashed roll of sail she was surprised when the blind man took care to seat himself beside her.

“Noble born,” he said gently, as if concerned not to offend, “What can you tell me of him?”

She felt then as if a hand touched her very heart. Not a cold sensation, as she had sometimes felt in dark days long ago but still an unwelcome one.

Who are you, blind man, and how did you come here? she wondered.

“I am by no measure noble born,” she said.

Best to let him know at once that he was not so clever as he thought he was. None of these tricksters ever were.

“I was a shepherd’s granddaughter and now I am but a sailor in a smuggler’s crew.”
The man smiled and nodded as if not disappointed but pleased. "I too have been many things. A woodcutter’s son who could find his way to the well only by means of a knotted rope his mother strung to help him measure the steps, a beggar boy, and a robed Guardian of the Temple of Jingjiao bēi, seeking to serve the Truth of God, to be one with the Universal Light because the Light within was the only one that would never desert him. Afterward, when the temple I served and all things and people I treasured save one burned to ash around me I found that rope again in my hand and, not unlike yourself I followed the path measured out for me, to this ship and this dreadful foreign shore. I am, faithful sister, the last of my kind save one as you are the last save one of yours but because we pass each other on the road and I seek comfort in the story of another’s hope, I ask you who is he and why does he seem like a bell about to be rung to mark a change of Watch, or a lamp waiting to be lit against some approaching night?"

Seek no comfort in my tale, foreigner, she thought.

"Are you a Jesuit?" she asked. "Do you serve the Orders or Rome?"

"No, no," the man laughed as if amused. "My order was ancient but it is only a memory now. The sage Jingjing brought its texts from Daqin, as the Empire of Rome was called then, though we parted ways of thought and doing with our brethren of the West so long ago that it seems they have all forgotten us, consumed as they have been in their own battles. Their skill is real and great but this seems to have strengthened a false belief that theirs was the one true path."

"Aye, you are right in that at least, woodcutter's child," Sabé said making no effort to conceal the bitterness in her voice. Why should she? If he understood so much already she would not diminish the sacrifice of her sisters by feigning, "Your blindness is nothing compared to theirs."

The strange man nodded, "Tell me only this then, shepherd’s granddaughter," he said, "Since we are both wanderers who will die far from the place we were born, is he your son? What is the darkness that searches for him and presses close even as we speak here?"

Who the Orders chose to mark as heretics had ceased to matter to her long ago. Sabé judged men by their deeds and so she answered him with as equal an honesty as he addressed her.

"I love him, but he is not my own child. He is the son of the bravest of women and a man who was offered the affection of a noble heart but became consumed by fear...perhaps of it's loss. Fear of loss turned in time to jealousy, defiling the free gift it claimed to treasure by treating love as a thing to be hoarded by greed and defended by cruelty and power. The pain of that self-caused defilement turned jealousy to anger and anger to hate."
The strange man closed his clouded eyes and bowed his head, as if in sorrow or prayer. “And Hate, in the end, always becomes a sword for the Devil’s hand,” he said.

“Then I have answered one of your questions and you have answered the second for yourself.”

The blind man reached a hand out gropingly to lay upon the mast and used it to help himself stand.

“I must leave you now,” he said, bowing, “my dear companion and I must help a child who lies grievously wounded on the shore. Perhaps we shall speak again honored lady or perhaps not for clouds gather as the storm builds,” he held out his hand palm up with the courtesy of a courtier. When she laid her fingers upon it he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it in a curiously European gesture. “I have known princesses and queens, great dowagers and ladies of wealth and rank to wear the silks of fair Suzhou but none, I assure you none to greater honor than you have done.”

Sabé heard a rough cough and looked up to see a swarthy bearded man standing by the rail with muscled arms folded.

“We are called to go. The little boat waits on you, Lǎo shǎguā, are you done flirting with the foreign women yet?”

The wandering monk laughed heartily at this and saying no more departed with his friend.

Other dinghies were being sent out to accompany the sloops of men from Nassau-town going to investigate the occurrence on the far beaches.

While Sabé sat considering these words she looked up to see that the twins at the bowsprit now sat against the rail, heads together, dozing. The children were clearly unused to the fine wines of the dinner. Khaeuri in turn stood stone-still after the fashion of an exotic figurehead, his back still against the mast.

If he had listened or understood any of her conversation with the blind man he gave no sign.

Hours passed and sun had settled very low when the Mate moved at last to point a finger curled and patterned with dark ink up toward the opening of the harbor.

“Ka hoki te rangatira,”

She went with him then to stand by the rail with others of the crew, for the watch on the mast had also called out that the captains were returning at last.
Five men came aboard looking badly shaken...*even that phlegmatic English giant which seemed most unsettling for reasons she could not put words to*...all with shirts damp with water and bloodstains only partly washed out.

The pirate maid had changed from that fine green gown to dress again in sailors blue jacket and breeches.

She waited for her lover and the Spanish officer reached for her hand with the look of a weary soldier returned to his sweetheart.

*It was an alarmingly open countenance for one clearly so practiced at deception.*

Solo, glanced to Sabé and Khaeuri as he climbed up, shaking his head. “A bad business,” he muttered as he followed the one who called himself Andor and his warrior angel toward the upper decks.

It was her prince who seemed most changed when he reached the top of the ladder. She had seen him in many moods both bright and dark over the last year at sea, lost and grieving in Marseilles, bone-weary aboard the Falcon on the crossing, angry in the inhuman ports of the Caribbean, frightened in the skirting of that dreadful plantation but this was a new expression to her.

It was a look of resolve, as of some considered adult determination newly set upon a young face.

*So many times she had looked and seen only his mother in his features but now as Khaeuri clapped a heavy companionable hand upon the boy’s shoulder and he nodded to her with a faint smile of reassurance...now for the first time Sabé saw his father. Only as a shadow, in the set of brow and jaw, yet the recognition made her blood run cold.*
The journey to Lisbon from Madrid had proved fraught with danger from all sides, Pombal’s men already had made arrangements to disrupt the wedding and thereby the treaty. Rome, then seeking both intelligence and evidence against Pombal and his allies had insisted upon assigning their own escort in the form of the renowned diplomat Bishop Kenobi and a “secretary” who would act as the Infanta’s confessor and translator. “Adalwen Himmelsläufer” the Bishop had introduced him, “my trusted brother and deacon.”

A tall blond youth, princely even in his simple clerical garb, had bowed before her lady.

“Addie?” the Infanta Mariana had cried in delight and the handsome cleric had flushed with a boy’s embarrassment as he stood.

*Only then had Sabéna recognized the name, for she would never have recognized the man.*

*Five years before when the Duke of Bourbon had sabotaged the attempted French treaty they had fled assassins in the mountains, dressing the Infanta in the gowns of a Handmaiden for safety while Sabé herself had put on the robes of the Infanta. They escaped ambush but found themselves cornered at the Abbey of Saint-Martin-du-Canigou and in desperation had sought aid from the Order.*

*That famous and respected warrior-ascetic Bishop Ginna arrived days later under pretense of a journey to the border to negotiate some trade dispute, Kenobi then a common priest had attended as his secretary and as their only servant they were accompanied by a ragged waif named “Addie” who spoke German and a little broken French and Latin. This angelic and sweet-mannered child had quickly become a pet of them all during the siege and the difficult journey of escape that followed but attached himself most firmly to “Pamela.” His slight stature and country bluntness made him at twelve seem so much younger than themselves, girls who had at fourteen already been trained and tried in combat and all the skills of court.*

*Oh how surprised the little boy had been when they reached Madrid and it was revealed that the “Princess” was in fact the Handmaiden and that his adored playfellow “Pamela” was the Royal Infanta of Spain.*

Now the former apprentice was attached to the Royal household as confessor and escort. The servant boy had grown now to a handsome and accomplished young man, bold, determined, clever and as keen a swordsman as any of them had ever seen.

*His was a rising star within the Order and set soon to move out of Kenobi’s indulgent shadow, it was said, being much favored by His Holiness.*

Yet he was still “Addie” to her lady, marked at first with the favor of a childhood friend but as one year passed and then another in that treacherous Lisbon where danger lay behind every corner and in the draining confinement that followed the arranged marriage....to an older man she respected but hardly knew..... he became more.
Having been wise and politic beyond her years since girlhood she stumbled now loving that boy more than reason, convinced that she could find a way to conceal their affair.

“Sus ojos no me vieron primero como un premio de la política,” she said simply, “¿Qué otro hombre puede verme así?”

He had adored her first as “Pamela” she believed and do we not all long to be loved for who we are within and not for the shape into which the knives of the world will carve us?

They were only Handmaidens. She was Princess and then Queen. Their duty was to defend her upon whatever path she followed.

Perhaps Queen Mariana deceived herself or, clever as she was perhaps she could truly have managed a way for them to be happy and together in some private way.

The King was though gone for months at a time fighting battles on the frontier, rumored to be an indulgent and practical man. Forced into a politic marriage himself he had spoken frankly and with some sympathy to his young bride in the days before and after the public ceremony. Rei Juan had his own "previous arrangements," and the Queen felt sure that he would countenance any plan that preserved the treaty with Spain and denied the Marquis de Pombal a chink in the royal armor.

Thus hopeful she retired to her private apartments in her favored monastery with her ladies for a period of "meditation and prayer" during another of the Kings long absences and prepared for the birth of her child.

What had happened? Where had the madness come from? Sabé had never known.

The Queen grew silent as her belly swelled. Sent them all away to weep in her chamber alone after secret visits and burned letters. Her beloved it seemed was not content with an "arrangement."

Nobles or priests, wizards or soldiers, some men it seemed must have all or nothing. Must destroy a treasure rather than share the smallest part of it.

However it came about, the Devil had found a sword in the heart of Father Adalwen.

Teckla fell alone defending their lady in the chamber that day as the rest of them were distracted by the melee at the doors.
When masked men in black stormed the apartments and they had at first taken them for Pombal’s men or Bourbon’s.

_How one had gurgled through his crushed windpipe. Raising a heavy blade to strike at Eirtaé, the assassin had not perceived that her turn was only a feint to set him in line for the blow from Sabé’s short pike._

_“Meninas,” he had coughed as he fell, eyes wide almost in surprise._

_Aye, devil, she had thought with satisfaction, “little girls” indeed._

But Pombal's men would have known better.

It was their first clue that the assault at the doors was only a distraction.

The pictures would never leave her.

_Her lady great with child crawling from the bloody chamber._

_Teckla dead inside the door, cut shoulder to heart._

_The once-handsome man his smoking black cloak thrown back now, bleeding from the wound brave Teckla had struck, face bleeding and armor and clothing slick with oil from the crystal lamp her Queen had broken across his face._

_Bishop Kenobi arriving too late, sword in hand, blade drawn against his former student, both men bellowing curses in Latin and other arcane tongues._

_Her sisters pulling the Queen to safety._

_The heavy wax candle and the arch of her arm as she flung it at the unrecognizable beast before her, once a boy she had called friend, whose tears she had dried with the hem of her apron._

_Kenobi’s face as he closed the door upon a shrieking man in flames and lifted the unconscious Queen to help them bear her swiftly away._
They hung in procession in her mind still and she walked them in her dreams like the stations of the cross in that village church at Tournemere.

When Solo finally returned it was with a heavy leather purse. By the aid of a lantern they returned to the Falcon in a little borrowed rowboat to count out their handsome wages in silver real and wait out the hours until dawn.

"Sabé," Luc said, as they sat on the deck under the moon. "They serve no nation or company, nor are they pirates. They call themselves the Alliance."

"Aye," she murmured quietly, "I have heard of them."

Excited he continued, "I love the sea but I hate so much of what I have seen since I left Tournemere, the way men and women are treated by those who seek money and what it buys, the injustice, the cruelty. Men make of God's most beautiful lands places of brutality and perhaps it is not in my power to change but I must try. I mean to go with them. At the very least to stand against the evil we saw on the Florida shore, and if I am spared to try further. I feel as if a storm is gathering around me and I must either run before or turn to stand and face it."

*Senhora da Boa Estrela, help me.*

"Oncle said that my mother was a girl of beauty and kindness who wanted me to grow up in a better life than she could give me and that my father was a brave soldier who went away to fight and did not return. It may sound foolish but I feel it has always been my fate to be a soldier too, but not for some king or captain's pride. I want to fight for what truly matters."

*Truth was said to make men free, according to the holy book, but what can the truth do for you my prince, except destroy you?*

“….the darkness that searches for him and presses close even as we speak here?” the blind man
had said.

Would the Alliance save him from it or drag him toward it?

“The Captain only drinks from his bottle of brandy and will not answer but Darian and Zachary say that they will sign on too,” he told her, "Your secrets are your own to keep dear Tante Sabé but I ask because you have been the best and wisest of teachers. I think you know what these people fight for and against and that they could use your help. Will you come with me? Will you at least stay to speak to Captain Andor?”

Oh irmãs antes de mim, todos os anjos do céu, help me.

"I cannot say now Luc, give me time to consider."

I will however most assuredly speak with your Captain Andor my prince, that I can promise you.
Historical fun and games: Look up “Nestorian Christianity in China” and the “Nestorian Stele/Stone” an artifact whose authenticity was discredited for a while and is now looking better based on current scholarship/archeology but real or not provides a keyhole on the spread of Persian-originating Nestorian Orthodox Christianity into China up the Silk Road during the 7th century as well as the crankiness of the Jesuit missionaries who found that they weren’t the first up the pike in the late 1500’s, (especially since they had pretty much decided that all the post-Byzantine versions of Orthodox Christianity were probably heresy by then) and were surprised by occasionally walking into Xinjiang, Quanzhou and other regions only to be greeted by isolated and odd Christian/Buddhist monastic communities with the equivalent of “Hey bro! Hows it going back in Daqin?”
Chapter Summary

In which Miss Erso accompanies Captain Andor and Captain Solo to investigate the British outpost called Fort Mantazas on the mouth of the inland waterways that may give them access to the plantation. There she makes the acquaintance of Cmdr. Rex Fetta, alias Acting Governor James Moultrie and learns that her father is yet living and that the letter she pressed Captain Andor to send at the commencement of their voyage has been placed in his hand. She is much moved by this news and she and Mr. Rook suffer pangs upon learning details of the situation at the plantation, plans are made based upon news provided by Cmdr. Fetta, Khaeuri gets dinner and Cmdr. Fetta gives Captain Andor some advice based on his own experience of loss.

Chapter Notes

A brief transitional chapter, housekeeping really. But some bits concerning Lady Mary, Jen’s letter and her recognition of how the voyage has changed her, clone angst and Solo realizing.....did I just join the Alliance? Holy hell I just joined the Alliance....that I wanted to save.

Emi ko mọ pe awọn ọkunrin le jẹ olọọ ni awọn akoko idanwo. = I did not know then that men could be faithful in time of trouble. (Yoruba)

E te tangata iti, ki te pa ano koe ki a au, ka wahia koe e ahau ano he rakau. = O little man, if you touch me I will break you like a tree. (Maori)

Dio ti protegga fratellino = God protect you little brother. (Italian)

Teşekkürler bayım = Thank you, sir = (Turkish)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
January 11, 1769

Fort Mantazas

some miles North upriver from the Mantazas Inlet

British East Florida

The flame of sunset set its color on the limed white of the walls as they approached from the shore.

The sheer incongruity of the construction, a stone fortress of unexpected solidity, perhaps 30 feet in height held in surround by walls near 50 feet wide struck the eye, for it lay upon an island that was little more than a shifting spit of sand piled high and lightly held by waving grass. It had the look of a battlement somehow fallen from the sky.

“Subtlety was never the aim of any fortress,” the old Gunner of the Onderean, “Two-Cannons” had been fond of saying.

Six guns. Five six pounders from the look of them and a larger weapon held back at center… Bless us, maybe an 18-pounder…even negligently manned from such position they could splinter any ship within sight. She wondered how often they had needed to since the days of her late Commander’s youthful assault up this river.

To be clearly seen to hold a gun was sometimes sufficient enough a weapon of intimidation as to render the firing of it unnecessary.

Captain Solo cast a worried glance back toward his sloop, tied up and anchored now in what must
surely be plain view from the cannon platforms above. He was far too skilled in his trade Miss Erso reckoned to deceive himself as to vulnerability of their position.

Mr. Baldwin Cor saw the tale as clearly mapped out as she.

"An impressive command of the passage," he said admiringly. "Any point of weakness has been well engineered against."

Jen spoke without thinking then, "My Olohri Saul Guerrere always said that the forts of Spain had but two weaknesses once their mortar dried, the hand of God and the venalities of Spaniards."

The short laugh behind her came not from Solo or Cor, but from Captain Andor.

"He was half wrong," her lover said, "the long and skillful application of blood and treasure have in the main protected them from God."

No door or staircase was visible from the sides of the fortress facing them but as they climbed the bank and approached the thick stone walls a long and sturdy ladder was lowered down from the platform above.

"Ladies first?" Captain Solo said.

_Before God she was going to kill this fool sooner or later._

"I will go first," Captain Andor said, "Miss Erso shall stand ready to climb up second on my signal but not before." Here he met her eye steadily, "Should I fail to signal within the first few moments or should anything else be perceived to go amiss get back to the Falcon by any course and Miss Erso will assume command of the venture thereafter."

_Damn you, sir._

With no more said he unbuttoned his coat, pinned it back to grant better access to the pistol in his belt and began to climb.

_She laid her hands upon the ladder and watched him go, holding tight to the sides with the effort of stilling her hand from reaching for her mother's round cross, as was her habit in prayer._

_Miss Jane Erso had known the sudden loss of love and friendship from childhood onward, had seen her mother fall at the order of the man in the white hat, endured her father's disappearance, Baba Saul's abandonment, cut her own conscience to the quick at Livorno and watched her enemies burn the last of her girlhood at Lisbon._

_All these shocks and more she had survived if some but barely, yet it came to her now as an absolute certainty that if this strange and unexpected man fell the last of her heart would die with him. Duty might drive her vengeful shade forward for a time, but it would be a hollow thing that would not last after its task was done._
I pray that you are right in your judgement of this, mi amor.

There were men at the top of the platform. Even in the growing shadow she could see hands reach toward him as he crossed from the ladder over the embrasure of the gun deck above.

She measured the seconds that passed by the beating of her heart.

One torch, and then another appeared at the top of the railing. Two others became visible on the tower's roof even further above.

"Come up it is safe!" Captain Andor's voice called down and Miss Erso's feet were in motion before his last word had finished.

One of the red coated officers escorted them up a narrow wooded stairway from the gun platform to an arched room of simple comfort. A curtained bed stood against the inner wall, lit lamps hung from hooks along the wall. In a hearth at one corner a small brazier held a few bright coals, while three carved wooden chairs and a simple bench sat beside a rough table upon which sat a bottle and several small clay cups.

Also laid upon the cloth was a battered document case of folded leather, tied with a red string.

A brocaded scarlet coat marked by cream-colored trim and gold brocade to indicate a captains rank lay as if carelessly tossed across the bed beside a black cockaded hat. Upon their entry to the chamber a broad-shouldered man in cream officer's waistcoat with white shirtsleeves rolled stood to greet them.

"Captain Andor," the man said extending a hand, "against all odds, we meet again."

"Commander Fetta," the captain said, touching his hat lightly in salute before taking the hand offered. "Or should I say, "Governor"? I understand from word at Nassau before we departed that congratulations are but lately in order."
"Proof that the perils of a venture that proceeds too well can render complications as perplexing as one that progresses to slowly," the man shrugged, "and so we adapt. It is a pleasure to have your company again so soon as well Captain Solo. May I take that your attachment to our fraternity of arms has changed?"

"It seems so Doctor Moultrie." Solo said. "Please forgive any confusion on my part though, I am but newly sworn to your band of fallen angels and the speed with which you fellows change wigs and names is still new custom to me."

The private who had brought them up, a sturdy strong-jawed fellow spoke then, casting Solo a suspicious eye, "You were most insistent some weeks ago sir that you served your own interests solely and sought treasure as your only recompense."

"Captain Solo," her lover answered coolly, "has now allied himself with our cause by sworn oath and under my command for the execution of our present mission."

Solo smiled his bold smile, "It has been presented to me Master....Dameron was it?..... that the straightest route out of Hell may run through Purgatory."

"As I recall Kesare, Captain Andor is well-known for his powers of persuasion." The man addressed as Commander Fetta said, taking his seat again and signaling by wave of his hand that the captain should avail himself of the other chair.

Captain Andor did so having first removed his hat and tossed it aside to sit beside the one that lay upon the bed.

"Since Captain Solo is already known to you sir, allow me to I present Mr. Baldwin Cor, our Master Gunner..." The seated commander tipped his head in acknowledgement, "and Miss Jane Erso. We have the honor here to stand before Commander Rex Fetta a senior agent of our Alliance and, at present and under another name it seems also Acting Governor of the British Colony of East Florida."

The man, heretofore informal if authoritative in his manner, changed suddenly upon the pronunciation of her name and sat forward to eye her shrewdly.

The private was less controlled and spoke as if startled, "Miss Jane Erso? The daughter of Mr. Galen Erso?"

A most strange sensation came over her, as if in her heart were a cabinet and some drawer within it were suddenly unlatched.
Yes, she thought, *That is who I am.*

"You know my father?" *Her voice sounded loud and strange to her own ears.* "You have seen him?"

"Mr. Cor," Captain Andor said, "if Commander Fetta approves, take two of his men from downstairs with you and return to the Falcon, bring Mr. Rook back here with you."

"If your ship is well anchored I suggest you bring all your men back here with you, at least until dawn."

"I dislike to leave the ship unwatched," Solo demurred, with the slightest twinge of obstinacy.

"Oh I assure you sir," Fetta said, "those who prowl this shore in dark of night are far more likely to dismember your men than your ship."

"Either the alligators hereabouts are more fierce than elsewhere or may I gather you refer to other enemies."

"Bring Khaeuri and the boy as well then," Captain Andor ordered and Mr. Cor departed with Private Dameron.

Jen barely noticed these exchanges so profound was her anxiety of mind. To hold still with her questions unanswered was almost painful to her.

"Sit down please Miss Erso, Captain Solo," Commander Fetta said, pouring out rations from the bottle, rum it seemed. The Dutchman found a place in one of the plainer chairs and took the spirits with a grateful hand.

"We have recent intelligence that pertains to your mission." The "Governor" said.

He withdrew a sheaf of papers from the case upon the table and slid them toward Captain Andor, who unfolding them began to read.

She herself remained standing. "What do you know of my father, sir? Is he yet alive?"

This Fetta's eyes were dark and his face, handsome still though his age must be near fifty, regarded her with something like curiosity and pity in equal measure.

"I cannot give any testimony of my own sight, but one of my trusted men saw him less than two weeks ago and though he could not speak with him directly took the chance of passing on your letter."

*Her letter?*

The one she had written at Cadiz. Months ago. A lifetime ago.
She looked at Captain Andor and was overwhelmed by the memory of a bitter friendless girl afire with new purpose, challenging a stranger and expecting only betrayal.

"You sent it," she said filled with a strange happiness even in this anxious place on the edge of danger and dark.

It seemed to her that she turned to look for them only to find that those ghosts, Gianna Gerrere, Leah Hallick, Tanith Ponta had vanished like mist...blown away in a sea wind.

“Yes,” he said smiling gently, “I do remember now,” as if he too looked back astonished at some meridian he had crossed unknowing.

He lay a hand upon her arm as if they were alone and for the space of a moment it felt as if they were.

“Captain, Miss Erso…” Commander Fetta spoke with a firm reluctance, after the fashion of a man compelled to a hurtful but necessary task. “You should both peruse these orders and reports. When you have done so I must give you newer and darker intelligence that regards your mission.”

She sat then and as Captain Andor passed it to her first read the letter from London, trying to recall the faces of the stern red-haired gentleman and regal lady in the fine white gown whose signatures marked it.

Lady Mary had herself entered the room after Jen’s compulsory toilette and in serene silence handed her a small folded silk packet. She had opened it sullenly and without thanks to find closed within a dozen exceptionally strong fine steel pins, doubtless for the closing of the borrowed gowns and a short length of waxed leather cord, to replace, it seemed the ragged and now damp hemp string that held her mother’s charm.

As she did so Jen had perceived a thin long-healed scar that crossed deep across the aristocratic lady’s now gloveless right palm.

Rope, she had noted, thinking of the many times lines of sail had cut her own hands.

But a scar like that? Only luck and a skilled surgeons stitches would have held it well enough to preserve the action of those nimble white fingers. She had seen men lose hands from such cuts.

“You must have wanted to hold onto something very badly madame,” had come almost to her lips but gone unsaid.

Six of the fine pins were tucked inside her sailors waistcoat even now, such things having many uses, and the cord tied about her neck to hold both the talismans that sustained her here.
The Lieutenant’s report was longer and the plain words of it burned her heart.

“…illness from the poisons rampant…half-starved wretches…children set to stand beside the walls of the warehouses to ensure the care of their parents in packing the “indigo” in which the explosive compound is concealed….the only unguarded soul, a dwarfish and withered Minorican priest allowed to administer to the dead and dying workers….maintains a rough chapel in a dim hut….Bey privately sought contact but he seems confined to the regional Catalan dialect would render English, French nor Spanish only in an unintelligible half-backwards fashion…in her opinion crazed by the despair of his position…surely no more than 600 of the Mediterraneans remaining….of the Africans tragically nearly all missing and likely dead…” And then… “…a Chief Overseer one Mr. Orren Krennik….Tarkin not in residence….house appeared unoccupied….stumbled upon brutal public execution of attempted escapees regarded….among the overseers one…a broken, thin and silent man, …English with an accent of the Scandinavian….unrestrained but supervised with watchfulness and contempt more befitting a prisoner….the man seemed to be a particular object of torment by our host….this Krennik clearly a man both cruel and observant to any unexpected action we made ready to depart. I took it upon my own authority to pass the letter you had given me to Mr. Galen Erso…."

Papa.

Voices could be heard from the platform outside.

Mr. Rook was speaking, “Are Miss Erso and the Captain within, Mr. Cor?”

A stranger, one of the English soldiers, could be heard to clearly cry out, “Dear God! Where are you from sir?” followed hard upon by the deep voice of Khaeuri, “É te tangata iti, ki te pa ano koe ki a au, ka wahia koe e ahau ano he rakau!”

Young Ceil-Marcheur could be heard saying, “Be easy Pa Khaeuri!
Mr. Rook was here.

Miss Erso quickly closed the papers and handed them back to Captain Andor wiping the tears that dampened her cheeks with the sleeve of her smock.

“Do not let him read it,” she said, “Please, he has suffered so much. Spare him this.”

*He piloted one of the ships that brought these people to this end. His brave heart will feel every death, every day of suffering since his departure upon that desperate raft as a weight upon his own conscience.*

“You know I cannot,” he said quietly. “He took the oath of the Alliance.”

"Trust God and the Truth." her mother had said....Oh but Mama it is so hard

She nodded.

Captain Andor turned toward Solo then and handed him the pages of Lieutenant Casrich’s report. The Dutchman looked surprised but took them gravely, his foolish bravado gone for once, and taking a slow breath like a boy jumping into dark water he began to read them.

______________________________

They conferred together through the early part of the night.

He informed them of the rumors that had reached Fort Saint Mark at Saint Augustine of the mysterious actions attributed to the two or three native casiques active in the in the area. The bulk of the surviving Timican people, weakened and imperiled, had moved west toward the Gulf shores after the removal of Spain, only a handful of desperate partisans remained to inconvenience the English. A series of attacks north and west of this fort had left it unmanned for short periods under the lax watch of the lately removed Governor Grant.

*Therefor whosoever remains Captain Solo had spied being feasted upon from his lucky venture south in December they had not belonged to any men officially stationed at Saint Augustine.*
A plan of sorts was developed and a clever contingency was proposed by, of all people, the French youth Ceil-Marcher. The Governor sent his men for the uniforms and other items necessary from the Fort’s limited stores.

While the he himself conferred with Captain Andor over the dark hints in Bey’s report, the pilot, Mr. Rook carefully read the reports from Casrich's visit to the plantation. After he had done so, ashen but stern with Miss Erso seated beside close him on the bench all the while, he folded and returned them to Captain Anndor’s hand.

"Teşekkürler bayım," he said.

The young Turk then asked for and was given the tide charts, maps of the channels and passages of the Mantazas, Halifax and St. Johns and proceeded to pour over them for some hours with that lady and Captain Solo.

The rum was portioned out.

Dameron grilled a few sausages on the brazier, since Solo implied keenly that it was advisable to keep the tattooed giant well fed.

What rest they could grant to their visitors they did. In times of emergency Fort Mantazas had been said to hold up to fifty men, a dozen was managed easily enough. Pallets were brought for Captains Andor and Solo and Miss Erso in the upper chamber and the others were given space on the empty bunks in the soldiers quarters downstairs.

At dawn he and Dameron escorted them back to the anchorage of their small sloop.

My condolences Commander,” Cassian Andor said by way of farewell while the others made ready to sail. “I learned of your brother’s passing while at Gibraltar. Those who knew and served with him spoke of him always as man of intelligence and valor.”

The Governor could have asked for details but did not. Though forbidden by his oath from lying to a fellow officer young Andor was unlikely to know details of that last fatal mission in the Pyrenees. Even were it otherwise the Governor knew that wider knowledge of the details of his siblings demise would neither increase nor decrease the burden of his sorrow.
When he had slipped out from the Governors House before dawn, leaving his double dressed in his favorite banyon and slippers, after reviewing administrative procedures and carefully checking the quality of last night's hasty manicure, his habitually stern brother had embraced him with uncharacteristic warmth. “Dio ti protegga fratellino,” Codomo had said gruffly before turning away.

Since their boyhood it had always been his stubbornly unprovable contention that he was somehow the elder of their threesome by some fraction of an hour.

“Thank you, Captain,” Rex Fetta said and bowed.

Over the young officer’s shoulder he caught sight of the little sloop. The bright-eyed Englishwoman, Miss Erso stood ready at the mast to set the sails but still glanced quickly back toward Andor as a sailor would to check the fastness of an anchor rope.

“Andor, may I speak to you now not as an officer but as an older soldier to a younger one and share with you some wisdom painfully bought?”

“Yes sir, of course."

“My brother Favio and I parted in argument…the closeness of our connection was…is… of course a rare thing but the universal truth that any farewell may be the last is one too easily forgotten by all men. Never part with harsh words from those dear to you, soldado. Even where regard is…or should be…understood do not let any true affection lie long unspoken of.”

Andor touched his hat and bowed, then turned to the little sloop through the shallow water. Within moments he, the mighty Mate and the fair-haired youth had pushed her out and climbed aboard as the rising water pulled her out.

With remarkable swiftness she turned to and shot like an arrow to the south.

Dark times lay ahead the only question lay in how dark and how long the night would last.

He held but little hope that he would see any of those who crewed the Falcon alive again and
whispered a silent prayer for them as he walked with Dameron back up the shore to Fort Mantazas in the red light of morning.

_He would need to be in place in Saint Augustine within a day or two before his brother smoked all of the good tobacco and turned the corners of every book he had._

Chapter End Notes

Fort Mantazas!! One of the excellent Florida State Parks!

Yes. In munitions and black powder manufactories having the families/children of workers placed in dangerous proximity to the works was a common practice to prevent carelessness or sabotage.

Looking at you Etienne duPont!

also....Yoda.

Next up....what is that dark ship on the horizon? Why is Sabe sharpening her sword?
The Handmaiden

Chapter Summary

In which Sabe, lately Handmaiden to the Queen of Portugal confronts Captain Andor considers that gentleman carefully and reveals to him, in part, the particulars of Luc Ceil-Marcheur's birth. That lady then parts company with the rest of the Rogue and Falcon's crew, and settis out to confront Lord Vader on his mighty warship.

Chapter Notes

Eu falaria com você em particular senhor = I would speak to you in private, sir.
Claro, honrada senhora. = Of course, honored lady.
Você serve Roma? = Do you serve Rome?
menino camponês = peasant boy
agente dos anjos de Deus = agent of the Angels of God

"Você concede a um pobre soldado uma grande honra, Senhora. = You give a poor soldier a great honor, Lady.

(all Portugiese)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

January 4, 1770

The Rogues Venture

Port of Nassau

New Paradise Island

the Bahamas

Her officers being unwilling to risk further notoriety by sailing the brigantine out from Nassau inlet without clearance from the Harbormaster and authorities it was determined that the Rogues Venture would hold for at least two precious days while the local magistrates took statements from witnesses
among her crew and if God spared him the grievously injured little boy.

The whole port was abuzz with talk. Rumor and speculation concerning the mysterious explosion of the "French powder store" dominated all discourse but by the second day other matters slowly crept back into conversation. Widespread unrest was spoken of in the English ports north, especially Boston. Fears of another Maroon uprising in Jamaica were aired, as were rumors also of the Yellow Fever in Antigua and terrifying dark warships seen off Barbados. All such matters reached Sabé’s ears as she walked in men's garb through the bustling docks and taverns and listened to the talk, saying nothing as was her habit in port.

When morning came Luc went with Zacharie and Darian into Nassau town to spend their pay upon some of the few items they would need before reporting to their new crew, and Solo remained behind, much the worse for the brandy he had drunk, to argue with Khaeuri between bouts of groaning.

Sabé asked no permission but took the jolly boat directly over to the brigantine.

Once granted leave to board by an officer at the watch...ah the Scotsman who had sung at the dinner.... she most boldly demanded leave to speak to Captain Andor immediately.

The crew was busy. Indeed had any eyes been watching the ship all aboard would have seemed much busier and more grimly impatient about their business than was ordinary to an American boat waiting for her barges of sugar to arrive before she headed to the Carolinas.

The sweet-voiced Mr. Antilles appeared most hesitant to let her pass unchallenged but even as she stood poised between the choice of violence or diplomacy as her quickest channel forward the officer she sought walked back from the quarter deck, changed now to a dove grey waistcoat and good plain long coat of indigo blue.

She wasted no breath but addressed herself to Captain Andor directly.

“Mia com você em particular senhor.”

To her not inconsiderable admiration he met her gaze without condescension.

"Mr. Antilles," he said. "Mr. Kay requires your help sir with regard to the arrangement of the cargo. I am at leisure to grant a short interview and will take responsibility for our guest's escort."

The fellow saluted smartly and moved off.

“Claro, honrada senhora.” Andor bowed and with a gesture indicated that she should accompany him back to the spacious cabin where they had dined on the previous day.
There was no denying he was very handsome in his way, the Spaniard, though she had ceased to be moved by such things long ago. His vocabulary, she had noted before, was near pure Iberian, but not his accent, in that Sabé heard a trace of the colonies, perhaps more than a trace when he had barked at the Dutchman in the high tumult after the explosion. Therein must lay a choice, for in her experience an Aliança, or at least the high agents thereof were trained to speak in whatever accent convenience required.

Come, menino camponês inteligente, she thought. We should not waste each other's time. For time is a treasure neither of us likely holds much more of, one way or another.

All trace of the pleasant gathering had been cleared away as if it had never been. The tables of the well-aired cabin were now pushed back and covered with maps, instruments, papers, pens and pots of ink. A cluster of men including the giant, now changed from his bloody garb and restored to a patterned silk waistcoat with his shorn head bound in an India scarf, all straightened in attention as they entered.

The Captain must have signaled them in some way imperceptible to her for despite raising eyes curiously at her each only saluted in silence and departed.

The giant did so by seeming to fold himself into one of the adjoining cabins with exactly the sort of deliberate care usually reserved to replacing a large document into a small envelope.

Upon this last removal she turned to Captain Andor without further preliminary.

"Você serve Roma?"

Sabe took a perverse pleasure in the officers momentary hesitation.....such men were not easily surprised....but he mastered himself quickly, and answered almost sternly.

"I serve the Alliance, Senhora"

She held her hand up impatiently, as if they merely bargained in a Porto marketplace. " Yes, yes, I have heard your catechism, sir, and argue against not a word of it, but though it may stand on the side of the Angels you and your brethren are sworn to a campaign beyond the lifetime of one or many. You measure by God's long ruler and I am a simple woman. What remains of my little life narrows now to one goal alone."

"And what is that Senhora Sabé?" he asked. The shrewd gaze of those dark eyes gave lie to the
lightness of his query.

To deny the Devil that boy. To save his body and soul from an indenture his traitorous father sold him to before his birth.

"Before I can say more I require a true answer from you soldier of the Alliance. Do your forces at present ally with Rome or serve the Order?"

"We do not," he answered her with quick firmness..... God help him, he was a true believer..... "Rome is under the sway of the Enemy and the Orders are utterly broken. It is true that some who escaped the wreck find shelter in our ranks, pitied for their persecution and valued for their skills but any who would join us must take our oath and foreswear sorcery. I assure you Senhora, none of us who fight and die under the wings of the Starbird do so to restore the Order to power."

"Our," "us," "we"? The mask of the cool and weary officer made cynical by the sins of men slipped as he spoke so and it seemed to her that she glimpsed a boy of Nueva Espana, ragged but hopeful and proud, dreaming of a world where no man made another kneel.

Whatever evils he had done, and she did not doubt he had done many, he had done all for a cause he believed in.

Small wonder then that the wild English girl loved him so.

Very well. She drew a breath.

"Once," she said, "I was Sabé Nabanno, Elect Handmaiden to Her Most Royal Highness Mariana Victoria, Queen of Portugal, Princess of the Royal House of Spain. I wore my colors as first among equals in that company, chosen and trained by the hand of my Lady's own mother the renowned Elisabetta Farnese of Parma."

Ah God, but the relief surprised her.

It was as if she had just laid aside a burden carried so long she had grown insensible of its weight.

He did not insult her by presenting doubt that a small woman near to forty, sunburnt and in the rough garb of a sailor should claim the honor of being one of the most skilled warrior guards of Europe, but bowed only his head in salute as between one soldier to another.
"Honrada Senhora, my crew and I have, as I am sure you know, a dire mission before us that we may not deviate from in the slightest particular. If it is your wish to seek the protection of the Alliance for yourself and your charge I will write letters of transit that grant unquestioned refuge. Your best course would be to take them and leave this place. Seek passage North and thence to London as swiftly as you may."

Poor Captain. Do you think my mission was but to save a great lady's honor or even a bastard babe's innocent life? You think all this has been to hide him from that velvet-coated vulture Pombal?

Go ahead and think so then.

There is only one way to deceive those trained in deceit, she had been taught long ago. Give them the truth and let them deceive themselves.

“The circumstances of his birth are utterly unknown to him. Indeed he believes himself the child of a grass-marriage between a country maid dead in childbirth and a young soldier lost to the wars before his birth and still dutifully mourns the country farmers who reared him. I assure you that I have never lied to him for I have never had the slightest need do so to. Were he to ask “What is my mother’s name?” I would tell him truthfully but why should he ask such a question? His story and his strength are his own and I am so far as he knows but a stranger who has befriended him because he reminds her of her own long-lost son.” Let him mark the catch in her voice as sorrow, for that it truly was. "Luc is a man grown now. For me to guard him longer will but draw eyes to him. He has chosen his own path and it lies with your brotherhood. Determined as he is I know I cannot thwart him so I ask you this only, that you teach him to fight. Give him a sword. You will find him an apt hand with it."

The Spaniard sighed as he took a seat at the table as if what he had expected from this encounter differed exhaustingly from the present circumstance.

Sabe felt a certain sympathy for his plight.

On the wide chart that lay before them on the table she recognized the features of the coast of East Florida, and noted at once that these were far better maps than Solo’s in terms of detail and scale.

“I cannot promise to protect him. If he joins our cause as he has asked to do then he joins this crew and answers with us all to the full pursuance of our mission here.”

She inclined her head, having steeled herself for this. There are worse fates that could find him than death, she could have said aloud but did not.

“But even if God spares us here, you surely know that the oath of service to the Alliance cannot be foresworn. It may be that he is called to Europe, or even ... perhaps, to Portugal. The decision then will not be mine. Would we not do him a disservice if we forever conceal from him such vital matters?”
“You must do what you think is right, of course sir,” Sabé said. “Whether the burden of a sorrowful truth unasked-for can do a brave youth any good or a royal scandal unprovable aid your cause will be up to you and them. ‘Them’ I say for I assume it is your esteemed Council you mean by ‘we’ ....or are you offering me a commission Captain Andor of the Alliance?”

“I am not, Lady, for reluctantly and at the risk of unintended insult, I confess that though I greatly respect you I cannot wholly trust you.” He might have smiled and made a joke of it but he chose a different tack, and stood to bow formally. “Please know that it pains me past telling to stand here on the edge of battle, outnumbered and ill-informed and regretfully pass over access to one of the sharpest blades ever forged in Europe.”

She could not help but smile.

Ah, the Sisters of the Collegia refused all but a precious few boys, but you they would have treasured.

It was enough.

She must do whatever remained alone.

“Where will you go now Lady Sabé? ” he asked her, not unkindly.

“I will say my farewells and sail south to follow some old errands left unfinished. I think I will not need to go far or long. My sisters hold a chair in wait for me and my heart tells me I will find it sooner rather than later.” She stood as she once had in royal hallways and spoke with unfeigned sincerity, “God go with you Captain, you and all your brave crew. I pray for your success.”

He bowed and kissed the rough hands held out to him.

“Você concede a um pobre soldado uma grande honra, Senhora.”

She left him then, in no doubt that the giant in his cabin had heard and recorded every word. As she walked out upon the deck she looked up to the mast, searching for some sight of the Eastern monk but saw no trace of him or his bosom comrade. Captain Andor’s pirate maid stood in the bow with her hand upon the sad-eyed Turkish gentleman’s shoulder. They spoke earnestly and gazed northwest. Toward Florida and that haunted indigo-stained plantation that was their goal and likely their doom.
Sabé climbed down into her small boat and rowed back for the Falcon one last time.

Luc and the twins would have returned by now. She would bid them farewell and not bother to conceal her tears, only their cause. She would even shake Solo’s hand if he were sober yet, and pay Khaeuri for three months of losses at cribbage.

_I have obeyed your last command my Queen. Whatever passes hereafter they will not have him._

Then she would return to Nassau port, to buy a good blade and quick passage on the ferry to Freetown with what remained of her handsome wages. There was a boatyard at Freetown, she had learned and in it surely a small whaleboat or something of it’s like that could carry a single skilled sailor in good weather as far as the coast of Florida and the swift current North.

Unlike the brave Captain Andor and his crew she did not need to seek the inland rivers or their accesses at Saint Augustine. The dark warship the nervous fishermen of the islands whispered of seeing had been headed north. It might now lie anywhere between Charlestown and Kingston, she knew but sooner or later it would be drawn to Mosquito Inlet, to that hellish plantation the Spaniard’s map marked as New Smyrna.

 Evil draws evil as murder draws crows.

There was one last safeguard she could set for her prince.
Sometimes you type all day and you get only....alas?....the result is a handful of paragraphs. How does this happen?

a "grass wedding" was a euphemism for a summer fling, although it was sometimes used to refer to couples who stated co-habitation after being betrothed, that is after the banns were officially announced in church but no ceremony had actually taken place yet. Children of such unions were usually considered legitimate though sometimes....with an asterisk, sort of..
The Course

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Andor reflects upon the burdens of Command. Recollection is made of his first assignment by Lady Mary Monmoth, some years previous, to the mystery later ascribed to the Indigo plantation at New Smyrna. An uneasy night at Fort Mantazas is shared with Miss Erso, and at dawn he choses a course based upon the revelation of those new dangers that face them.

Chapter Notes

What does our intrepid boy fear most?

Yes, they are already thinking of themselves as married, without quite realizing it.

"¿Estás bien, querida?" = Are you well, dear one?
"Sí, lo seré. ¿Qué te preocupa, mi esposo? ¿Tienes miedo? = Yes, I will be, what worries you, my husband? Are you afraid?
(Spanish)

Nous sommes les outils que Dieu utilise dans ce monde, et nous devons nous adapter aux tâches requises = We are the tools God uses in this world, and we must adapt to the tasks required. (French)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

March 3, 1766

The Hairy Man

Billingsgate, ward of London

England
As Cassian Andor's career progressed it had been his lot, and indeed his choice, to work largely alone, alone or with Mr. Kay as secretary and occasional bodyguard.

*Kay who, like himself was bound to nothing and no one on this earth and who it seemed to him then...in his block-headedness....might suffer loss less keenly.*

After Havana, and the worse debacle at Venice, he had indeed taken something like comfort in the freedom of risking no life but his own.

For more than three years of missions after Tano's loss he worked almost solely under Mr. Draven's command and was dispatched...*somewhat to his surprise...largely in Europe. He did not question the strategy of those who watched a horizon hidden from his sight but only moved where those with higher view directed him, shadow-like through the courts and alleys of Marseilles and Paris, Madrid and Naples.*

*Did we ever pass each other, my Jen, he wondered. Would your sharp green eyes have even seen me then if we had?*

He also returned to England at regular intervals to make confidential reports and receive new orders, usually from Mr. Draven directly.

Then came a morning when upon entering a dockside pub as arranged, in this case the Hairy Man back from Billingsgate, Cassian Andor found himself escorted to a low back room only to be confronted at the door by a red-tressed girl of scarce sixteen in a cut-down gown of cheap cotton print, single petticoat, patched apron and India spotted kerchief.

*You will allow me to search you, sir,*" this steely-eyed street wench coolly stated.

"No sweetheart," he said, availing himself of his most pleasant smile, "I most assuredly shall not."

"A formality only, Lieutenant" came a familiar though seldom-heard woman's voice from within the dim room, "After some recent lapses in security my new officer of guard tends to over-diligence with all contacts not personally known to her own keen eye. I beg you for my weary sake to endure this unpleasant but singular inconvenience."

Lady Mary Monmoth stood at the head of the Council that commanded all their agents and forces North of Tripoli and West of Kiev and she had earned her authority by every measure of merit he knew.

"...her own keen eye..." Here was code he knew. She wished him to know that this time-wasting
charade was not intended as some test of himself but of the young guard. "...my weary sake..." held the further meaning that this request was a personal one.

Captain Andor nearly laughed. Insult to rank was the paper armor of the weak and though he could feign it well enough when circumstances demanded they did not do so here. Let the youthful guard inspect away, she ought only to be grateful it was he who had come and not Kay, for Kay did not like to have his clothing or his person touched.

He laid pistol and dagger on the small low table adjacent and removed Señora Tano's legacy, a wire, from the sleeve of his frock coat before placing that garment folded across the stool the girl had risen from and unbuttoning his waistcoat.

She patted him down quickly, in thorough and impersonal silence.

"Your boots," she then said, not being a fool, as he rolled down his shirtsleeves. He would have obliged her but Lady Mary seemed to have seen all that she required from this trial.

"Enough, Mary," the lady said stepping into the light of the doorway. Her attire was that of a better than middling servant, being a printed bed gown sprigged white on a lilac ground, green petticoat and blue checked apron with her still-bright hair swept up into a white pressed cap with a pink ribbon.

*Rank was easily signaled or obscured by attire,* he considered, *dignity was not.*

"Time presses. Lieutenant Andor carries a small steel blade in the top of his boot and concealment for other tools in one or both heels. Either you or I could disable him before he might make of use weapons thus concealed so set your mind at ease and leave us."

The girl bowed and slipped back into the shadow of the hallway, a trifle over-dramatically it seemed to him but...youth...and he entered the dim room after the lady, and heard it close behind him.

"I most earnestly beg your forgiveness Lieutenant," Lady Mary Monmoth said, lighting an extravagant candle on the table to supplement the light from the grimed window and low brazier.

"Mary Jade is come to us by a hard road," was the only explanation she offered. "She had yet to learn that both edges of the blade do not need sharpening equally."

*A defector?*

He had taken the healed scar of a burn on the wenches arm to be some mishap, or a branding for theft.

*It was the burning off of another mark. Dulce Jesús. A girl of sixteen marked with the Sword of Fire?*

*Lady Mary must indeed have the cleanest conscience in Europe.*
"Sit, please young man," she indicated a battered chair by the low table, choosing for herself one opposite.

He took his seat as directed, attempting to hold himself without expectation in this most extraordinary circumstance.

"Mr. Draven will join us shortly."

_Ah, Andor thought, so he is not dead._

He realized then that the uneasiness that had gripped him upon seeing Lady Mary Monmoth herself in place of his usual commander had been fear...not sentimental fear that Mr. Draven himself might be lost, though he prized the older man as an experienced officer for whom he held enormous respect. What pressed his heart like a stone was the fear that if Draven had fallen he himself might be promoted.

_No. Por favor Dios. Not that._

_He was never able to lay aside the memory of old Raddiaz's face at Havana as he read the orders still stained with the courier's blood and steeled himself to order all his men to certain death beyond the wall._

"God go with you, young assassin," the General had said with sad firmness, "this is our day to answer the call not yours," and ordered them to put him in the dead English boy's uniform so that he at least might escape the city before the mighty Castillo was breached.

At nineteen he could imagine nothing worse than Command, the burden of sending others to die. He still could not. One murder at a time was all his soul could bear.

"You had contacts at the Canaries and the Azores, upon a time, as well as at Veracruz. Do any of them remain in place?"

"I cannot say with present certainty, madam."

_He had passed most of his network to Mr. Aaron Cracken upon his transfer but four years was a long time for such to survive under the Fist of Spain and Portugal._

She nodded. "You will need to re-establish quickly whatever cannot be revived."

"Am I to return to the Americas?" He ventured to ask.
To have said "home" would never have occurred to him. The only home he knew then was this fight.

"In time that may well prove necessary but for now what we ask is that you discontinue all your present ventures and place your considerable skills to the pursuance of another. Do any of these names hold meaning for you?"

She slid across the table a sheet on which were written eight names.

Levoisier, Erso, Baldwin, Lovelace, Lioni, Stahl, Menendez, Merck.

"No madam, not of themselves. Are they persons of interest to us?"

Her Ladyship neither flinched from his meaning nor made light of it.

"I cannot say what will be required," she told him, "nor at present even venture a guess beyond telling you that they are all alchemists. At one time each was based in Europe but most have connections to the West Indes. It is of vital interest that we immediately ascertain whether any of them yet live, find them if they do and if they do not learn all that is possible with regard to their dispositions, ends, movements or activities, most especially of any family members or connections. This must must be acted upon at once. I do not exaggerate when I tell you lives uncountable may depend upon our project's conclusion."

This was far beyond his usual sphere of action, and he felt her cool eyes upon him as he moved the paper back toward her hand.

*It was said that in her day the Alliance had had no keener interrogator so he took no shame in her reading of his thought. Why me?*

She nodded as if he had indeed spoken. "Nous sommes les outils que Dieu utilise dans ce monde, et nous devons nous adapter aux tâches requises.”

What could he do but bow his head?

"May I have use of Mr. Timothy Kay?"

"You may," she said, "have whatever resources you require. Mr. Draven will give you the dossiers, for he has personally reported these matters and presented to the Council connected evidence that the Enemy has a great project in motion and that these men are in key to its development."
Mr. David Draven himself on a mission? Captain Andor was willing to venture it had been years since the Chief of Agents for Europe had seen the field.

The Lady then took from a basket on the floor beside her a bottle... brandy to appearances..., along with some small horn cups.

Waving away his hand she poured out two good measures, one for him and another for herself.

He did not doubt that the quality of the liquor would greatly belie the homely vessels.

He wished her good health.

"We place great faith in you, Captain Andor," she said quietly, sipping the strong drink without tremor, "and the measure of that faith is the burdens we ask you to bear. Forgive us."

Such candid sorrow surprised him.

She had seen his biography, he was sure.

My fate is not one you should weep for Señora.

I will likely die in an alley, with a knife in my ribs but what of it?

What were the odds I would ever have died anywhere else?

All that hungry bastard boy had wanted was to know which way Hope lay and to fall facing it.

They sat in silence for a time until it seemed to him that he heard sounds presaging his Commanders arrival. Beyond the door could be made out a muffled voice of English accent protesting.

"The bloody hell you say, my girl?"

Oh, I would pay good coin to see what passes now, he thought and noted the smile that Lady Mary Monmoth concealed behind her hand as she rose to intervene.
January 12, 1770

Fort Mantazas

Some miles North upriver from the Mantazas Inlet

British East Florida

Miss Erso had also slept but little the night they spent at Fort Mantazas.

The Commander had offered her use of the good bed, and it was a mark of her turmoil of mind that she took it without question. Captain Andor himself lay a pallet down on the floor beside it and when the moonlight permitted in the early hours of the winter's night could see her staring open-eyed toward the timbered ceiling. At one point well after midnight when Fetta and Solo were, as evidenced by their breathing, soundly asleep, she crawled down to share his narrow mat upon the floor, her head upon his shoulder and her hand laid upon his heart.

Only he and perhaps the young officer, Dameron, had been close enough to see the way her hands had trembled as she touched the written report of the man who had seen and spoken with Mr. Galen Erso and Captain Andor suspected that he alone realized how profoundly shaken she must have been.

They had killed her mother and dragged her father away before her eyes when she was a child of eight, or so she had stonily reported back in London. She was abandoned alone at the bottom of a well and the lion of the Onderean had found and claimed her before she died there.
"He spoke of her endlessly," the Turkish gentleman had told him, when she was at watch on the mast and they two men sat going over the coastal maps. Mr. Rook pointed out the place that Galen Erso and others of the prisoners had launched his raft."

The brave young pilot had shaken his head in sorrow at the memory, "Always as if she were yet a child....his little girl....so clever, so fearless. He told us that his only comfort in the pain of being parted from her lay in the knowledge that the fearsome Saul Gerrere could outrun any enemy and thus keep her safe. He thanked God that she had been hidden well before Krennik's men arrived and thus spared the sight of her mother's gruesome death and her father's shameful weakness."

More clever and more brave than you know Galen Erso. She had endured it all.

The walls of bitterness and ice that she had built around her childhood's pain burned along with the pirate Gerrere in that room above the Portuguese coast and now she stood outside them.

How many can say so?

"¿Estás bien, querida?" he murmured against her hair.

"Sí, lo seré," she whispered. Her fingers must have felt the perturbation of his heart. "¿Qué te preocupa? ¿Tienes miedo?"

He did not answer.

What good to say it aloud Jen?

"Trust God then, husband," she said, her lips against his shoulder in the dark scarcely to be heard. "For what do the likes of we have now but hope?"

The blow that shook him came in the report of one Lt. Bey, those which told about about movements of Fetta's men after their leaving the plantation, and of the dark warship seen moving at great speed under British colors, searching, for what seemed unclear.

The Devastator.

Vader was here.

By whatever cause this venture had moved beyond Tarkin.

Freiherr Vader did not work through intermediaries. His was the right hand of the Enemy himself.
Word must be gotten to the Rogue's Venture.

Time was running out and that which he had dreaded all his adult life now stood before him.

Dawn came and “Acting Governor Moultrie” walked them to the shore at dawn to bid them soldierly goodbyes.

"What course now, sir?" Solo asked. He seemed able to manage the "sir" only by placing a slight ironic twist to it. Captain Andor ignored the Dutchman's subtleties for the state of Captain Solo’s self-merit could not possibly have mattered less to him.

"Out to the inlet to rejoin the Rogue, with best speed," he said, "but we cannot linger long alongside…no more than an hour. We must take on gear and additional hands, attach the small inland craft and make for the pirates back way in to the lower reaches of the St. John's and the Halifax and thence to that "impassible" channel you seem to have passed in your previous journey. We must commence our move on this hellish plantation before the day closes."

Mr. Cor, looked to him, wonderingly, as Solo and his men set to and Miss Erso climbed to aid them with the disposition of the sail.

"Does the Rogue wait for us here sir or proceed up to St. Augustine under cover?" the Master Gunner inquired.

“Neither," Captain Andor replied, "our plan has changed. The Rogue must sail South, and you must go with her, for she may well have need of you."
Fetta's news had given vital intelligence, some small hope and a chill that cut to his very bones.

*That brave brigantine and her crew must be sent out to buy them time, maybe even at the cost of their lives.*

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Chapter End Notes

So, had to throw in a little more Mara Jade, just for the sake of all those Legends books we devoured in our middle-school years. She’d got some ardent followers despite cannon leaving her behind.

Because that was the way it went in those days. Cool female characters appeared and then nobody could figure out what to do with them. I choose to remember her as the poor Force-sensitive girl psychologically abused by Palpatine who became the dread assassin the Emperors Hand, before being shown the way to the Light by Luke and then it all went downhill fast.

Here she finds her own way to the good guys.

I could bore you all with the details of the Siege of Havana but suffice to say, as Cassian pointed out: "The venalities of Spaniards."
What is Needed

Chapter Summary

Being a small chapter in which Captain Andor gathers the last members of the party to pass up the inland rivers, passes to the officers of the Rogues Venture a fearful piece of intelligence and orders them to a course of great peril. Miss Jane Erso recalls one of the legendary escapes of the pirate Saul Gerrere and considers that in this moment, for her at least, nothing else is needful as their course moves forward.

Chapter Notes

Alas. We must catch up with a little....ok a lot of.....plot exposition. Our brave crew must part ways and nothing says "I've got a bad feeling about this" quite like the word that Darth Vader has been seen circling your general vicinity.

Lieve God, heb genade = Dear God have mercy.

Slimme oude vos = clever old fox.
(Dutch)

He korero tupato the tangata! = The man speaks truth/knowledge/cleverness. (Maori)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

January 12, 1770
"Mr. Rook?" She heard Captain Andor say, as they drew alongside the brigantine. "We will bring Captain Solo’s charts and those provided us at Mantazas, but as we draw close from off the deeper channels you must be the one to guide us in. If there is anything you require from aboard the brigantine to aid you fetch it now."

That gentleman nodded and reached first for the ladder.

After a late supper at Fort Mantazas, they laid their own maps and those of the "Royal Tarkin Grant" provided by "Commander Fetta" at Fort Mantazas alongside Solo's pencilled charts. Their only course had become clear to them. Back through the coastal run of the lower Mantazas, which was hereon now called the Halifax, ran many inlets and streams from the inland River called the Saint Johns and chains of brackish and fresh lakes. Though blocked by mangle and forest on the drafted page, some when swollen by winter rains were for weeks at a time raised deep enough to join in tangled pathways to and from the main waterways. Unmarked because they moved and vanished for the greater part of each year these had brought the Falcon around and past the plantation unseen in December. It was to be hoped they remained deep and clear enough to bring them to her again before January’s end.

On the British grant surveys Mr. Bodhi Rook had pointed out the location of additional quarters, indigo fields and access roads, holding pits, rerouted streams and by his accounts miles and miles of covered stone canals.
His drawn alterations differed so significantly from the only two-year-old "official" maps, portraying the plantation as a far more modest venture that Fetta expressed...not doubt, but wonder that so much excavation and building could possibly have been achieved in so short a time.

"Are you quite confident in these recollections sir?" The mysterious Commander asked, not urgently. "These swamps are deceptive as to distance and It is better than a hard year since you walked there."

"And I have walked each foot in my mind for every night since," that good man said, "this is how the hellish place stood to the last vile cobblestone in the days before I escaped it. It will only have grown since then."

Captain Andor laid his hand discretely on her arm as she passed close to him on the Falcon's deck, and said quietly, "If you go back to your cabin please take what you think you may need, for God alone knows when we may return."

*My poor truthful deceiver, she thought, if we were alone would you say "if?"*

She could have laughed though for his sake she did not.

Pirates do not say goodbyes, and what had she come here with in any case but the clothes on her back and a pair of boots? All stolen.

She had her own name, her mother's little charm, a blade, a course ahead and the man she loved by her side.

"I have everything I need," she said and smiled at him.

They would bring one small shore-boat to accompany the Falcon and three light canoes. Solo's sloop was swift and could fire light cannon from her bow but if the path proved too shallow or the sloop had to double back they would have access to small craft that might press closer.
Captain Andor called all officers and principals to the great cabin one last time and first named the majority of party who would accompany she and himself inland up the river.

Himself as command with her as his second.

Solo was to captain the Falcon and steer them in.

The decorated cannibal Khaeuri would come along as crew. It was not possible to persuade him to leave his captain’s side and even if he could be persuaded to do so his strength and projected air of potential menace almost made him a weapon in and of himself.

Young Luc, experienced with the Falcon and the inland waterways, would come as crew also.

Mr. Rook would act as pilot and lead them over when they reached the back canals of the plantation itself.

Two or three others yet remained to be chosen as hands from among the crew after conference with Captain Rostock.

Jen did not make mention of the fact that she had seen Mr. Imway and Mr. Malbus, the latter accompanied by his crossbow, already seated on the Falcon's foredeck paying cards as if waiting patiently for the rest of the crew to arrive.

It was proposed by Captain Andor that Mr. Kay would accompany them as well. He alone could easily speak the full range of languages they might find among the prisoners and was best set also to deal with injuries and take the measure of any equipment and chemical materials they might find there.

All must be effectively destroyed and his skills would be invaluable should questions arise.

"Also I have keener than average sight and am of sufficient height to act as an effective lookout even from a flat deck," the gentleman pointed out with a sort of uninflected pride. "But Mr. Cor also has considerable experience with explosives manufacture and could prove an additional asset."

"You are correct Kay but the skills of her Master Gunner will now be needed aboard the Rogue's Venture," Captain Andor said evenly. "Information we received out of Saint Augustine has confirmed a most dire complication."

He unwrapped a narrow black document case that Miss Erso had seen, unopened, upon the table previously.

Within its contents she glimpsed an undetailed carpenters drawing of a mighty ship... a sloop of war, and a handful of finely printed notes some in Arabic script, others French and English and a stained folded card on which was an tiny inked sketch of a black-draped man with a sword in gloved hands, in what looked like Venetian carnival mask.

For some reason she could not name even at a distance the little drawing made her shiver.
"The Devastator is confirmed to have been sighted off the coast of East Florida south of Mosquito Inlet,” Captain Andor said.

The room fell silent and the faces of many of those present grew pale. Captain Andor continued after the briefest pause "We received hints at Kingston and Nassau that Tarkin himself was preparing to leave his American base at Charleston and likely moving to see to the final stages of the production at the indigo plantation personally, but the presence of the Enemy's dread warship in these waters must be taken to mean that..."

Captain Rostock spoke,"Lieve God, heb genade ...Vader."

"Who?" asked Mr. Rook.

"Qui?...I mean, who?" Luc Ceil-Marchur echoed.

"The Devastator is our Enemies flagship and Freiherr Vader is her Commander," Mr Kay economically explained.

"The Right hand of Darkness" to quote Commander Tano, may she rest in peace,” Lieutenant Melshi muttered.

Captain Solo laughed, "Come now, are we grown men here or children? There was a French ship of that name said to haunt the East Indies when I was but a sweet-faced boy. They said she could run against the wind as swift as with it and was captained by a faceless devil with legs of silver who could stop men's hearts with a wave of his hand...and those were the tales the sober men told, when the arrack and rum came out things grew fantastical."

"It is the same ship and the same devil," Captain Rostock said, "though she sails under many flags, depending on our Enemy's needs and alliances. Vader too is no phantom, though whether he is one man or many or even a man at all varies with Report."

At this the old seaman's eye went to Captain Andor as but as that officer offered no clarification he went on. "All that is known for sure is that few who stand before the Dark Commander live to report on what they see. No ship De Devastator pursues has ever eluded her, it is said, just as none have ever escaped Freiherr Vader in combat on either land or sea.”
“No. That is not so,” Jen Erso was surprised to hear her own voice say, for she had formed no intention to speak. "One ship and one man did, at least. I served aboard the Onderean when she cut beneath the bow of the Devastator off Tripoli and escaped. Commander Saul Gerrere himself repelled the boarding party from the rail."

At dreadful cost, she now knew.

"How?" Mr. Melshi asked and all eyes in the cabin looked to her....all at least save those of the unconcerned cannibal who sat on a chair in a corner paring his nails with a penknife.

*It seemed to her in that moment as if she could feel her Olori standing at her shoulder, testing her again. "What strategy did we use my Jen? How did that one thin wounded lion escape?"*

"Surprise," she answered. "Surprise and the wit of Saul Gerrere. We lay among other ships, mostly Corsairs of Tripoli, many at anchor or moving in a harbor thought safe under their control. From nowhere it seemed, the black ship appeared blocking escape and firing on the shore. Her guns, set row on row like sharks teeth, broke masts like dry bread and not a ball failed. The Enemy rightly thought itself the lion attacking penned sheep and thus had no reason to expect one old ram to turn and charge instead of yielding in fear or taking doomed flight to be cut apart by those mighty cannon. Our Commander ordered all hands on deck and closed our gun ports, in feign of surrender and ordered monkeys up and out on the yard arms to play the mime of striking sail. While this was pantomimied others of us were covered quick in black smocks shirts and grimed with soot. We shadows climbed up behind, pressed flat to the masts with the setting sun behind us. On the Commanders order we shadows dropped and dove to lash sail and send her forward fast while all the crew rushed bodily to one side to tip our ship low the few feet needed to evade their fire and make the turn..."

Mr. Baldwin Cor whistled.

"Slimme oude vos," Solo chuckled.

"And would such action serve you here my hawk?" No Olori. It would not. "Why not my Jen? What does the black ship do differently here?"

She looked up and met Captain Andor’s dark eyes, for now she understood clearly the reason for his sleepless night.

"The black ship is sent not to hunt here but as a hound at watch over this plantation. They know we are coming."

“Perhaps yes and perhaps no," her lover said. "By the grace of God we escaped notice at Jamaica I
think, for had they spotted us then they would have caught us off her shores and we would all be dead already, but it is too much to hope we escaped remark at Nassau. The enemy knows by now that a brigantine under British flag is in these waters. Our hope lies is that they do not yet know for certain who sails her or what she seeks. The Alliance may not be their first guess for we have been at pains this last year to make them think our ships all accounted for in The North Sea and the Mediterranean, in the Gulf or under watchful eyes at Boston. Syndalla’s clever ruse about the “French pirates” muddied the waters in Kingston. The mercantile disguise that has so well funded and concealed their evil venture heretofore comes with its own dangers, for dye is presently more precious than gold. Remember the dead "soldiers" Solo saw at Fort Mantazas? Thieves and lesser pirates circle smelling money. The colonies are in flux and British merchant factions seek financial and political advantage over each other with a Protestant energy unrivaled by any other nation on earth. Jabbar Tielle-Hutta in Cuba calls in his markers in these waters, no doubt promised a share of trade in Indigo but they know better than to trust he will not try to better his share."

"He korero tupato the tangata!" Interjected the decorated cannibal, approvingly.

"Ja, ja." Solo muttered

"Those named will head with me up the inland waters to reach this plantation. After acting to free the surviving prisoners there we will take measures according Mr. Galen Erso's advisement and set fire to the manufactory itself. That is our aim and remains so. Before this latest news we had hoped to send the Rogue south of the Mosquito Inlet to hide off the Canaveral shore. Placed there she might move quickly upon a few hours signal to retrieve our infiltration party and bring all hostages away from the plantation, up to aid and refuge at St. Augustine under the protection of agents present there. Now however, we find that we face not overseers and several dozen armed soldiers, nor even Mr. Tarkin himself and his well-trained guard, but likely the Devastator herself with a crew of as many as two hundred trained troopers and, we must assume, Lord Vader himself in command. Time to act grows short and we are forced to a harder plan of attack."

"What are your orders now, sir?" Mr. Melshi asked.

In that moment every man and woman present knew what he would ask of them, and they listened gravely.

"The mission of the Rogue's Venture must now change to that of the vixen who draws the wolf," Captain Andor said. "Based on Solo's venture up these waters the inland party will allot ourselves five days to reach the plantation. By dawn upon the fifth day we will have found a way into the heart of this prison and placed ourselves to commence its destruction. Upon that day and time any and all ships and units of guard at Tarkin's plantation must be convinced by you that they are attacked from the sea. Draw their eye and keep it on yourselves for as long as you are able while we light the fire from behind."
“We have each taken a vow to stand against the Darkness and our mission now is to deny it this terrible weapon it builds on the coast of Florida. May God be with us all. See to your preparations, the Falcon sails within the next two hours and it is unlikely we will be able to communicate directly again before our actions conclude.”

All present, even with a moment's hesitation Captain Han Solo, nodded in assent.

Cassian Andor's voice was firm and his eye calm as he looked around the table.

It came to her that she alone in this room knew what that cost him.
It will get darker before it gets better and some by no means all but some canon-consistent heartbreak will loom but I PROMISE I do have a kind of a light at the end of the tunnel.

Pirate story. Did the pirate story make sense? I ran it by my pirate people and they liked it.....or pretended to...I did buy them beer so they may have been biased.
The Old Priest

Chapter Summary

A sort of cameo in which the dwarfish pastor of the captive community at the New Smyrna indigo plantation, who is more than the simple elderly cleric he appears, thinks upon his life and mission in that painful place, while he reflects upon his visions of what has been and what may be to come. He is brought a message from Mr. Galen Erso that dramatic changes in the circumstances of the people lie ahead and knows he must rally himself.

Chapter Notes

l’home alt = the tall man (Catalan)

Den vadízei se emás = He does not trod/walk on us (Greek)

ToTajtzin aquin tinemi ne ilhuicac = Our Father who art in heaven.. (Nahuatl)

Sit Deus adiuva nos omnes = May God help us all (Latin)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Smyrna Colony

Mosquito Inlet

British East Florida
If Father Yodan Campos bowed his head to weep bitter tears at the cruelties he saw in the present or the myriad evils of the futures revealed in his visions none saw him do so.

Long long ago his masters had taught him that Hate and Fear were the path to darkness but that had been in another world. Those were the snares set for young men. Self-pity and Despair were the last devils that hounded him and yield to them he would not, not while breath still stirred in him.

God's Light had set him to do penance and perform a task in this place, very likely his last, and Yodan Campo would shirk from neither while even one star remained in the night sky of his prophetic meditations. He would serve the innocents whose island had given him shelter, strengthening those that hope told him might survive this place of trial and giving comfort to those he knew could not.

To accomplish this he knew he must stand fast, live cloaked and diminished, bow and play the doddering fool.

Only if the day came when his visions showed him that last light of hope had indeed blinked out, then and only then he would take up his small sword one last time to slay as many of these servants of the Enemy as he could before he fell. Surely God would grant him that last mercy, despite his grievous faults, for he had once been a warrior.

Size mattered not.
The stars had already faded and the birds begun their songs in earnest when the dwarfish old man hobbled up the sanded path to the thatched three sided building that served as his chapel. He had kept a long nights vigil at the hut of the Ferros family.

It came to him as he approached that the chapel was not empty and his white brows lifted upon the sight of a figure, a man just visible within the dim interior.

*Had any been standing outside to see they might have perceived that for moment the diminutive priest stood straighter, that the stick he had appeared to lean heavily on was mere ornament and that the suspicion of danger set an unexpected strength back into his withered arms.*

Then the moment passed.

Father Campo smiled gently and the appearance of the crippled ancient returned as the priest recognized the man who sat upon the bare bench within his tiny rustic church, head that bowed as if in prayer.

Such an early visitation would have been unremarkable had the petitioner been any other of the prisoners.

"A poor hour for conversion you have chosen youngster," the priest said, wearily.

*Campo knew Sefla to share the neither the faith of the Minorcans, or the Greeks.*

Laying aside his cane and lantern he slowly seated himself upon one of the rough boards beside the Hausa man. Whatever his catechism, Sefla was the acknowledged leader of the few surviving Africans from the first ship, a heart of great strength and a good friend.

It remained one of their small jokes that Father Yodan Campos age was so venerable that all within the plantation boundaries were as babes to him.
Sefla laughed soundlessly and shook his head. "Do not tire yourself pushing a boulder far too heavy for you little grandfather." Though he remained wiry and strong in defiance of his hard life early silver dusted his dark hair and lined furrows framed his shrewd eyes. "Only listen to me now for Mr. Galen Erso sends you a message."

When the Minorcans were deceived aboard those wretched ships many even in starved desperation could be persuaded only on the assurance that they would not be left without the comfort of their Catalan faith. Dr. William Tarkin therefore considered it useful to send men ashore at Ciutadella to "persuade" a priest to come with them and Father Campo, having been apprised by his visions of their coming, hid the younger priests within the sacristy and allowed himself to be so pressed. At the conclusion of the hellish voyage the Doctor's men were greatly surprised to find the aged and infirm dwarf still alive and would have dispatched him in the rash of executions that followed the landing, save that Tarkin himself intervened. That clever servant of the Enemy cynically considered that access to what he considered their weak-minded rituals might keep the majority of the new captives more docile and thus avoid such delays as those caused by the escape of a number of the surviving Africans in the first year of the plantation's establishment. It would also, the evil man reasoned, like their language and customs, conveniently render them more disposably "foreign" to British eyes and British law. Thus Father Campo was permitted not only to live but to do his pastoral office, after a fashion.

Rough walls were built and the people allowed to gather palm to roof it. His rough vessels were placed upon a plank altar and Father Campo and the people of New Smyrna endured.

Over the years, Misery being a great ecumenical, the Greeks, Italians and Minorcans all prayed, took sacraments, confessed and were baptized in his little church without much thought of which Patriarch across the merciless sea would approve of what. Even the secret Jews whose grandmothers had sheltered among the people of Minorca in flight from the Inquisition and the few Turks who sheltered among the Greeks attended. No doubt many were but grateful for the hour's respite granted on Sunday and whispered prayers other than his own but Father Campo did not trouble about who sat where or bowed when, but humbly left some benches quietly un-communed at the back and a grass mat facing West within a darkened corner. Light shines wherever men find it.

Dr. Tarkin being seldom in residence after the first days of the establishment, the Director and his junior overseers paid the frail, addled and devout old man no mind at all, aside from veiled contempt, so long as he stayed to his place, kept the people quiet and preached no resistance.
As the seasons passed Father Campo became nearly invisible within the plantation, staying largely to the chapel and huts of the workers, stumbling in both English and Spanish. He tended a small garden of vegetables, married, baptized and performed such care as the sick were allotted. He also supervised the burial of the dead, a not inconsequential responsibility. Likely because of his obvious infirmities he was spared work in the indigo fields or the dangerous labor of the grinding mills, tanks, and canals.

Tarkin's men avoided him, his services and the chapel. Officially this was a matter of discipline but many did so out of fear, even superstitious awe. He struggled, as his faith demanded, to pity them.

All had forfeited their humanity in the brutalizing of others, most blindly and some gleefully, but a few, usually in some hour of extremis, glimpsed the devil they served and knew how they had condemned themselves.

He buried their dead too, after all.

When the ships brought the surviving Minorcans, many sick and all frightened he had thought this evil “plantation” no more or less than a new-tinted variation on the theme of man's greed and cruelty, conducted by the Enemy for some temporary profit in the furtherance of if's corruption of the Americas.

Dr. William Tarkin was said to have cruelly called the place New Smyrna after the birthplace of his tormented wife.

The only shelter then was a few rough awnings on the shore, some thatched houses built for the guards and the bare acres of forest and mangle burned and cleared by the hands of the few surviving Africans brought here before them. The "Greeks" as the guards called them all, were handed wooden tools and ordered to clear yet more land and then to cut endless blocks of stone and till and set indigo. Only after the cruel sun fell were they allowed to work on building huts for themselves and their families.

The English had a habit of behaving as if they like Adam were the first to set foot upon every corner of God’s earth they came to, but they were not the first people here and they knew so. Pirates had doubtless found such a concealed anchorage convenient to the Great Current that carried the silver galleons of New Spain North and West to the waiting hands of her fickle merciless kings......who sat now? Isabella? Phillip? He always lost track... Spain in her long and sometimes brutal, sometimes negligent, years of rule on the peninsula had never made much published use of this humble place.

Still, a handful of little feral trees all but hidden in the dune grass out on the point lingered to hint that once someone had had a brief dream of something besides pillage and war. Like himself they were survivors, ancient and bent by the relentless wind.

Their fruit was dry and stunted like the failed dreams of men but the faint sweet smell of orange blossom that the wind brought to him once or twice each April sustained Father Campo in a way that prayer and sacrament sometimes could not.
When they built the little chapel Father Campo in his wisdom sensed far older post holes pressed hidden on the earth. The women set to dig the brackish well found a hollowed out stone bowl many yards deep in the sandy ground..

*He baptized in it now and hoped the ancient shades of this place took no offense. Surely they also had marked the birth of their children by some petition of hope?*

The coquina basin was too curved and small for use in the building of the canals and tanks or Krennik's men would have taken it, for it was of the same miraculous native stone. As it was Mr. Galen Erso allowed them to bring it to him for the chapel.

*Mr. Galen Erso he knew now to be the keystone upon which some mighty construction rested. When he moved many things would fall.*

Though he saw the "Chief Engineer" of the plantation numerous times, the priest had spoken to him only a handful of words in the first years. Tall but stooped, a silent Scandinavian among the British and Portuguese of the guard and officers, Erso mostly kept to the endlessly expanding works in daylight hours, stood at the docks with the officers only for floggings and executions, and came down at other times to supervise the shipping and receipt of cargo. If he stood out to the eyes of Father Campo from among the other overseers it was only in that that the guards who accompanied his movements seemed to act in a role more supervisory than protective.

Then, some two years ago a Minorcan boy, overcome in seizures from the heat and poisoned fumes, fell inside the vat and the tall man carried him himself to the priests chapel.

"Clean water, he must have," Father Campo had pleaded in his falsely broken English.

The guards had only laughed and turned away.

Mr. Galen Erso, after a careful look over his shoulder to ascertain that the English did not see, silently gave the boy some from his own flask and rinsed his eyes with the remainder.

As the Engineer lifted his head from this merciful task the dwarfish old man truly looked at him for the first time and in those blue eyes saw what had heretofore escaped him as surely as it must have Tarkin and all his lackeys. He saw fire.

*Galen Erso burned like a cinder buried in ashes thought dead and cold.*

*The kind that may be carelessly tossed out on an icy path and forgotten until in the night breeze touches it and a city burns to the ground*
The moment passed. The grey-faced Engineer returned to the works and the boy survived though he lost the sight of one eye.

How had this been hidden from him?

Yodan Campo’s heart told him that Mr. Erso was not of the Order…. no flame of mystical skill shone in him. Those hands were not the hands of a soldier… the priest was sure that Erso had never held either sword or pistol. If searched....and he did not doubt the man had been searched, it seemed to give the cruel Director great joy to humiliate him…. no sign of the Starbird would be found on him of that Campo was also certain.

What was this fire that burned in Mr. Galen Erso? How so carefully hidden, and for so long? For even the most senior captives, Selfla and the other men of Africa, spoke of Erso having been present upon their arrival.

Thereafter he watched and prayed often on the matter of the Chief Engineer.

He made his inquiries carefully. A wrong word might mean death for anyone.

"l’home alt" the Minorcan children called him and knew better than to give thanks aloud or show any sign of gratitude or affection when he passed them small gifts of bread, or salt or thread. "Den vadízei se emás," one of the Greek men said with a cautious shrug when Father Campo asked about Mr. Erso.

Though not permitted any further than the warehouses and the nearer fields Father Campo knew from his parishioners that the stone-lined canals stretched back now for many miles, as wide in places as those of Venice. Some carried fresh water from cisterns and streams far inland down to the fetid tanks where the indigo rotted, then fell into to lower tanks for mixing and flushing. Others carried the effluent to the river and the sea. This was Galen Erso's realm and his prison.

The cakes of darkest blue were laboriously dried and packed then brought to the ships that came and went twice each fall and spring to take the precious dye back to England for lucrative sale. The other, secret product of the plantation, ground from the pressed remains of the rotted dregs was carried inland to a place never spoken of except to be called the "the Sugar Mill" there to be mixed with powders brought in by other ships. Sailors took the small schooner that ran back and forth to unload these sometimes from ships too large to enter the inlet, from the outer beaches, or met at sea.

One of the schooner pilots, a haunted-eyed Turkish youth named Rook had vanished one stormy night last year. A search had been made but the boy’s clothes had been found rolled upon the shore, and since no boats or equipment were missing the search was quickly abandoned.

Many sought escape from the plantation by whatever means they could. He would not have been the first suicide among the guards or crew.

A few nights afterward though, in his meditations, Father Campo was given a vision of a young man upon a ruddered raft with make-shift sails of woven grass, waxed, at sea beneath a white moon.
He had prayed for the youth each evening since.

As one of the crew of the schooner and much concerned with the incoming cargo Mr. Rook would have had much contact with Mr. Erso, the priest considered.

Sefla too, whose keen hand had quickly become the most skillful at cutting the stone, was also often at the works and the dreaded Mill.

Father Campo's visions began to show him many things in that winter's long nights.

A young nun lay near death in a sickbed and begged those in attendance to bring her a tiny prayer book printed in the Nahuatl, language, which she kissed and laid upon her heart. Inside it he perceived a small blue feather and a lock of a child's hair.

On the banks of the Oṣun River a young man kneels weeping at the feet of his sister and she embraces him with joy and dries his tears.

A young girl in a green gown placing a gold ring upon her third finger.

An African woman in an English city praying for her son.

A small white star reappearing from behind clouds.

A little brown-skinned girl veiled in a blue gown of India listening to stories on her mother's knee.

In a candlelit room a woman in white opens a silver locket and weeps.

A child shivered in the dark at the bottom of a well and told herself that her father would surely come soon.

A river made of fire.
A boy in white, lit by a rising sun crying "No!" Pointing a gun and firing.

A rounded cross as small as an English shilling carved of pine and varnish holds hidden in its center a gold flecked stone whose markings tell a story.

A dark ship silhouetted against a blazing sky.

A dark-haired man sat in a darkened room and wiped from his knife the blood of a man who had trusted him, silently praying, “ToTajzin aquin tinemi ne ilhuicac…” without any consciousness that he did so.

A blind youth following a rope up a path.

A tall and mighty warrior who believes himself a ghost lifting up a half-drowned boy on a wrack-filled Pacific shore.

And through all of these a blackened shadow, in the tortured shape of a man he had once known, hunting.

He knew that visions of the past, while finished and complete appear like cards well-shuffled, or leaves in the wind of the mind. The future was always in motion and it's visions disastrous as guides for deeds. So he watched, buried the dead of New Smyrna, and waited for the truth of the present to reveal itself.

“A message for me you bring?” the priest asked Sefla cautiously. “From Mr. Galen Erso you say?”
“Yes grandfather,” the stonecutter said, “Mr. Galen Erso has set a charge of fire within the heart of this evil place and the pilot carried for us a message to tell how it may be lit. Help is coming.”

_Sit Deus adiuva nos omnes_

“The people, what of them, Sefla?”

“Will you help us? The people will listen to you. We must try to rally them. Try to get them away when the time comes.”

_The river of fire._

The old priest shook his head to clear it of the vision.

He considered the hanged men he had buried two days before.

“There will be no ‘try,’ Young Sefla. Do or do not. Live or die. If begin this we do there can be no turning back.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry. Yoda, your man for backwards exposition is.
I had to give him some space to explain his addled self.
Next chapter, I swear....Brought to you by your Florida State Parks.....up the Halifax River. I promise there will be dolphins and probably manatees.

Historical notes: The descendants of the Minorcan survivors of New Smyrna have done massive genealogy and scholars have identified the last names of several families being those typical of "conversos", that is Jewish families who publicly converted rather than face exile and execution during the Inquisition. So called "crypto-Jews" also professed Catholicism under the sword but secretly retained Jewish traditions and ritual observances and were at huge risk of torture and death. Minorca became home to several small communities of converted and "crypto-Jews" seeking shelter from the church authorities of mainland Spain and Catalan amongst multi-ethnic communities on the islands there and some seem to have formed part of the 1500 tricked into servitude at New Smyrna. Anomolous burials at St. Augustine may indicate that at least a few of these families survived and retained enough of their traditions to seek some form of Jewish burial even after their re-settlement there. Work is still being done on the research.

Father Campo was a real person, and a Minorcan priest brought along by Turnbull/Tarkin to serve the Minorcan and Italian population at New Smyrna. He expanded his ministry to the care of the Orthodox Greeks and Turks as well, according to his letters. He was a very strange and interesting man, although probably not a tiny 900 year-old fighting machine and bad prankster.

Also, the oldest English maps refer to finding little orange groves abandoned on the Ponce point although not much survives to tell what the Spanish may or may not have done there. Sorry. Archeology is my jam and the notes are longer than the damn chapter.
Ceremony

Chapter Summary

In which the party from the Rogue's Venture moves inland and up the backwaters of the St. Johns River and various waterways in order to reach the dreadful plantation from the less guarded landward side.
The party aboard the Falcon settles for their first night and Miss Erso and Captain Andor formalize a matter that had heretofore remained unconventionally private in their relationship. The crew participates in various ways.
Miss Erso recalls fragments of memories of her father.
Captain Solo and Khaeuri discuss marriage in general and the Dutchman's prospects in particular.

Chapter Notes

More romance.....because nothing says love like saying it in a crowded, low-ceilinged, poorly lit, 50 foot sloop cabin at night during a rainstorm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

January 13, 1770

The Falcon
St. Johns River
above Lake George

British East Florida

She had drawn morning watch. When the call came hours still remained before dawn, but at least the rain had stopped.

There could be no bells to tell the time now but someone, Ceil-Marcheur she thought though she could not have said why, knocked firmly upon the hatch above.

Twice, pause, twice, pause, twice, pause, twice.

All was still quite dark beneath the canvas where they had slept but she found her clothes easily enough as she had rolled them near her head as a pillow of sorts in some part of the night. Having obtained all necessaries she attempted the impossible task of untangling from warm arms and legs and climbing out from between the folded mast and spars without waking him. This effort failed at once, and she felt his hand upon her hip as she braced herself to work her way out of their make-shift bed chamber.

“Qué hora?” he whispered.

“Eight bells,” was her answer as she bent to kiss the hand that stopped her, sliding her fingers along his forearm without thinking even as she tried to move away for she did wish most devoutly to stay.

“Rest while you can,” she told him, for the Falcon could not untie and move out until dawn at best.

God alone knew what would face them day by day and hour by hour from here.

For once he listened to her and lay back.

Jen Erso crawled out barefoot from beneath the tarp cover and sat upon the side of that spare boat in the Falcon’s hold to tuck her shirt and button trousers. Her boots could wait until needed. Once decently covered she lifted the hatch with her hands and climbed out onto the deck.
Her surmise had been correct. The French youth stood on by the mast.

“All quiet,” he said. “Save for the ominous splashes of the alligator. If you have a scarf, wear it, once the rain stops the moustique….mouse-kee…ahhh”

“Mousquito,” she laughed.

“I cannot pronounce it because I do not want to. Tiny shrieking demons of hell will do.”

“Repose bien Luc.”

Shaking the wet canvas slung over his shoulder he passed her the unlit lamp and moved around toward the cabin. Even in the poor light she could see his fair hair and white shirt as he paused to look back at her

“I did not say it before but, congratulations …madame.”

“Every hand at sea is a story and few of them are comedies,” old Anna used to say. Ceil-Marcheur could not be much younger than herself and in any case she had seen his hand with a musket. Whatever the youth’s tale his childhood was over now. Captain Andor thought well of him as a soldier yet something about him still seemed a sweet boy to Jen and that made her sad on his behalf.

On impulse she kissed his cheek. “Merci, Luc.”

As the boy moved down to the cabin and his hammock she made her own way toward the bow, taking his advice to tie her kerchief around her head and ears and roll up collar and down sleeves.

The low chuckle she heard from the figure at the stern,…Mr. Malbus by it’s shape… she ignored utterly.

Pity to those who had taken First and Middle Watch, was her thought as she took her seat at the rain-washed bow, but now a slight breeze had freshened and between the breaking clouds she could now see faint stars. Looking out over the dark water and darker tangles of forest on either bank, Jane Erso thought of her father.
"My Jen. My star...."

At those words a floodgate had opened, as if memory were water. On that cliff in Portugal she had been struck with force sufficient to bring her to her knees.

Now though a remembrance came to her of lying on the lawn of turf beside the garden wall....of her father teaching her how to hold a strand of grass between her small thumbs and blow through it to make a whistle.

He had carried her high on his shoulders as they walked on a graveled path, swinging her up so that she shrieked in fearful delight and her mother cried, "Galen, have a care!" It was their own sport though, and when he put her down she would raise her arms and beg to be lifted yet again.

Jen was small but she knew her papa was taller than most men. Taller than the boy who took care of the pony. Taller than the man who brought the mail in the cart.

Taller than the man in the white scarf.

His words in Alphonso's expressionless voice had reached her even through the darkness of her closed eyes and the roaring of her blood....or had it been the flames already by then?

"Saul. My heart weeps for her every day. I do not ask her to forgive me. Is she happy?"

From this firmer ground over these weeks she had begun to set aside her pain and truly reason out the words the old albino had so faithfully transcribed.

In that vanished ragged message she had heard anger, desperation, the bitter call for vengeance but also an intimacy of address. The message Mr. Bodi Rook had carried at such dreadful cost had been meant for Commander Saul Gerrere alone. Her father had spoken to Baba Saul directly, as if they were friends, almost as if they were brothers.

How? What had they been to each other?

"I swore an oath!" Saul had said

There was so much she did not know. So many things that she would ask him.

Oh Papa, and there is so much that I would tell you.

My wedding was yesterday.
Miss Jane Erso knew the perils of sail in from these coasts.

Maps that had given good guidance to pilots for a hundred years could be utterly undone in a few hours. Rafts of mangle that seemed as fixed as land could be torn loose by a single storm and slide to open or close off passages. Sand might move in a single fierce tide to open one channel and choke another. Swift moving streams that had offered deep passage but days before might now be only a portage, with low water knee-high.

Such inland rivers were as a child's toy maze and woe to the little bead caught in the wrong hole.

"You look sourly swee...I mean, Miss Erso.." Solo said, leaving Khaeuri and Mr. Rook at the helm and stepping up toward the mast where she sat. "Which of the ten thousand poor prospects that face us most troubles you presently?"

Oh God help me, she thought. *Is a man born an aja kọfọ or does the world make him one as some bears are taught to hunt and others to balance balls on their noses?*

Captain Andor lay in a hammock strung above the foredeck, resting as he could while the tide brought them up from the inlet. She wondered if he was listening.
"I must ask for your word that you will not kill him until he gets us to our destination," her love said to her quietly as they lowered and secured the gear required into the sloop.

To ask who "he" was was hardly necessary, but she glanced over to where Captain Solo was directing the men to lift the folded shallop-boat up and into his cleverly-hatched hold.

"You think him likely to betray us, even now?" she asked.

"No," he answered, "I think him true or I would not have him on here, skilled or not. I promise you I have laid aside his betters because I could not trust their motives. Syndalla judged him right, I think, but I suspect him likely to talk the strutting fool out of habit sometimes and because it comforts him."

"Ah, and you think that the cutting of fools and the tossing of their carcasses overboard is a habit of comfort to me?"

Lashing rope as he was he did not answer or meet her eye but she saw his mouth take up one of those small smiles of his that filled her heart as a breeze fills a slack sail.

Fair enough. He was not wrong

She would try treating the bear as a man and see if that made any difference.

"I grew up at sea," she said simply, "to feel the wind drop as it does in these green canyons sets my teeth on edge."

The Dutchman paused as if waiting for some insult to follow, when it did not he nodded.

"Aye," he agreed, "it feels like weighted chain and no mistake."

Looking back toward the stern, to where where they had left the main channel of the Mantazas and the outlet to the sea, he removed his vainly trimmed hat and wiped his brow with the back of his hand and a most thoughtful expression.

"I assure you though, with the extra sail the Falcon can catch a whisper too small to dry sweat," he
earnestly pointed to that admittedly clever arrangement. "And as we cut over and down the main channel of the Saint Johns we should find a little air from north to south at this time of year. With that breath we should be able to move quick enough on smooth water back into the little lakes and thus slice half the distance off before we must cut in again through the mangle-streams."

Captain Solo boasted shamelessly of his ship’s agility but in this his boasts once again proved near to the mark. The Falcon made good use of the incoming tide to bring them well in. Even after the waters turned against them they moved up River against the current far faster than Jyn would have thought possible and as they turned her inland the shallow keel let them pass through a narrow creek branching up from the dwindling Mantazas. Hardly visible except as one of several gaps in the greenery it would likely not be passable by even canoe in a few days without heavy rain and be extinguished within a dry week.

Branches scraped the sides of the little sloop and they broke out poles to push along for a tense hour, then just past sunset of that first day they reached into a wider channel, felt her lift with a changed current and knew they had reached the great inland river.

Heavy clouds covered the moon and cut off what light there was and they were required to stop or risk trouble that would cost them in damage or worse delay.

Mr. Rook pulled them well in to the bank to tie up just as the rain began in earnest.

Khaeuri draped himself in an oilskin and stood the first hours of the nights watch with Mr. Imway.

"Jesus," Captain Solo whistled. "Do you mean to tell me you are stone blind, sir?"

"Yes," the monk replied, "since infancy."

"And are you commonly given a turn at watch?"

"Only in the dark," was the cheerful answer.

The rest of the crew made places for themselves within in the small cargo cabin. Solo had a “captains cabin” for himself that was little more than a curtained shelf. Mr.s Rook, Ceil-Marcheur and Malbus took hammocks.

Only Mr. Kay seemed unwilling or unable to rest, and setting himself in a corner behind the stacked canoes with a tiny glass candle lamp, his long legs folded with knees pulled up nigh to his ears, read and sketched pencil notes in the margins of a book.
As he fixed one of the small flickering lanterns to a beam of the low ceiling Captain Solo laid a hand upon Captain Andor's shoulder and spoke to him quietly.

His words seemed casually uttered but must have been unexpected in some fashion, for Captain Andor looked at the Dutchman with surprise before quickly mastering himself to look toward her.

"A moment....." he said, "I should speak to Miss Erso."

Curious, she stepped around a crate and ducked under the foot end of the hammock in which Mr. Malbus had already situated himself.

Captain Andor stepped to meet her and bowed his head as if to speak to her with what privacy could be managed in that dim and confined space.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"No trouble," he said, "It is only that... when I informed Solo that I had no interest in commandeering his cabin..."

Ah God no, she could well understand why he might refuse. Setting rank aboard ship was important, and Solo seemed a clean fellow enough but it hardly seemed worth...

"He then suggested that I...we ...together might use the shallop-boat in the hold as a private cabin of sorts. It would be dark and somewhat open but she is well covered and so likely dry enough. An advantage would be that the arrangement might afford at least some hours of...

...before God she wished there was enough light to see his face...oh poor spy... "privacy."

"Sweet Mary! How does this rate a discussion?" Solo said as he walked back around, ducking his head below the rack of musket and stepping around Mr. Rook, who was hanging his hammock and averting his eye discretely

....Oh poor Mr. Rook....so far from home.

" The man said at one point you were his wife. Come now, I care not how you people sort yourselves wether in pairs like socks or tangled laundry in the basket. I made what I thought to be a generous suggestion one officer to others. Just settle yourselves somewhere and let us all get some rest."

They had not spoken of it, so small and selfish a thing it had seemed, to grieve for the loss of their close company, even as they laid out plans for this final dreadful part of the venture.

_Had she been once more among the she-crew of the dread Onderean she might now have laughed and said "yes please!" and one of her friends would have tossed a shilling but that world was lost forever, burned and sunk beneath the sea._
After all she had been the one to first set the rules of this lovely game they played, in which they loved each other and called each other husband and wife. So soon after it began it had ceased to be a game but still she kept to that ship’s discipline of “above decks”. It was a shyness almost or an over-caution that they shared. It seemed to her from that first night that each of them knew in their different ways how rare and hard a true thing is to find amid the lies of the world.

Yet Cassian Andor had said himself that he fit upon no chart and neither did she.

So Miss Erso took the cord that tied her necklace from over her head and slipped off from it the gold ring that threaded on beside her mother’s charm. As she did so he lay his hands over hers and took the ring from her her fingers carefully.

"Deberías casarte conmigo, soldado de la Alianza.” she whispered. He made no answer but bowed and lightly kissed the hands he held.

"Captain Solo, this is your ship so the authority of law would lie with you, it seems” he said. "May I ask as a great favor whether you would spare a few moments now to marry us?"

"Oh bloody hell!” was Solo's answer.

"What is this, you sinful children?” Mr. Malbus asked, as he lay in the hammock above, his bare feet immediately near to their heads. "Is it true you have been enjoying each other all these weeks without the sanction of religion? I am shocked."

She reached up with her free hand and pinched the bare skin of his ankle sharply.

"Fine,” Captain Han Solo, sighed. "Somebody get me a book."

Young Luc swung down from his hammock. "Zacharie had a bible but he took it with him."

"I do not care what book we use boy...." Solo looked across the cabin, "You there, long shanks, what is that volume you are reading?"

Mr. Kay looked up, no doubt puzzled to be so addressed, having ignored the conversation to this point.

"This book, sir? "An Account of East-Florida,, Including his Journals of a Journey from St. Augustine Up the River St. John’s, by John Bartram of Philadelphia, Botanist to His Majesty for the
"Wonderful. What better writ could we ask for? Give me a few moments loan of it, sir, if you would be so kind."

"Kay," Captain Andor said, "please lend the captain your book, and come up here for a moment to stand..." he looked around and spying a keg nearby pulled it over closer, "...or perhaps you had better sit...here by me."

That gentleman bent nearly in double to work his way back to the place they were standing, nearer the hatchway.

Outside in the darkness, there was little wind but the rain could be heard pounding steadily on the boards.

Jyn stepped around, ducking beneath the still amused Mr. Malbus to where Mr. Rook sat upon a trunk adjacent to the low hammock he had hung underneath Ceil-Marcheur's.

"Dear Mr. Rook," she said, kneeling to take his hand, "will you do me the great charity of acting as a witness and stand in my father's place for my wedding?"

That good man's expression seemed perfectly fixed between concerned shock, and laughable confusion, "Miss Erso. How can...? Even if..." Words clearly failed him.

He looked over to Captain Andor who was at that moment explaining to Mr. Kay that his part was only to return him back, on request, a ring that he was giving him now.

"This ring that Miss Erso has been in possession of for nearly a fortnight and that I previously questioned you about but was assured by you that her continued possession of it did not constitute theft?"

"Yes."

"The one from the trunk of costume reserved for clandestine operations?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you are my closest friend Tim and that is the required action of such in a marriage ceremony."

"Oh. I understand. Very well."
If Mr. Rook questioned her on either the legality or the churched sanctity of such a ceremony according to any religion known to man she could fashion no answer for him, and doubted Captain Andor could either.

That bravest of men laughed and bowed his head.

"Of course Miss Erso, I will be honored to do such service for you and your father."

And so he did.

Mr. Bodi Rook stood with his hand upon her shoulder and Captain Solo with the unmistakable air of a man hurrying through a school lesson bid them put their hands upon what was likely the only book aboard that ship that was not an almanac. Captain Andor passed that dear ring to Mr. Kay, seated upon a box, who with a tilt of his pale head dutifully handed it promptly back to be placed again on her finger. Solo muttered something in Dutch, pronounced them man and wife and ordered young Luc to pour out short rations of rum from the store.

Mr. Malbus hung above in his hammock and applauded with delight.

By far the oddest thing was the way Mr. Kay very gravely shook her first her hand and then Captain Andor’s afterwards.

"Is it custom for the officiant to also kiss the bride with any of you people?" Solo asked, as Jen had known he would.

"No," she and her husband answered together.

The ceremony had lasted perhaps fifteen minutes from beginning to end.

The rain slackened long enough for them to make their way out the across the dark wet deck and under the slatted hatch to the hold. The shell of the little boat lay inside, mast down and sail rolled and stowed within but there was space enough between for them no narrower than the bunk they had shared previously. Beneath her tarps it was, as Captain Andor had hoped, dry enough. She had had her wedding night already at Kingston and so did not care for anything else but that his arms should find her in the dark.

No bride was ever happier.

If four nights were all they had left then they would have them.
Within the cabin the lamps were trimmed and the crew took what rest they might, save for Mr. Kay who, having had his book returned to him, continued on with his work.

From the upper hammock Luc Ceil-Marcheur felt obliged to ask a question.

"Mr. Rook," he asked of the pilot in the hammock below, "is this what weddings are generally like in the Alliance?"

"I do not imagine so," the pilot answered. "but as it is the first I have witnessed, I cannot say."

"Well," the youth sighed, "it is nothing like the weddings in Tournemire, that is all I can tell you.

They were both asleep by the time Mr. Imway came down from his own turn at watch. He sat for some time in the large hammock set up by Mr. Malbus and the two of them laughed heartily together as Malbus related the story of what had transpired in their own language.

At midnight Captain Solo came up upon the rainy deck.

“He aha te ngangau katoa i roto i te whare noho?” Khaeuri asked him, passing over the oilskin.

“Een beetje dwaasheid,” the Dutchman shook his head, “The Spanish assassin and the pirate woman wished to be married and I was required to perform the offices with a book about holy birds and fish. It was quite touching. I swear to you I nearly wept.”
“He pai ki te marena,” his First Mate said, “Ka awhina i a ratau ki te kimi tetahi i te rangi.”

“Ja, ja. So they always told me when I was a boy.”

“He pai ki te whai wahine,” his First Mate said, adding sorrowfully, “Ka whakarerea e au wahine katoa a koe. He pouri ki a koe.”

“Damn you, sir. If I have told you once I have told you a thousand times just because I bring a woman aboard and…”

“Kaua e pouri. Ka kitea e matou tetahi wahine mo koe i mua i to tau tawhito,” he patted Solo’s shoulder, “He wahine ataahua ia ki te moni.”

Solo shook his head, but smiled and held his arm as a brother should. “You cheer me, friend. Go get some dry sleep. “

Glad to have at least raised the poor puppy’s spirits, Khaeuri moved down to his hammock.

Chapter End Notes

Deberías casarte connigo, soldado de la Alianza. = You should marry me, soldier of the Alliance. (Spanish)

Een beetje dwaasheid = a bit of folly (Dutch)

He aha te ngangau katoa i roto i te whare noho? = What is the whole/all of the noise in the housing/cabin?

He pai ki te marena. = It’s good to get married.

Ka awhina i a ratau ki te kimi tetahi i te rangi. = It helps you find/you to find someone in heaven/the afterlife.

Ka whakarerea e au wahine katoa a koe. He pouri ki a koe = All your wives leave you. It's sad for you.

Kaua e pouri. Ka kitea e matou tetahi wahine mo koe i mua i to tau tawhito. = Do not be sad. We will find a wife for you before your old age.
He wahine ataahua ia ki te moni. = A beautiful woman with money. (Maori)

I desperately wanted to get this team onto the St. John's and across the awesomeness of the lakes which is no longer geographically possible but what the hell, heavy rains and a couple of hurricanes rearranges everything in Florida. John Bartram's Journals(1766) are real and he seems to canoe and sail a lot of places you can't get to anymore so he's my muse for this.

Oh, in case I forgot to mention this previously, "Mangle" is what the English called "mangrove" of all kinds and the word "forest" was not used as it is now usually is to describe only stands of mature trees but to describe all kinds of brush and thick mixed vegetation.
In which The Falcon continues up the inland river called, among other names, the St. John. Mr. Timothy Kay speaks briefly with Mr. Baze Mabus and they come to a sort of understanding. Captain Andor reflects upon his experiences with the two monks as well as the mission before them all and the party aboard the Falcon encounters a battle between monsters.

Kay and Baze bonding. It should have happened.
Welcome to Florida.
Checklist: Manatees, Alligators, Birds, Worrying about getting stuck on a sandbar, More cool birds, Discussion of barbecuing an alligator.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

January 14, 1770

The Falcon

St. Johns River

British East Florida
“Behold him rushing forth from the flags and reeds. His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. When immediately from the opposite coast of the lagoon, emerges from the deep his rival champion. They suddenly dart upon each other. The boiling surface of the lake marks their rapid course, and a terrific conflict commences. They now sink to the bottom folded together in horrid wreaths…. Again they rise, their jaws clap together, re-echoing through the deep surrounding forests. Again they sink, when the contest ends at the muddy bottom of the lake, and the vanquished makes a hazardous escape, hiding himself in the muddy turbulent waters and sedge on a distant shore. The proud victor exulting returns to the place of action. The shores and forests resound his dreadful roar…” p. 118, William Bartram, Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida and the Extensive Territories of the Creek Confederacy and the Country of the Choctaws. Philadelphia, 1767

“The blue powder house of poison we go to storm is South of where we started and the sun and all her stars tell me we are heading South but we go against the current…such as it is it moves to the North from here.”

It had come to his attention some time previous that Mr. Malbus had a habitual dislike for the use of proper names in any context.

Mate Khaeuri he commonly called “colorful giant” or ‘foreign giant” so it was unsurprising that he should address Mr. Kay himself with such improper and saucy informality. He referred to Captain Andor as “Captain,” which though curt was at least correct. Luc Ceil-Marchuer he referred to as “the boy,” or sometimes “the shiny boy” which was somewhat confusing. Captain Solo was commonly “the Dutchman,” and Mr. Rook “Pilot”, again accurate if somewhat impolite, though Mr. Rook professed this to be infinitely preferable to Malbus's previous appellation of him as “the infidel.” Miss Erso, who might more properly be called Mrs. Andor at this point, he addressed as “mei-mei” or “little sister” interchangeably, which must surely be symbolic of an affiliation other than the traditionally familial. His companion Mr. Imway he addressed occasionally by his given name of Chirrut but just as frequently as “blind fool.

The contrast between this seemingly derogatory form of address and subsequent occasions when he overheard him address Imway quietly as “Qīn'àì de”.....which Kay’s limited experience in dialects of...
spoken Chinese suggested as an endearment .....also appeared when held to observations of Mr. Imway's good humored and affectionate manner to Malbus and trusting reliance on his countryman for assistance in such homely matters as the filling of his plate at mess and determining the color of his neckerchief. These spoke instead to mutual regard and intimate attachment as the basis of their relationship.

Incongruities regarding the actions of persons and their relations to each other confused Mr. Kay still but not as they had in his youth when they were a source of enormous distress. His experiences subsequent had greatly expanded his ability to categorize the actions of others. Commander Tano and Captain Andor's tutelage had been enormously helpful in this.

Mr. Malbus, allowing for variations influenced by cultural factors and previous traumatic experiences that affected his relation to others, might best be categorized as "gruff" and "sarcastic" therefore Kay focused upon the valid question imbedded in his utterance rather than it's manner of delivery.

"It is a peculiarity of the St. Johns River that it flows North along much of its length from the center of the peninsula, presumably from some as-yet unconfirmed source to the South," he informed the man. "As such it is of some interest to scientists and cartographers, though largely unexplored by Europeans until quite recently."

"Ah," the man said, "like the Irtysh or the Nile, two rivers that also never brought me anywhere I wanted to go."

Timothy Samson Kay considered this for some time.

"Attention to accuracy is an important indicator of regard, Mr. Malbus."

The man grunted, as was his habit and regarded him with a raised eyebrow.

Mr. Kay took no offense as he was familiar with such pauses among persons translating meaning in a language in which they were, while fluent, not native and continued.

"My height is well above average by any measure but the place of my birth, though presently part of the United British Kingdom, is in fact Scotland."

Malbus frowned slightly and regarded him in silence for a time while he pulled up and coiled the damp bit of rope to replace it in his pocket.

"Very well, Scottish giant," he said.
At his wife's instance he slept for a few hours after she slipped wraithlike out to take her watch before dawn.

"Is it too dark down here?" he had asked as they made a narrow bed under the canvas cover of the folded shallop, for he knew that at times when her nightmares had troubled her she had liked more light, even if it was but a porthole open to starlight or the watch's lamp visible out on the deck.

"No, no," she had said, "not if you are with me," then most ardently set about to reassure him of her fearlessness until they both quickly forgot the dark and the hammer of the rain upon the hatch and cover above them.

Upon awakening alone, and hearing movement on deck he took moments to lie and gather his thoughts.

They had managed the first peril, that of finding Solo's passage from the Mantazas to the chain of lakes that formed this portion of the St. John's.

Now Solo's famously clever ship and keen seamanship must work them across and up the variable courses of the river until they could find a channel that would bring them close in to plantations unguarded inland boundary. They had at best two more days and a night to accomplish the journey that Kay's present idols Mr.s John and William Bartram, Royal Botanists of these Provinces by appointment of George III, had taken in two weeks.

Mr. Rook had experience managing the inlets near the plantation. Solo and his crew had sailed here but months before and his Jen had ventured the far northern reaches of this same River in her piratical youth.

It occurred to Captain Andor that it was himself and Mr. Kay who had the least practical experience of these inland waters and though Kay's confidence seemed much recovered since his late trials Captain Andor knew himself to be on uncharted seas in more ways than he cared to count.

He excepted Mr.s Imway and Malbus, who had already informed him plainly that they had neither of them ever visited the Americas, from this reckoning. They were already exceptions to so many rules now one more seemed hardly worth mention.
He had been walking the decks in the restless hours before they had first sailed out from Gibraltar, so long ago, and come upon Mr. Imway sitting quietly near the hatches, head bowed as if in prayer. As always when he was not otherwise committed Mr Malbus stood nearby, a looming protector. "Good morning Captain Andor," the blind man had called out, "is it you we must speak to first about berths upon this ship or one of these other fine officers?"

Though the main routes of travel and commerce between Europe and the East Indies were well known to him upon the map Cassian Andor had himself never ventured further East than Cyprus nor further West than Acapulco.

When he and Rostock had interviewed the refugee monks afterwards he had taken an opportunity to ask the question that circumstance had denied him in the cell above the Tagus. "How from so far in the East did you make your way to Lisbon and what did you seek there?"

"A clear path appeared before me," Mr. Imway said smiling in answer, "and I followed it there, and from there.." he reached out with a hand to tap the deck beside him, "... to here. How much further it winds is not clear to me now, but I am glad that this portion of our journey shall be by sail at least, my feet have grown a little tired from all the walking."

"Gods grace and good Fortune have guarded you well then," Captain Rostock had said, "if you made your way West over Asia to Lisbon on in any part by foot."

"Grace indeed," Mr. Imway had answered, "but I had no need of Fortune," he nodded toward his companion, "I have Baze Malbus."

Mr. Malbus had grunted in exasperated disgust at this but made no contradiction.

That gentleman's answer when interviewed was far less mystical if no more enlightening. "The Darkness burns in civilized places as well as out here among infidels and barbarians and I lost my faith in mere words and dreams to hold against it." Here he had raised his crossbow, a weapon that Kay's eye had judged to be of Ottoman workmanship though none had yet had nerve enough to inspect it closely and laid it on the table. "Once I guarded a temple full of fools, now I guard only one."

Rostock being amenable they were thereafter given the oath and taken on as crew but as the men stood to depart the interview and be issued their gear and berths Captain Andor, quite without forethought, asked them another question.

Not until childhood had been left far behind had Cassian Andor visited the western port of Acapulco but a more youthful memory came to him of the docks of Veracruz and trains of wagons unloading crates all stacked as high as the two story walls and then loaded in turn onto ship after ship queued in the great harbor. Each when filled was bound for Spain. Not even the rats of the docks slept during the those days and nights devoted to the loading of the goods brought overland from the Galeones de Manila. A boy struggling to hold on to the letters a barely remembered loving hand taught him had eagerly in those days tried to read any notice, bill or posting that came his
way. Painted on those crates in red and black had been characters he did not know but beneath sometimes were others he did, though the word they spelled had had no meaning to him then....

"Did you sail from Fujian?"

Mr. Imway only shook his head, but Mr. Malbus looked at him then with a genuine surprise.

"Not him," the grizzled man answered nodding toward his companion, "once this fool healed from his injuries he decided that his God wanted us to walk along every road from Chang'an to Baida, many that beasts have sense enough not to travel but in my youth I did go down to Fujian once and stayed some while there. I saw the ocean and learned to sail a boat and to cut a man's throat..."

Imway coughed, "oh alright, I already knew how maybe but I learned to do it better there."

He looked Captain Andor over with a shrewd eye.

"All those ships we loaded to sail south and go west with silk and rugs and all that silver we unloaded for the Emperors coffers...were you unloading and loading them on the other side young man?"

**Well, myself and half of Mexico**, Cassian Andor thought.

"I suppose I was."

Mr. Malbus laughed heartily, "and so on two sides of the mighty Tàipíngyáng a little boy and a big one both came to know that the sinful world is round, did they not Captain?"

Before he saluted Captain Rostock and took Lieutenant Melshi's hand one last time, *each doubtless aware that one way or another their boyhood contest was finished*, and climbed down to the Falcon, Midshipman Syndalla spoke to him at the rail of the Rogue’s Venture..

"Me leve com você.,” she had said, knowing full well she stepped outside the order of command in doing so.

"Nenhum capitão, você será necessário aqui," he answered her. *having had to say much the same to Mr. Baldwin Core, Lieutenant Antilles and, surprisingly young Toby.*

That brave woman glanced down and across to the Falcon's deck, where Imway and Malbus were already aboard and helping maneuver the now folded shallop as it was lowered by ropes into the shallow hold of the sloop. “These men are good hands surely but....”

*He might have answered her, “They have skills we may well need. Strong arms may be all that can pull us through these shallows and a blind man's eye may be all that saves us in the dark,” For these*
things were indeed true but she would not have been satisfied.

"You know the reasons why," he said.

You have held command as I do now Captain Hera Syndalla.

Melshi must take as many experienced Alliance hands as I can leave him to confront an enemy only one ship has ever escaped. The Falcon goes into the dark. These men are all chosen for their skill to aid in that mission, because they volunteer, but also because in the final calculation they are expendable.

She laid a hand upon his arm then and nodding sorrowfully turned away.

He hoped that for all her talk of pirates and their scorn for farewells Miss Erso had found occasion to say goodbye to Syndalla. He perceived that the women had great fondness for each other and Commander Fetta's admonition lingered in his mind.

When the dawn came a few hours later another light knock sounded upon the hatch. ..two a pause and then two...her hand he felt sure. Captain Andor found his clothing and moved the canvas back carefully so as not to dampen their makeshift cabin more than necessary. Once dressed he lifted the hatch and climbed out upon the deck to put on his boots. Above he found the Morning Watch half finished and a sky brightening with sun and broken clouds.

Mrs. Andor had clearly put the fear of God into Solo and Malbus for they made no remarks pertaining to a wedding night and allowed him to claim a biscuit, apple and button of dried beef to make some breakfast. Only the tattooed Mate, climbing down from his hammock to walk head and shoulders bowed and claim some food for himself, clapped him on the shoulder more gently than Captain Andor had braced himself to expect and said, "Mahi pai. He hari to wahine," with what appeared to be a smile. For all he knew the remark concerned something quite innocuous but the captain was still relieved that Solo was not nearby enough to offer translation.

As they worked their way across the glittering waters of the lake great numbers of snowy white birds
lifted and flew from the wide swaths of green on either side, egrets of various sizes. Great herons stalked the fallen logs and branches, fierce eyes focused down on their prey in the water like skilled assassins. There were some whose names he knew in several languages and others he had never seen before.

Mr. Malbus laughed at a bunch of brilliant pink Platalea ajaja. They must have blown inland in the storm and were now wading in one of the grassy edges of a lake as the Falcon passed through. "They are like ugly maids in beautiful silk. Chirrut! They have spoons on their faces." He went on to describe them at greater length to a laughing Mr. Chirrut in their own language.

To Mr. Kay's evident interest the grey forms of large manatí could sometimes be seen among the weeds of the edge. Kay was most intrigued by Jen's account of clear warm springs that fed into other reaches of the river and how in these the beasts sometimes gathered in great numbers in the cool nights of winter and how they could be seen quite clearly in the fresher waters. "They look quite smooth from this distance but their hides are rougher than pumice," she said, with an almost girlish smile, "though the natives are said to hunt them they have no fear whatsoever of people and one rolled as tamely as a pet beneath the hand I extended from the dory we rowed across."

"I did not have the heart to tell him how our crew speared them and brought the meat back smoked," she whispered to him later. "The thought came to me that this might upset him."

It might or it might not, he told her. Mr. Kay was usually a stranger to impractical sentiments but sometimes he did form attachments to animals that seemed to escape him with people.

The day passed into afternoon. By dint of Solo and his Mates's skill and Jen and Ceil-Marchuer's quick hands at the sails they had taken good advantage of the wind to make speed against the sluggish currents, passing through wide passages as still as broad shallow lakes and then up through clearly distinguishable banks to the next turned thread of the river into the next. As the afternoon passed they came into what would likely, by their maps be the last widening.

"Breathe while you can Andor," Solo said, pointing across the small shallow lake. "Across here we must choose our path carefully."

The oldest Spanish map that Captain Andor had seen of the area called the Rio San Juan, Rio de Corrientes, and Miss Erso had noted that Gerrere's guides called it the Welaka, in their tongue the River of Lakes. With each rainy season it partially rearranged itself like beads of various sizes upon a stranded cord and they must pick the right string or risk failure.

From the bow Mr. Rook called out, "Captain, ahoy! We have debris in the water to starboard."

"Damn these trees," Solo said, taking out with the small glass Captain Andor had given him use of. It was not the first time that he had cursed the branches and whole rafts of brush that the previous night's storm had washed into the river. Here they were but a hazard to navigation, but as their way narrowed they might become an obstruction the Falcon would be pressed to clear.

"De zoete Jezus is een timmerman!" he said, peering through, "Look at the size of that one. Big as an oak and enough to put a dent in us for sure. Khaeuri! Turn us to…"
His bold Jen stepped up beside him. At the precise moment she murmured, “It moves across the current not with it,” Chirrut Imway seated in the bow turned his sightless eyes over the water and called, “That is no log.”

Khaeuri let out a great shout the meaning of which Solo did not need to translate. A great beast, an alligator at least 20 feet in length, vastly besting in size anything from young Sabine’s long ago stories, charged straight toward their bow with a snarl, seeming to lift itself half out of the water by the effort. Mr. Malbus all but threw Mrs. Andor to the deck and shoved him aside to fire his crossbow fairly into the lizard’s gaping maw.

“No!” Jen cried, from the boards but as the creature fell back and rolled, frothing the water with a deafening roar the sound of something slapping the water on the near side of the bank was loud enough to be heard even over the bellowing of the wounded monster.

Swiftly foaming the water before it another massive alligator charged across, leaping at it’s wounded rival with a bone jarring cry.

“Rook take the helm!” Captain Solo shouted, “Erso the jib! On my mark and not before!” he ran back and took the place of his Mate while Khaeuri seized up a harpoon fixed beneath the cabin awning and hurled it at the wrestling beasts.

”Now!” Solo cried.

The little ship turned as hard to port as she could and a sudden lucky gust aided their turn. Kay had all but run to the rail for a better look and Captain Andor grabbed his coat and pulled him back in fear of a sudden vision that he would overbalance straight into the mouth of one of the thrashing creatures.

“Save your bolts,” Imway said. “They fight each other now and will until one or both are dead.”

The splash and sound of the battle continued behind them as the Falcon shot to port and tacked around, all the waters of the lake in turmoil.He prayed that in his urgency Solo knew his depth still amid these shallow bars…sooner or later they would need to leave the Falcon and proceed by smaller craft yet he had no wish to do so here….but it seemed that the Dutchman kept his head. The roars continued for a time, deafening, echoing across the water even as they moved away. Then, suddenly they stopped and a few seconds of silence reigned before they heard the sound of smaller splashes struck, one after another after another...from the banks all around them.

_Smaller predators moving to take advantage of their sovereign’s fall?_

“Cassian,” Kay said, from where he sat beside him on the deck, in a slightly tightened tone that Captain Andor alone recognized as confusion and contained distress, “Why did you knock me over and to what purpose are you still holding onto my coat?”

“My apologies Kay,” he said, releasing the garment and climbing back to his feet, “I was seized with
a sudden irrational concern that you would fall overboard and be eaten by alligators.”

“He kino rawa. He kai pai kei reira,” the cannibal said shaking his head as if in sorrow as he looked back.

“You are welcome to swim back for it,” Solo said, “I will ready a grill on deck and mix up a sauce.”

They crossed over the grassy lake and the wayward river began to narrow more and more around them. As the sun set it split into three separate shadowed branching channels bent before the Falcon.

Solo conferred with Ceil-Marcheur and Mr. Rook at length then crossed himself and chose the center channel of the seemingly identical choices. The brush closed around again, now to a masts-length from the sloop on each side, cutting off most but not all of the fortunate breeze. The channel stayed deep enough though, they had chosen well. The Falcon moved beneath a cloudy moon for a time until it was reckoned that the risk of missing a turning in the dark exceeded the danger of the time it would lost in tying up until dawn.

His wife took his hand and they retired to their own “cabin” for such rest as they could find before the morning watch and dawn.

By sunset tomorrow, the third day from their parting with the Rogues Venture, they must try to reach the outskirts of the dreadful plantation, by whatever means they could.
Běi = North
Tàipíngyáng = the Pacific Ocean (Chinese)

Me leve com você = Take me with you

Nenhum capitão, você será necessário aqui = No, Captain, you will be needed here (Portuguese)

Mahi pai. He hari to wahine. = You have done good work. Your wife seems happy. (Maori)

platalea ajaja= roseate spoonbill
manatí = manatee (Spanish)

De zoete Jezus is een timmerman! = Sweet Jesus be a carpenter! (Dutch)

He kino rawa. He kai pai kei reira. = It's very sad. There's a good meal there. (Maori)

Yes, the Saint Johns flows north. Changed some dates on Bartrams Journal but the "battle of the Alligators" quote is verbatim. Sadly nobody believed the poor guy and he was condemned for his purple prose but speaking as someone who floated her tiny kayak past an 18 footer that the locals called "Goliath" I believe the guy.

The "Manila galleons" brought the riches of China to the New World via the Philippines twice a year for over 200 years to be carried from Acapulco to Veracruz overland and taken thence to Spain. Gold started the Spanish Empire but silver was what the Emperor of China wanted and as much was shipped out of Mexico to the East as it was to the West to be turned into all that fine English and French silverware you see on Antiques Roadshow.
The Plantation

Chapter Summary

In which Mr. Galen Erso seeks out his friend and ally on the New Smyrna plantation Mr. Sefla, to share the news relayed in his daughters treasured letter. He recalls how his first encounter with that resolute gentleman came about, through the retelling of an incident early after the arrival of the Minoricans in which the painful choices of the prisoners, and of many other desperate souls in the region, were laid bare. The two men realize that the last chance to thwart the evil aims of their enemies may be nearly upon them.

Chapter Notes

Ok. Dark. Sorry Exposition. More painful drama in the Americas of the 18th cen. The prisoners of New Smyrna will be fighting back. Three score means sixty in case you've ever wondered.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Were it not for Taidu Sefla all would have failed long ago. Mr. Galen Erso knew that alone he would never have had the strength of mind or wit to find a way out of the darkness that surrounded them all.

Six years ago the stone mason Juan Partella, had told him a story.

That first full season, after the back fields were cleared and the storms ended, forty or so of the workers had been driven out to what was then the farthest end of the plantation, at the drying bend of the Spruce Creek. There they were set to labor in the sweltering heat, placing new indigo seedlings out into the sandy soil beside the first-finished of the great irrigation trenches.

Arrows.....thin, short and almost soundless in flight, came from the forested brush and struck two workers dead.

The half dozen English guards abandoned the people in the field and fled back toward the central part of the settlement, the great house had been merely a blocked foundation then and the
barracks no more than two or three wooden huts and a series of rough awnings, to ring the bell and call the reinforcements from their fellows then still largely camped aboard the ships.

In those moments, Juan told Mr. Erso, a dozen dark men appeared, shirtless, hair bound back and eyes marked by red and blue, paced so as to nearly circle the field and the laborers who now stood frozen in terror or cowered at the edges of the rows, their only escape nearly cut off.

“A-la-kus-cheh!” several of the strange men shouted again then one of them, by signs and in some fair clear Spanish, though spoken with a grimace, Juan said that made it seem as if every word in the language was distasteful to the man, made to them a kind of announcement. Their "caceque" a word they used as if to mean "leader" was fleeing this area to the North and West, across the inland river. The "prisoners, he said were all welcome to come with them if they were willing to fight as warriors but they must come now.

Sefla stood not far from him and they two alone of all those gathered faced the speaker with anything like undersandng. So it was that both men learned what neither of them had known until then, that they both understood Spanish. They two of all who stood in that sun-baked field in that moment.

It had been essential prior for each man to conceal this from their captors, who sought always to control the people in separating them by language, Minorican from Greek, Italian from the surviving Africans, all from the English, lest the oppressed more easily join forces.

Though the cruel overseers often knew enough in each speech to give orders and watch for insurrection only two men were safe to admit mastery of more than one tongue, the chief of the works, Mr. Galen Erso and the old Catholic priest, Father Campo. Of these only Mr. Erso moved freely. The priest, a wizened little man who hobbled with a cane, was kept now mostly confined to the area adjacent to his small hut and chapel was much under suspicion a necessary evil in Krennik's mind for the the control of the Minoricans and Italians.

Juan was astonished when Sefla began to speak, "Hay niños aquí ..... por favor" he began, and it was true. The young children were always kept back when the adults worked the field, to work at the camp. This ensured the return of their parents from the lightly-watched field “Por favor. Déjanos conseguir a los niños!”

But the intruder shook his head. "A-la-kus-cheh," one of the other savage man repeated, pointing to Sefla, and around at the half dozen other African men who were there with them.

Juan realized, in that moment that the man was not speaking to him, or most of the other men and women in the field behind.

"Confiamos solo en los africanos ... vamos a luchar. No podemos traer niños," Juan thought he shook his head as if in sorrow. Another of the savage men stepped forward then and spoke fiercely, pointing to the bodies of the two dead Minorican laborers, "Los españoles son nuestros enemigos Los ingleses son nuestros enemigos ¡Elige rápidamente!"
"Estes personas no son españolas!" Sefla protested, but the bell was ringing and the shouts of the English guards could be heard.

The other Africans looked at Taidu Sefla uncertain for none spoke any language save that of their own nations.

"Kuwa?" one of the young men said imploringly to Sefla.

The broad-shouldered man called something to them in another tongue, “Ji da zuciyarka. Allah zai gaya muku abinda za ku yi.”

Juan had guessed the sense if not the meaning of his utterance. No doubt he told them that a desperate choice now lay before them, whether to run into the wilderness in the company of these warlike utter strangers or stay and endure whatever lay ahead with the cruel Devils who brought them here.

Three of the African men turned and boldly ran into the forest.

What the others might have done could not be divined, perhaps they themselves could not say. For then the English arrived and began to fire their guns. The remaining workers threw themselves to the ground and the Indis vanished.

Juan told Galen Erso later that he did not grudge the three men who had run. They had no children hostage here, being along with Sefla among the dozen still left alive from the three score Governor Tarkin had brought in the first year before the Minorcans arrived. Most of their fellows were dead and even if by some miracle of salvation aid came from outside they had no reason to believe that it would come for them.

But oh the bitterness of it he said, as he wiped the tears from his eyes. To be denied even the hope of such savage rescue by being mistaken for the despised Spanish, who had ruled Mahon without pity and left the people of Minorica to starve.

Sefla being among those who had remained the guards taunted him in particular hardly caring that he could not understand them, as they thought, saying that he was lucky his scarred leg had slowed him, promising to bring back the others in chains, though they never did.

In the dark of the path outside Father Campo’s pitiful hut some days later Partella took the chance to approach Taidu Sefla.

“If my intention was to abandon these who cannot run, cannot fight, to break the promise of vengeance I made those who lie beneath the waves off that cursed shore, to renege upon the vow I took to God I would have done so. For I am in most respects a dead man already,” Sefla told him, almost with a kind of pride, “I swallowed my draft of seawater and spit it out again for that one purpose. I saw the light of Aljanna that you call el paraíso and now it is in me and I shall never be parted from it.”

Many months past before the stone mason found cause to trust Mr. Erso sufficiently to relate this story to him.

More time passed before Mr. Erso himself went to the overseer and asked for a man to be given to
him to grind stalks for the testing tank. “I need a strong back but there is no need for walking far, that fellow will do.”

When the grinding of the stone hid the sound of speech from the inattentive guard on the path the Engineer asked directly, “Hermano. Quiero matar a todos estos demonios y quemar esta estación de la Muerte de la faz de la tierra. ¿Me ayudarás?”

The Hausa man looked at him sharply at first for trust misplaced here was mortal danger, then with a courage Mr. Erso would soon come to know well, Taidu Sefla nodded. “Death indeed,” he said in English. “There is no better name yet we must find a way. It is demanded of us.”

“Do you think they yet live?” Sefla asked Galen Erso once, as they stood one night at the back of the “Sugar Mill” listening to the calls across the distant forest of what sounded like birds and might or might not have truly been so.

Certainly, there were no more attacks on the workers in the fields after that, although the English guards seldom ventured far unless in good numbers no matter how well armed. Several of the smaller surveying parties had vanished.

This was their battle, his and Sefla’s but there were others who fought elsewhere and he admired them keenly for it.

New Smyrna Colony

Mosquito Inlet
British East Florida

January 8, 1770

He went to the tanks that morning with his child's precious letter bound against his side with a band of cloth, grateful for the first time for the dampened scarf all who ventured close must wear across nose and mouth lest they be overcome. The cloth hid a visage he no could not in this moment trust to conceal his emotion and the stark vapors heat rendered the tears he found himself unable to suppress unremarkable.

Mr. Erso stepped close to the Indigo worker as he raked the last of the vile matter in the the upper tank. Though breath must be kept shallow and muffled by the protection of the cloth, so long as they stood beside those dangerous vats they might speak as freely as men upon the moon. No man of Tarkin or Krennik's would venture near.

"The pilot," Galen Erso told him, "Brave Sefla, Mr. Rook survived. He brings help." His friend’s eyes alone were visible above the scrap of damp rag that bound his face.

“Praise God,” he said. Then, “The Lion?”

Galen Erso shook his head.

“The Alliance...and,” he laid his hand upon’s arm, “my child. He found my daughter and they come together. He leads them here.”

Sefla’s eyes were rimmed in red as were his own from the acrid steams but his gaze was clear.

“When?” he asked.

All other details were of less importance. Time was running out, as they both knew well.

The warehouses were full and the tanks held as much as they could bear, while the canals filtered the water for the last round of processing. The season of hurricanes being well over in these seas and the worst winter storms of the North would soon be past. Months at best. Weeks at worst.

Mr. Erso had before reckoned it likely that when the final hour came they would have the warning of Dr. Tarkin’s triumphant return. Barring that at least that of seeing the last crop of true indigo shipped out. Even the Devil does not waste treasure surely? Now it seemed more likely that they might not
have even these signs to tell them that the last hour for action was upon them.

Oren Krennik cheated whenever he could but he had been willing to gamble with true dice from time to time if he thought he could win and the Director had returned in his good hat and scarf from some shipboard meeting well outside the inlet as pleased as a patient fox at finding the chicken house door at long last open.

Her letter had been dated upon the last of September, the heart of the season of storms. Grant was dead and one of those English officers had slipped this letter into his pocket two days ago…How long to cross in safety and gather means….it could not be easy.

She spoke of safety at St. Augustine. She must be near and Mr. Rook was with her, he knew the inlets….

“…..I am alive, and free. Be assured that I am provided with skills and resources most women my age do not possess, enough to make my way in circumstances that might daunt others….”

His bold little Jen, climber of unwatched ladders, chaser of butterflies, general of her wooden soldiers.

A broad-shouldered, dark and melancholy man, Lara’s “friend” at Southampton, had joined them in the shuttered carriage at Dover. He had been dressed as a servant yet the men in the stable had stepped back in salute when he came in.

His clear-eyed Beatrice had felt the touch of the shadow even as long ago as India though she had not been able then to give it a name. Approached by a sailor at Madras she had not known then who to believe but had kept the note he passed to her for months, then just Jen after was born begun to pass information.

So it was that the most dreaded pirate of the seven seas sat and listened, bundled in a coachman’s greatcoat. He listened as Galen Erso poured out his tale for hour upon hour over the journey. Cold manner at first yet still he had listened, taken notes and asked keen questions, alas most often about things Erso in his ignorance did not know, about ships, schedules and ports in Asia and the Indes, the names of government officials. Galen Erso knew very little of such matters. All that had been Krennik’s business. Yet the man was patient and as the weeks of travel passed his attitude softened.

When he bade them farewell at Penzance, the man embraced him with affection and respect. Mr. Erso in his terrible shame had been truly and deeply moved by the gesture.

“Do you know how rare it is Galen Erso,” he said, “to meet a man who will say, “I believe you,” to a being all his world tells him is his inferior, be it man to woman, master to slave, husband to wife, victor to vanquished? You have failed you say? You have been a blind? I tell you I have seen many blind men but very few with the strength to cast off error when confronted with it. I once believed Lara’s faith in you misguided. Forgive me.”

Commander Saul Gerrere looked to his wife then as Galen Erso imagined a king of old might look as he set a beloved knight out into battle.
“...but we will watch and if all else fails Lara... if the worst transpires, get to safety with supplies for at least two days and my men will find you.” He laid his scarred hand upon the hazel curls of the sleeping child as she lay in her mother’s arms, “I will care for her as if she were my own.” he said and smiled, “And we will fight side by side will we not sweetling? Until we drive them all into the sea. For there is no strength in the world like a free woman with a sword in her hand and her true path open before her, I know.”

“This hideous venture will be thwarted and our loved ones avenged..... Dearest Papa, do not despair. I am coming for you. Stars are constant, even when hidden from sight......”

Oh Lara....

“It will be soon.”

Sefla bowed his head and Galen Erso heard him whisper words of prayer.

*In all these years how many hours had they spoken freely? Never enough for him to teach or Erso to learn. They had only ever spoken through tongues not their own.*

“Dole ne ku ci gaba da bege cikin zuciyarku, har ma a cikin duhu dare, mala'ika ya ce.”

Galen Erso expected no forgiveness when Judgement came, not even with his guide in Paradiso to plead for him, but if all their fates were bound perhaps Sefla’s invocation could take his own as echo.

“Amen” he whispered.

Sefla looked up. “It is time to begin. I will go to the old priest.”

“Do you think he has the strength?” Galen Erso asked.

“He is far stronger than he looks.” Sefla said.
Chapter End Notes

Coming up. Some people will be dressing up and sneaking onto the facility. Frieherr Vader realizes more may be going on than a weapons project. Father Campo prepares to kick ass.

A-la-kus-cheh! = Come with us! (Seminole, Maskókî or Muskogee, a variant of Creek)

No! Estes personas no son españolas! = No! These people are not Spanish!

Hay niños aquí = we have children here

Por favor. Déjanos conseguir a los niños = Please. Let us get the children.

Confiamos solo en los africanos ... vamos a luchar. No podemos traer niños = We trust only the Africans ... we go to fight. We can not bring children.

Los españoles son nuestros enemigos Los ingleses son nuestros enemigos ¡Elige rápidamente! = The Spaniards are our enemies! The English are our enemies! Choose quickly!

(Spanish)

Kuwa? = Uncle?
Ji da zuciyarka. Allah zai gaya muku abinda za ku yi. = Listen to your heart. God will tell you what to do.

(Hausa)

Hermano. Quiero matar a todos estos demonios y quemar esta estación de la Muerte de la faz de la tierra. ¿Me ayudarás? = Brother. I mean to kill all these devils and burn this station of Death from the face of the earth. Will you help me?

Historical not: Yeah. Based on an actual event at the New Smyrma indigo plantation. In the later 18th cen. A tribe formed of survivors, mainly Muskegee/Creek-speaking people who were forced South into Florida by the expansion of the English into Georgia. The Aie and Timmican peoples who had made treaties with the Spanish a century before had mostly died of introduced disease or intermarried with Spanish, Choctaw, and free black communities. Those who remained culturally distinct but whose parents had converted to Catholicism and were themselves baptized offered the chance to relocate to Cuba with the Spanish mission communities in 1763. Some who would not or had not remained and linguistic evidence suggests that at least some of these joined the independent bands of Creek-speakers who dissatisfied re: ticked off with their leaders bargains with the English and the Spanish went kind of rogue. Being culturally less dependent on coastal access these new bands of outlaws formed their own communities along the rivers and "forest" wilderness the Spanish had largely avoided and the English had not yet exploited. They actively recruited people held in slavery and deserters from any army. Eventually calling themselves the Seminole they were flat-out legendary.
The Fields of Indigo

Chapter Summary

In which the party aboard the Falcon comes as far down the inland waterways as that clever boat can bring them. The former Miss Jen Erso, Mr. Bodi Rook and Captain Andor face the task before them and Mrs. Andor considers her husbands qualities of leadership in this hour. Young Sera Fortuna and the prisoners of New Smyrna prepare themselves and look for the signs of their last hope. A plan is executed.

Chapter Notes

Cue the music. Here we go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Spruce Pine Creek

Being most likely upon the South Branch

Adjacent to that body labeled "impassable lake"

Upon the 1768 map of the plantation of dr. William Tarkin

British East Florida

January 15, 1770
They could hardly be said to have departed from the main channel at all really, having left behind any sense of its main flow a few hours before. The choice forward when dawn of the fourth day came lay up one of a half dozen narrow streams.

Captain Solo furrowed his brow and laid a hand on Luc's shoulder. The French youth considered a moment, closing his eyes as if to listen for some clue perceptible upon the nonexistent wind, then pointed to the left hand way. No one questioned the boy's choice. Mr. Imway nodded in fact, smiling as if some preference of his own had been confirmed.

*Mr. Kay cleared his throat as if he might speak but at a shake of Captain Andor's head, seemed to arrest the impulse.*

The flow of the water against them had grown almost indifferent as the width of the river through the scrub grew narrower. Solo ordered the sail down and the mast tipped back.

The Falcon's shallow keel had brought them in far but not yet to their goal. The question now lay in whether to break out poles and drag lines as they had when the branch of the Mantazas had nearly failed them, in hope that here as there deeper water lay just ahead. The terrible risk was that it might not and the Falcon would find herself aground on the sand likely only a bare foot beneath them now. They had almost no margin for error.

"We crossed near here over to join the Halifax, for all we had to pole the last mile," the Dutchman said drawing up the sounding line. "But either we are wrong in our choosing, the stream has changed again or it has withered past my recognition. I fear if we press much further we will find ourselves stuck until next autumn."

"The water was far higher then," Ceil-Marchuer insisted, "but we are not lost as such. I am sure this is the channel. We made barely through here ...our way..." *he paused to find his thread in English,* "then...and then....met the coastal river two miles on the other side I think. That is where water began to turn more salt again and where we came out amidst the first rafts of mangle. There we found the box and that poor wretch's arm."

"The latter part of winter often begins the drier season here," Mr. Rook said. A tension had grown visible in his jaw and shoulder over the last slow hours and the hand he laid upon the rail showed knuckles white.

*Not with apprehension she sensed but resolution.*

Last night he had consulted Captain Solo's rough charts several times but now hardly seemed to glance at them. Turning his eyes to the South where the water came now only as a trickle through the marsh winding a few feet deep and two or three across is was as if he too perceived something through the veil of interlaced pine.
"The clouds and rain of the two last nights have brought us further than I dared to hope but we are yet two or three miles at best from the far west end of the indigo fields."

"Bodi," Captain Andor asked the pilot quietly, "are you sure?"

*His voice and steady manner presented an image of command quite new to her, being so unlike her Olohri’s kingly roar, Rostock’s firm serenity or even the bold wit and skill of men like Solo.*

"Evet kaptan," the man answered, then stopped himself, breathed, and went on, "I mean, yes, sir. It is likely they have diverted water from higher up to the canals and so changed the pattern of the stream from my time but if you would come upon them by land, this is the way. I am sure of it. I feel it as a shadow on my heart."

Her husband nodded as if he required no greater surety.

_A memory came to her from the dark days working across the Channel, when she had sailed toward toward Leah Hallick’s fate. An old sailor whose hammock had hung near her own on that Dutch ship had spoken to her abruptly. Though heretofore silent as a stone he smiled a cracked ancient grin when he saw her eye linger on the tattoo upon his arm, "Have you never heard of the Aerie, Nally my boy?" a briar-like green circle surrounded a black ship in the center and a rough hawk or eagle was crudely inked upon its square sail, "or a captain called Nest?" Jen in her boy's guise had shaken her head, but the old man's smile did not fade, as if such ignorance were fully expected and of no significance. "Some captains are clever, others lucky, some are justly credited with greatness and stand above their fellows to command fleet with a steel saber, others, cursed but long-remembered can by strength and cruel will drive navies to conquest, but the very best lead by example and though the world forgets their names they are the ones men will follow to the ends of the earth. Where courage is shown it is imitated and where trust is given it is returned." He rolled himself in his blanket after and never spoke to her again on that rough crossing. Her heart too stone-hard then to hold even the seed of curiosity she had not pursued his story, but slipped off the ship at Dover, later to barter for women’s clothes and start her sleepwalkers journey to London. Only in the last weeks had his words come back to her as she watched her skilled spy remake himself to take up the task of command. To the ends of the earth indeed._

Nest? She would ask Solo in the unlikely event an opportunity ever presented itself. It seemed the sort of story he would know.

Her love now looked to Captain Solo, "Can you get the Falcon back to the last branching?" He spoke of a section less than a mile back.

"Aye. Such current as there is runs that way. It will prove far easier to go back North than press forward."
"Then she shall wait there for her part in the drama. Unload the canoes and we shall take up our roles from here."

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

January 15, 1770

Sera Fortuna took her place in the fields behind the other women. Today she was set to bind.

They harvested the plants as always, cutting them with short knives a few inches off the ground, moving forward in lines through the rows. Each woman or man bent over to grasp an armful of the waist-high stalks, all well-leafed and topped with unopened buds, to cut the stems and then half-straighten to turn and drop the armful behind before twisting back to move forward and take another. Behind the cutters the binders would come, gathering up and twisting an outside stalk around each bundle to tie it off then dropping it on the row to be taken by the carters. The unexpectedly heavy rain of the days before had made the ground soft so the pace was less dusty but muddy and slowed.

All of the workers were uneasy.

This furthest field would commonly have been given another day after a hard rain for the leaves to dry.

Even more disconcerting was the order to cut the whole plant as they moved. In the usual method of harvest they were ordered to leave at least a hands span of each plant in place. The rich soil and the
warm sun would cause the established indigo to restore it's own growth within two months. Only a handful of times in Sera's young life had a productive field been cleared. This was usually to build new sets of tiered tanks beside the dreaded Mill, and once, only once, when storms prevented the resupply ship and sickness had broken out even among the overseers and guards, they had been allowed to set an extra field of precious corn and beans.

But now no stone had been cut or set aside for new tanks, the women all knew this and the ship from Jamaica had come but weeks ago.

The shutters of Governor's great house had been opened and rugs and linens aired as if his honor himself were expected. The Director was despised but greed and cruelty are at least human crimes, the seldom-seen Governor himself was feared like the cold hand of death.

Even those too sick or listless with despair knew some dreadful action approached.

Juan Peya had come to Sera's hut before dawn yesterday and wakened her and her mother.

"Les meves germanes valents, heu de venir a la capella," he had whispered.

Senhora Fortuna had been unable to rise but Sera had kissed her mother's hands, taken the shredded shawl they shared and gone.

Old Sefla and Juan Peya stood beside Father Campo, even upon the swept-dirt altar and there had been no light to see by save that of the stars and the small sputtering lamp of pitch and fat beside the basket that served as the tabernacle of the Holy Sacrement. Two dozen perhaps were gathered there. The hour was near, the old priest said, when the people of New Smyrna must grasp at the slender hope of escape or yield all and face death. God who heard their prayers and knew their sufferings had found men and women in whose hearts his truth could take root and whose mortal hands even now strove to reach them.

What the sign would be no one could tell them now but when it came those who could run must be prepared.

What of those who could not even walk? Sera wondered, and looking at the eyes of her neighbors knew that she was not the only one to ask. The babies must be carried and children must be told to run with adults, Sefla told them.

"Porteu els malalts i els febles a la capellan, em quedaré amb ells," said Father Yodan Campo and repeated himself in Greek. All her life the girl had known the priest only as a holy man. What strength the old dwarf possessed seemed to her that of a tireless spirit in a weak body.

Not now. Though he stood barely to Sefla's shoulder his voice was as firm now as that of a young man and as he raised his walking stick over his head some flicker from the little lamp caught the
polished surface oddly for an instant making it seem to Sera’s eye like a bright sword before he lowered it again and it was only a piece of pine.

He blessed them in the three languages of the people of the plantation and sent them back, the young and strong, to tell their families what was coming.

The guards were positioned at the ends of the vast field. Only one at each side but both were in sight of each other and of their fellows on the platform between this field and the next.

One of the other binders, to her right young Lucia Cabrello, turned to lift another burden and let out a scream, dropping to her knees and pointing toward the brush at the far edge nearest the stone canal.

Most of those in the field were too young to remember the attack of the savages on those first days after they were dragged off the boat but the story had been told and retold. Almost all flung themselves toward the ground.

A hugely tall man, dark and black-haired, his face and shirtless body covered in patterns of black and blue, strode from the pines, stepping over the edge of the narrow irrigation canal.

“Don’t shoot!” cried a voice in English, “in the name of God hold your fire! We are officers of the King!” Two men staggered out beside the giant both in the red uniforms of British officers. One had a pistol which he held to the back of the giant. The nearest overseer has aimed his musket, but now hesitated and lowered it. “We have a wounded soldier!” cried the second English. “We require aid!”

Sera lifted her head and saw now that the mighty savage’s hands were bound before him and he pulled, by a rope looped round his shoulders a small boat behind him as if it were a sledge. One of the redcoats pushed it so that it could go over the ledge of stone and as she dared to stand she thought she glimpsed within a slight pale figure, a boy perhaps, lying in a coat that seemed thickly stained as of with blood.

The overseer signaled to his fellow and both ran toward the strange soldiers and their prisoner.

Whistles here blown and some other guards ran out from the covered watch station. The strange English officers were speaking quickly and shouting to the guards. Sera caught some words, “Royal mapping exposition…” or was it “expedition?”…”Savages…ambush…” “…killed” and “…prisoner…”
One of the overseers barked to the people in the field, indicating that they must move back and sit on the ground beside the half-filled wagon while the guards gathered around the strangers and one was finally commandeered to help drag the injured boy away toward the wide cart path that ran along the greater canal. This led toward the main settlement, some two miles distant toward the Inlet.

The harvesters saw and heard no more and that they were ordered to continue back to their work.

An hour or so later came Sera’s turn to pull a full and painfully heavy cart filled with leaves to near her own height to the drying racks. It took nearly all her strength seeming thrice as heavy as any she had ever moved before. She did not know whether to blame the sodden leaves or her weariness. The guards upon the path laughed at her struggling distress but at least they were too occupied with gossip about the visitors to waste the time in beating or berating her.

Upon finally reaching the nearest slatted platform and gasping for breath, she bent to lift the crude wooden fork which had fallen beside.

As she did a hand clasped her by the waist from behind while another at the same instant covered her mouth.

“No cridis,” a dispassionate voice spoke in her ear. “Estem aquí per rescatar-te.”

Sera turned her head up to find herself looking into the pale blue eyes of the tallest man she had ever imagined. He crouched in the shadow of the cart to hold her still, dressed in ragged brown clothes with fresh leaves of the indigo in his white shorn hair. “On està Galen Erso?”

Chapter End Notes

Gratuitous Enfys Nest reference? Yes thank you, don’t mind if i do.

Highly limited by the fact that we know zip about the actual layout of the New Smyrna plantation and most of the little we thought we knew 20 years ago has been proved wrong. Not that I wouldn't make it up anyway.

Evet kaptan = Yes Captain (Turkish)

Les meves germanes valents, heu de venir a la capella = My brave sisters, you must come to the chapel.

Porteu els malalts i els febles a la capella, em quedaré amb ells = Bring the sick and the weak to the chapel, I will stay with them.

Quedeu on sou! = Stay where you are!
“No cridis,” = Do not call out.

Estem aquí per rescatar-te = We are here to rescue you.

On està Galen Erso? = Where is Galen Erso?
(all Catalan)
Darian

Chapter Summary

In which young Darian Leonitus, now a soldier of the Alliance aboard the Rogues Venture, sails south toward a Battle that will require the courage of all hands. She recalls how she and her brother came to be aboard the Falcon and looks ahead with a clear heart.

Chapter Notes

Grim, also short, sorry. More all-too-true nasty stuff about the miserable fate of women in wartime. Also Corsica !! I confess to love of some 18th century fiery political idealism, lightly mixed with admittedly dark stuff from Star Wars Rebels and sprinkled with a tiny bit of NH.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

January 14, 1770

The Rogues Venture

South toward Mosquito Inlet
Off the coast of British East Florida

Darian Leonitus lay in the hammock they had allotted her and reached a hand down toward the identical canvas slung below. Her brother did not reach up to take it though for he was already asleep. He would need his rest. When the hour came tomorrow or soon after they would fight, this time side by side. She said her prayers and then settled herself to sleep quickly and most surprisingly well. Whatever lay ahead she had chosen it freely and therein lay the difference.
Memories had bitten her like sharp daggers in dark dreams, almost nightly before they left the coast of France. Now though their edge never dulled nor did the pain they brought, over the last year after leaving Europe behind they had begun to cut her rest less and less often.

She and the other girls had been sitting at dinner with the matron, arranged in two rows down the long table. The sound of shouting out in the courtyard had not alarmed them for tomorrow was Market and the streets below were often raucous and busy. The mealtime prayer had just begun when the door burst open and a dozen French soldiers burst in.

The brutes themselves stumbled, looking almost surprised, if the Devil can ever be surprised. Later she reasoned that they thought it merely some rich merchants house and as such and in the ordinary order of looting been given broad permission by their officer to break in and take as their own any biens meubles they found within before burning the dwelling.

A school for girls they had clearly never expected and indeed why should they? What was any woman to them but another kind of cattle? "Biens meubles?"

The men moved forward and Daria Leonitus, daughter of an officer of the Army of the Republic of Corsica, taught to hunt like a boy in the hills, snatched a knife from the platter on the table and plunged it into the neck of the first to reach for their old teacher.

*She could not even take comfort in the surety that she had killed him, for it was only a fish knife after all, but still she hoped.*

Another soldier immediately struck her senseless to the floor with the butt of his musket.

*Not strategic her archery master would have scoffed. She had not thought, but only acted by reflex.*

"Pourquoi tu ne m'as pas tué?" she whispered through a cut and swollen mouth, when she woke again, bound hand and foot in a shed outside the city wall the invaders were using as a barracks. A single soldier among the many there, sat on an apple box wiping down his musket with a wad of lint and looked up. Raising an eyebrow at her French, he said "Aucun d'entre nous ne l'aimait," with a shrug and gap-toothed smile, "et vous étiez la plus jolie."

So it began, her sojourn in Hell.

She did not speak her schoolgirl French again to any of them nor did anybody truthfully speak to her except sometimes the other women and the few boys in the camp. When she listened through the walls what she heard broke her heart as thoughly as her body. Genoa had betrayed them. Presidente Poulti had fled to London, the ministers and officers as well to England or up into the hills to be hunted like foxes and hung when caught. The flag of the Moor's Head flew no more. The Free Republic of Corsica was gone as if it had been a dream.

After that she listened no more.

Her brother had been serving his term in the army at Genoa. Many Corsican soldiers were handed over to France when the ax fell but some deserted and escaped. The heartfelt conviction that Zacharie still lived was the only spark of light in the darkness that smothered her. There was no bond like that of twins.

The practical French brought some women of their camps along whenever they moved so that cooking and laundry as well as baser necessities might be set up quickly on the march and in the confusion and tumult after the city fell she found herself separated from the other booty of war and shuffled with others aboard a ship as the companies moved out, some sent back to France others to Sicily or the coast of Italy.
There was no way to know what became of the other five girls of her school. The blow of that French musket had sundered her fate from theirs forever, for better or worse. In a church long after she had prayed for them one last time and then closed her mind to their memory. It was not in her power to help them now. To live she must go forward.

In her delirium she had thought him only another phantom until after he carried her into the dark little country church ... how many times before when a door or the flap of a tent opened had she seen his face clearly and heard his voice say, "Surella. Sò qui"? she had seen and felt his hand take hers but always it melted away. The ghost vanished. It was never him. Until the one rainy night when it was.

Her faith in her own mind was so broken by then that she turned her face away and had not answered him. Darian would not believe, even when he dragged her out by the arm, when he cut down the guard on the road and put her up on the horse before him. Still would not even when he wrapped her in his soldiers cloak, gave her water and brandy from his canteen and spoke to her, calling her name over and over. It was not until hours later when he finally brought her into the dry shelter of that village church that her denial wavered. Surely the Devil would not think of a church to torment her?

A French priest had come running in shouting about blasphemy. What must he have thought to see a man in the uniform of a French soldier carry a camp woman into his church at midday and fill a hat with holy water from the font to lay at her feet and wash her hands and face with his regimental neck scarf? Her brother drew his sword on the old cleric, snarling in French that this woman was his sister and ordering the cowering man to offer her whatever sacraments of the Church she requested at once or to apply himself Last Rites here and now. "Fratellu?" Darian said then. Believing at last she held her arms out to him and he knelt on the altar beside her weeping like a child.

Everyone had told him again and again that she was dead, some because they believed it, others because they thought her better so, but he had defied them all. Such was the bond between brother and sister that he had known she was alive just as she had somehow known he searched for her.

The past was ashes and the rain washed it away. He cut her hair with his sword, gave her the clothes of a soldier from his pack and they set out together, orphaned, friendless and nationless, but vowing never to be parted again. For a time they travelled as brothers with some friends that he had made, a band of deserters, mercenaries and occasional bandits who haunted the mountain roads. He taught her to fight with a sword. In the spring, with nothing but a wish to see the sea again and leave damned France behind, they found their way to Marseilles and the Falcon.

Captain Andor apologized for his dialect when he re-introduced himself and laid out the tenets of the Alliance to them at Nassau. "Such Italian as I have is of Rome and Venice," and added with no little embarrassment, "and some Neapolitan." Though the pale giant Mr. Kay spoke like a countryman, albeit a rather passionless one, it seemed better to bargain in English, the common language of the Falcon's crew.

"You are both Corsicans," the captain had said in the Great Cabin, "these are not ideals that will seem as strange to you as many others. You have come closer to living under them than most."

Zacharie did not answer.
Darian remembered their father lifting her upon his shoulder when the flag was raised telling them how their little nation was the first since the ancients to stand without princes, and surpassed even Athens of legend in this for on their island the rights of citizens were denied to none, neither to men or women.

She found herself doing so, "For a little while perhaps, if aspiration can be said to make a thing so. We believed it at least, but the clouds cover that tiny corner of sky again."

"Tell me truthfully sir what can your cause bring myself and my sister?" her brother said with no small bitterness, as if testing the man. "If the darkness will cover all in time is it not less painful to never look up."

The Spaniard turned the document around toward himself then and seemed to consider it carefully, as if rereading the words.

His expression was calm but his fingers touched the paper almost with a reverence.

"Perhaps," he conceded, "but what choice is there otherwise, unless to live with one's neck forever bowed? For myself in the little time I have I would rather at least fight for some glimpse of the stars."

She saw in her bothers eyes how he wished to sign but he begged of the Captain a few more hours to decide.

Poor Zacharie. He worried for her but he need not have. Like hearts find each other in the end. Who knew that better than they two? Misadventure and chance, if chance it was, these people seemed at least to recognize and name the darkness that had taken their Republic and their childhood from them.

When he asked what she wanted to do she had taken his hand.

"Amici e non di y ventura," she said.

God had brought them here for a reason and whatever befell them in battle she would fight as a soldier and never be made helpless ever again.

Only one farewell had distressed her.

"Come with us Tia Sabé."

She went to tell the older woman of their decision and kissed her farewell aboard the Falcon, "I see the women treated justly here and find in their words a cause Like that of my father and his before him. This Captain Andor...for all his intrigues my heart tells me he does not lie."

"No, my love," Sabé had said, patting her cheek. "Though I do not doubt the young Spaniard can lie, and very well when need serves. Even my cynical head agrees with your heart in this, that he believes every word he says to you and is the sort who will never ask coin of another that he is not willing to lay down of his own. But Sabé's pockets are empty. I have sworn all the oaths I ever shall and have no more to give even to handsome and noble-hearted Angels. Goodbye and God bless you brave Darian. Stand by your brother and if you and he are spared stand by our Luc as well."

They sailed out from the Mouth of the Mantazas and South soon after the Falcon moved away. On the second day after Captain Rostock and Mr. Melshi gathered the crew on deck and laid out the plan. Arms were passed to each member of the crew down to the smallest cabin boy, Toby and stations assigned" Upon learning that they each had some experience with near combat and the ropes of the Falcon, Darian and her brother were given pistols and cutlasses and set places on deck when the hour came.
"I know them," Syndalla said, "let them serve in my company."

Mr. Melshi nodded with a degree of deference that surprised Darian for the rank of Midshipman had not seemed a high one to her understanding of shipboard command.

The old woman Quartermaster Kanata made one of her rare appearances above decks and squinted at the horizon. "A storm comes down from the wrong way round for these waters," she ventured, "The blow may come from either side." So saying she tucked a curved, shark-toothed little cutlass into her belt and went back below.

The watches passed as the Rogues Venture moved South and the crew were steady taking their rest in turns so as to be ready for what would be asked of them.

Chapter End Notes

biens meubles = movable property
pourquoi tu ne m'as pas tué? = why did you not kill me?
Aucun d'entre nous ne l'aimait, et vous étiez la plus jolie. = None of us loved him, and you were the prettiest.
(French)
Surella. Sò quì' = Sister. It is me.
Fratellu? = Little brother?
(Corsican)
Amici e non di y venta = (Italian/Corsican) roughly: Friends, but not by chance/accident. The motto of the short-lived 1755-1767 Corsican Republic. It refers to a people being bound by fate and common purpose rather than "accidental" bonds of birth, status or other worldly designation.

Historical Note: in 1755 (twenty years before the American Revolution and thirty before the French) the little island of Corsica, desperate for Independence from all of the people who'd been invading it since the Ancient Greeks and before set up a Republic, with an elected governing Senate-like body, independent Judiciary and a "President" in charge of Executive functions and acting as Commander in Chief of the tiny but supposedly kick-ass army. Hold onto you hats, women were granted suffer age and allowed to vote for their local representatives. Officially Corsica was a client-state of Genoa and paid taxes and sent it's soldiers to serve stints in the Genovese army but they had self-rule until 1767 when Genoa sold them down the freaking river with no notice and sold the island to France. The Corsicans were blindsided. They fought but were no match for France's big army and navy. President Poulti escaped to England where he tried but failed to drum up English support and wound up being drinking buddies with Boswell.

Next chapter back in the swamps of Florida with a big man in handcuffs and a couple of guys in stolen uniforms trying to sneak into a prison.
Crows

Chapter Summary

In which Governor William Tarkin, proprietor of the plantation at New Smyrna makes ready to return to his holding under orders from his true sovereign as to the disposal of the venture there. He considers the treachery and usefulness of Director Oren Krennik and meets with Frieherr von Vader, presently addressed as Lord Vader, to discuss plans regarding the transfer of the plantations holdings. Lord Vader himself muses upon the deck.
A stowaway upon a mission boards the Devastator.

Chapter Notes

And now a moment with the bad guys.
Hi Sabe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Devastator

off Mosquito inlet

Coast of British east Florida

January 11, 1770

The sturdy twelve-man long boat that transported Governor William Tarkin and his secretaries across from the Crows Point, his Charleston schooner presently bound for the sake of subterfuge on toward Antigua, could not escape an impression of leaf-like fragility as it drew alongside the mighty Devastator.
The warrior-frigate held at anchor beyond the mouth of the Mosquito Inlet.

Shrewd planning, the Governor felt, necessitated a private and direct meeting between himself and Frieherr von Vader before his announced procession in to the settlement at New Smyrna.

As the boat came round those aboard caught sight of a simple accommodation ladder placed amidship against the warships starboard side. At the rail above it seemed that only the ship’s captain and a rather utilitarian handful of officers had been spared from the mighty vessel's carefully selected crew set to greet the Governor and assist in the boarding. Far less pomp than an officer of his position would normally have demanded.

The Governor of New Smyrna suppressed a rare wry smile. The hour being late and his mind much occupied the simplicity of his welcome aboard, far from offending him, was a relief.

A bone-thin gentleman of patrician accent and hawk-sharp visage, William Tarkin shrugged aside the proffered hand of his secretary and quickly ascended the mist-slicked steps quite unaided.

Three years past fifty five he still retained the wiry strength and agility of a much younger man, indeed he maintained it purposefully through ascetic habits of person and exercise lest age soften the mind along with the body.

Ceremonies of rank served useful purposes of intimidation and the reinforcement of authority but they gave Tarkin no pleasure of themselves. When they could be dispensed with he gladly did so.

"Ask no more of a bed than it be flat, a woman that she be silent and a blade that it be keen," his father had said, on one of the few occasions that gentleman ever addressed him.

Indeed he had found an unexpected sympathy between himself and his Master’s favored lieutenant in such matters. Both men had been common soldiers in their youth...on separate battlefields of course..... and shared an impatience with useless ornament.

Lord Vader was here. In American waters for the first time in a decade at least.

Doubts as to this project's potential to command their Master's highest consideration were dispatched promptly on notice of the Devastator's approach.

Actions in Jamaica and ventures further North had largely consumed his personal attention for the last several years. Informants on the plantation kept him well apprised of the programs progress by regular dispatch, and supplemented Mr. Oren Krennik's flowery and transparently self-serving reports.

Fraught with early setbacks the venture had shown promise but the hoped-for large scale production
of a revolutionary explosive proceeded at an agonizingly slow pace and been subject to countless costs, delays and mishaps for almost a decade.

Indeed, had the venture not begun to pay for itself handily in the last years yielding, their armories assured him, highest quality nitrate as well as considerable quantities of profitably salable indigo he would some time ago have abandoned it passing it's promising technical innovations on to competing project and disposing of its unsalable workforce as well as, with some pleasure, the vexxing Director Krennik.

The Governor had, of course, quickly been made aware of Director Krennik's unapproved dispatch of a testable portion of the explosive compound to an unnamed target in Europe.

The Director, by staging a less-than-covert trial of the weapon’s destructive potential in a place where word of it must quickly reach their Sovereign, clearly sought to circumvent his authority. It was a surprising even bold move for a man Dr. Tarkin had sized years ago as a useful if narrow-minded striver.

_Tarkin considered ordering the ungrateful ferret strangled and tossed to the abundant local crocodiles but quickly mastered his annoyance._

Krennik’s short-sighted ambition had built a scenario that could not help but benefit his own interests.

If the unsanctioned "test" failed Krennik alone would be set to bear the blame and Tarkin's swift action in the punishing an overreaching inferior, immediate disposal of inconvenient evidence….in the form of the plantations population…. and efficient salvage of the venture’s useful technical elements would go a long way to impress their Master.

If it did not Tarkin's agents in Rome were ready to present it as his own plan and accomplishment.

Almost to his surprise the trial proved a success.....a success, indeed beyond all expectations.

Word had reached Rome from Lisbon within days of a massive explosion and landslide on the coast.

Though the nearby countryside was shaken and wild tales of black ships and fire would circulate for a time, no doubt piquing the interest of their enemies, the area affected was isolated and sparsely peopled, haunted only by wine smugglers and the tattered remnants of the extinct pirate threat. The benighted Portuguese being nationally unmanned by the slightest rumble beneath their feet….indeed even the usually cool-headed the Marquis di Pombal supposedly sought direct reassurance from his Eminence in almost womanish agitation and Tarkin would have given a great deal to have read those private dispatches….the event was easily dismissed as an earthquake.

Their Unassailable Master’s response was immediate. A swift ship reached Charleston with the message directly from Rome:

_Hoc telum iter, ut compendii gratia proposita est plures nostri. Fac secretiora proponerentur, et celeritate movere navem onerarium cum omni materiae. Vader ego mitto ad vos, mandatis_
mea sunt.

sealed with their Master's own private signet.

New Smyrna had borne both flower and fruit. Their objectives might be moved forward by a century.

*Look, Gracia Maria, perhaps the name of your tattered and mercantile birthplace shall live forever as one of the cornerstones of our Unacknowledged Empire. Would you be proud I wonder?*

Tarkin received Captain Ozzel's salute with a nod and moved quickly to the stateroom. He had not expected to be met on deck. Even though the sun lay low and shrouded in cloud Vader habitually avoided daylight save when direct duty demanded it.

Outpacing his minimal escort and entering without introduction the Governor of New Smyrna found their fleet’s dread commander in mid-conference, standing at the far end of a table surrounded by a three or four of his senior staff all of whom were seated in tense contemplation of the table in front of them.

Tarkin could not fail to notice the red-uniformed officer writhing in silence on the floor at Frieherr Vader's feet.

"Do I interrupt, my Lord?" he asked coolly.

Vader waved a gloved hand and turned away. As he did so the officer, as if released from some unseen grip, gasped loudly and pulled himself retching onto hands and knees.

_The Governor recognized the violet-faced and coughing man as one of his own officers from the colony, one Captain Mott._

"Does my officer give offense Lord Vader?" was his terse query.

"He displayed a disturbing lack of confidence in my proposed course of action." Vader's rumbling voice displayed no perturbation and only the faintest accent.

Mott had pulled himself unsteadily upright by means of the table, no one present being fool enough to reach to assist him.

"Ah," Tarkin glanced at the man, “I see. No doubt five years in the American jungles have had a deleterious effect on his understanding of order."
A mere demonstration, Dr. Tarkin did not doubt. Had Vader truly been angry the unlucky Mott's brains would presently be decorating the stateroom wall.

Governor Tarkin recalled Captain Conrad Anthony Mott as a skilled naval officer given to occasional fits of arrogance. This, no doubt stoked by habitually reined-in contempt for Krennik had made him overconfident in expressing his opinions with regard to the project's future management. Idiot.

Tarkin met the gasping man's eye and jerked his chin towards the door.

"Wait up on deck Captain Mott," he ordered tersely, "I will take your report later." The man staggered out.

"Jeder Mann, geh sofort!" Vader barked and his officers immediately and as one pushed back their chairs and departed, gaze still downcast.

Governor Tarkin helped himself to one of the untouched glasses of sherry on the gleaming table and wet his lips.

"The fevers of the Indes have taken a toll in the last few years Vader," he said, seating himself in the nearest appropriate chair, "and left me scarcely sufficient men here to effectively move the cargo now that events press, I therefore must request your forbearance until His Holiness's orders are executed."

Vader flexed a gloved hand as he contemplated the map of the Americas affixed to the wall behind him.

"You misprize this matter at several levels Tarkin."

"If you refer to Director Oren Krennik, I assure you I do not my friend. I have observed the ambitious wretch long and far too well."

The expressionless mask turned to face him but it's wearer remained standing.

It occurred to Tarkin that he had seldom seen Vader seated, the posture perhaps being one that sharpened those agonies which, if reports were credited, attended all his movements.

“I do not, but your subordinate may also prove a problem less thoroughly mapped than you have reckoned”

If you know something say it, my Lord. I am not one of your mice to be toyed with.

The deep and carefully labored voice spoke from lips unseen.

“He contacted me directly by message at Kingston and sought a private audience in this very stateroom not six days ago.”

Oh I will have you tossed to those crocodiles yet living I think, Mr. Krennik.

“Did he my Lord? And to what purpose, pray?”

“For what purpose does any jackal move Tarkin? Because he smells death and circles like carrion hoping for a meal. You have less control over your people than you ought.”
Tarkin kept his tone light.

“And as a priest did you apprise him of the dangers of gluttony my lord?”

*Clearly you knew the measure of this little scorpion at once or you would not tell me this now. Come to your point sir.*

“I warned him against choking on his aspirations, certainly. No doubt he had his usefulness once but if I may advise you it seems well past it’s end.”

Vader paced the length of the table.

“Thank you, Lord Vader,” it seemed best to say. “I shall see to him and implement our Master’s orders with regards to the dispersal of the stores of the compound and the arrangements of the manufactory and the plantation at once.”

The cloaked figure paused in it’s panther-like stalking for a moment and turned again in Tarkin’s direction.

*The fitted mask depriving the eye of any clue of the sorcerer’s direction of gaze, Governor Tarkin was often left with the impression some audience other than himself was being addressed when Vader spoke.*

“The ambition of corrupt fools, the greed of petty kings and princes even the pride these fools take in creating their powders and fires is misplaced. The ability to level cities Armageddon-like and raise piles of corpses is but the bluntest of the weapons at the Dark Power’s command.”

Vader was feared as a demon and Necromancy and Natural Sorcery being far from William Tarkin’s study the designation might be apt for all he knew yet shrouded within still lay something like a man so Tarkin coolly addressed it as such.

*It occurred to the Governor that like warriors of old legends Vader continued in combat even after his enemy was defeated, hurling insults at a corpse.*

“You are His Eminence’s mighty right hand, mien Herr. Take advice then from one who acts as his more practical and mundane left. The power of the old Orders is broken forever. Their once-mighty fortresses were revealed as paper split by rot. Our Master laid them bare and the few pockets of scurrying survivors have been crushed through your efforts. You yourself are the last practitioner of their arts. His Emminence also seeks tools to advance the aims of the Pax Imperial and my duty is to provide them. The weapon I first spoke of to him these thirty years past has been achieved in this bleak place and by his order we shall bring it now to his hand. With it his wisdom sees a path to control the present rulers of men and crush as with a mighty roller the gadfly of the Alliance once and for all.”

The black scarved and hatted head tilted, as if an ebony and lacquer statue considered his words.

“And yet…” the deep voice rumbled, “Something is wrong. I sense an obstacle, a presence such as I have not felt since …."

The towering commander waved a hand as if warding off some fog or ghostly evil and turned to stride from the stateroom without another word.
Governor William Tarkin took no real discomfiture.

He calmly retained his seat and finished the sherry. In short order the red-liveried servants returned and brought him a light supper after which he called for and poured over the accounts and maps that the unlucky Mott had left behind, and began to plan the disposal of the New Smyrna plantation.

He would speak with Vader after the fit passed

Such abrupt interruptions were the price one paid for Frieherr von Vader, and when one considered the service of the most accomplished practical wizard since Dr. John Dee or Kai Lung combined with that of the most feared military commander since the days of Charlemagne and Attila the inconvenience of madness hardly seemed dear.

________________

The sea groaned beneath its own weight. The creatures within it echoing unfathomable songs and cries layered echoing one upon another.

Uncountable. Teaming, striving, consuming each other, dying and sinking away.

There was, if not surcease at least peace in the sound but peace that was of no use to him, that mocked him rather.

What was it that he sensed?

Three hundred mortal souls breathed, sweated and twisted their limbs within the space of this wood and iron container and he could if he pressed his hearing in their direction make out the petty cacophony of all their thoughts.

Miserable. Familiar.

The cold cinder that was Tarkin’s mind. Hardened to obsidian not diamond though. A sharp edge but no fire.

There was a disturbance.
Like a break in cloud or a perturberance on the water but unlike those things too.

There had been ripples in the cold smoke-dark fog before, faces had appeared before.

The old woman in the Library on the African coast, who had spit at him and sat as if at peace among her burning scrolls. “Huwezi kushinda kamwe,” she had said even as the blaze consumed her.

The child in the forest in India who had challenged him haloed in sunlight even within the dark of the cave.

The alley in Venice. A cloaked woman had drawn a bright sword and turned to face him. She fought well…familiarly.

The falling brace of an awning struck his shoulder as he turned to dodge a blow and the mask slipped. Wet salt air striking the unhealed flesh with a fresh spark of agony hardly to be noted in the bonfire of pain he moved in. But she had called out a name then.

Whose name?

A voice had spoken to her through his mouth, as sometimes happened.

Whose voice? What had it said?

The woman stared at him and light seemed to shine from her which stung his eyes so that water drained from them.

But what of that? It often did.

“I will not leave you!” she cried, “Not again,” and laid the sword on the filthy cobblestones.

“Then you will die,” he said…..but he had not struck.

Why had he not? He remembered moving through the corpses of the children in the monastery as if through dry leaves and feeling only a sense of completion but he had not struck the woman with his own hand. Why not?

Instead the buildings upon both sides came down around her so great had been the rage that poured from him. Bricks, stone and timbers flew apart and fell like cannonball, like hail.

She fell beneath the hammering debris.

The light faded out and he had gone on.

She was not Mariana.
Off Jamaica he had felt it first. Like a half-familiar scent on the wind.

And now here...Yet he could give it no clear direction. No name. Why?

This venial wretchedness must be concluded. They must return to Rome.

His Master would guide him.

Tarkin was a fool. It was not the mightiest of man’s weapons that brought the Darkness. Unused what were they but powders and pastes of rotted leaves? Black, yellow, the inky blue of a moonless night sky, the cold glow of light-worms, the fire at the heart of the stars?

The only weapon that the Darkness required was in the hearts of men.

The seasoned crew upon that mighty ship kept good watch and good discipline. Vader paced often at night and cloaked in black so that the men more often heard the tread of gleaming boots or the creak of leather armor than saw the dread commander as he passed them on the decks. Some of them felt a cold shadow as well, even in the hot still fogs of tropic nights but they were trained to ignore it. It is the remarkable habit of men that they can placidly accustom themselves by time and familiarity with that which would repel or terrify them in other circumstance.

She was a ship run with martial efficiency in all waters and in all ports for she was never in peaceful harbor. The Devastator herself was War. It was her sole cargo.

Even so, when the Commander after some hours passed again into the stateroom to speak with the Governor and other officers the sailors on deck breathed an inward sigh of relief to a man.
Perhaps the normally keen and well-manned watch then relaxed their gaze upon the dark waters. Perhaps not.

Certainly in that moonless midnight none marked a small figure in the water off the starboard side. If the cloth-muffled oars from an unlit longboat were heard at all they were taken for the creak of Governor Tarkin’s craft, still tied and bobbing below.

A little hole that was silently opened in a board some distance off from the heaving side of the frigate sank a brave dark little boat, sailed solo from the Bahamas to this inlet. She slipped beneath the water unheard and leaving no trace for even the sharpest eyes to find from sea or shore when daylight came and the small wet figure that climbed ropes left hanging from the accommodation ladders and slipped unseen into one of the many gunports would have been impossible for any but their dread commander’s arcane powers to see and he sat at that moment distracted with Governor Tarkin and his officers.

Aided by these accumulated circumstances the woman moved like a shadow between the sleeping hammocks of the gunners and powder monkeys to hide herself down with the vast holds to wait.

Nothing encumbered her but two sharp blades, one a short cutlass and the other a knife small enough to fit into a sheath bound beneath her breast, a silver medallion with an image of the Virgin inscribed “Regina boni stella” and a small waxed linen bag filled with scraps of scarlet.

Chapter End Notes

Next up. Yoda meets Kay.....how much fun would that have been?
Jen, Cassian, Khaeuri and Han infiltrate the base.
Bodhi, Luc and the monks try to get in position.
Chirrut is not a "follow instructions" kind of guy.
Historical Note: Most accounts of the New Smyrna colony state that the name came from the hometown of Dr. Turnbull's wife Gracia Maria Derobin Turnbull (sometimes listed as De Robin, or Dan Robi, or other misspellings) in Smyrna, then Greece (presently Izmir in Turkey). Most accounts state that Turnbull named the settlement as a tribute to his wife but more thorough scholarship indicates that the British then-Governor of East Florida, James Grant named it in tribute to the long-suffering Mrs. Turnbull. The relationship between the Turnbull's is hard to pin down so I have chosen to make Gracia an off-camera tragic figure because A) I have more than enough characters in this as is and b) who in heavens name would be married to Tarkin? Sheeesh! That's it's own little House of Cards fanfic.

Hoc telum iter, ut compendii gratia proposita est plures nostri. Fac secretiora proponerentur, et celeritate movere navem oneriam cum omni materiae. Vader ego mitto ad vos. His mandatis mea sunt. = This weapon moves to hasten the majority of our objectives. Make sure and secret proposals, and with speed to move the boat transport with all materials. Vader I send to you. These instructions are my own. (Latin)

Jeder Mann, geh sofort! = Every man, go immediately! (German)

Huwezi kushinda kamwe. = You can never win. (Swahili)

Regina boni stella = Queen of the Good Star (Latin)
Trust

Chapter Summary

In which the party of Captain and Mrs. Jane Andor (née Erso), Mr. Kay, Captain Solo and First Mate Khaeuri approach the edge of the plantation and commence their infiltration.

Chapter Notes

Plot moving toward Action. (Also gratuitous romantic moments, Flashbacks and more.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

January 15, 1770

The role assigned her was, in Mrs. Andor's own opinion, the most wretched in their whole little pantomime. To be forced to lie quite still with eyes closed in a borrowed coat well-soaked in the blood of a quickly dispatched marsh duck and be carried on a rough travois of poles and palm branches through the very fortress of her enemies seemed to her like agony compounded.

"Are you ready?" her husband asked as Solo finished tying the knots around Khaeuri's powerful wrists.

Captain Andor had initially moved to undertake that project himself as they stopped to finally arrange
themselves on reaching the outer edge of the forest. As Solo and herself finished the lashing of the last knots on the stretcher the captain had taken up the short length of rope and approached the massive Mate, no doubt believing the plan to be well understood by all parties present. When the startled cannibal rolled a dark eye and snarled, "Kaua e pa ki ahau te tangata iti! Ehara koe i tuku whanaunga!" in a much aggrieved tone, her visibly alarmed husband stepped well back and passed the bindings promptly to the amused Captain Solo.

"Sir, perhaps it would be best if you..."
"Calm yourself Khaeuri," the Dutchman chuckled taking up the task, "forward is the only way out now." The giant then held out his arms placidly enough for his friend to bind although he continued to regard Captain Andor with inexplicably grave suspicion for several minutes.

"Does your friend understand us?" She had heard Mr. Rook inquire of Captain Solo at the Christmas dinner....so long ago it seemed now....aboard the Rogue's Venture.
"Of course," that gentleman answered, looking companionably upon his Mate, who at that particular moment had been devouring yet another roll of bread, "Though older than his decorations would lead you to believe he is not even slightly deaf. I cannot answer for his command of Turkish of course but he has excellent management of most tongues common to the ports of Asia and the Americas...likely several more than myself and I am quite a well-travelled sinner."
"Then why does he not answer in any but what I take to be his own speech? Surely he knows we cannot understand him?"
"We-eeell," Solo drawled, "how he answers that question varies with his mood. From what I know of him I venture the reason to be either because of a belief he sometimes professes that he himself is already dead and traveling through some species of hellish underworld where those addressing him are likely all mere ghosts and as such ought to be able to understand him perfectly well, or ...and I think this latter the more likely reason.... he genuinely and unassailably does not give a damn."

"Yes," she told him, and drew a breath to steady herself.
It was not fear she felt so much as anxiety. To trust his hand was one thing to trust the rest of these....she was new to such things and so her heart told her was he.

Her hair having grown too long for a usual British soldier's queue he had cut several inches from it with his knife and afterward she had quickly braided it back and bound it with a leather cord. Instead of tossing it all aside after, he reserved one hazel-brown curl, and kissed the lock before carefully folding it into his handkerchief and tucking it within his shirt.
"Como un encanto para la buena suerte," he said solemnly
Seeing Solo busy arranging Khaeuri and Mr. Kay occupied with the careful rending of his ragged shirt and breeches to match the textures of the surrounding brush, she took the chance to catch his hand and press her lips upon his palm.
"Stay with me, my love."
"The whole of the way," he said, letting his fingers linger on her cheek a moment, "However long." Then he arranged the bloody jacket and shirt around her, the damp and sticky shirt she had already donned, and valet-like checked the small bladder bound beneath her arm ready for her to press and make the "wound" ooze more. His pistol was hidden at her waist, primed and ready, leather stall over the frizzle to keep it safe from early fire.
"Oh God," Solo said, as she took her place on the travois, "Andor, are you quite sure about this?" His gaze as he spoke was upon Mr. Kay who was just then placing a circlet of dry grass about his head almost in the fashion of a May garland.

"He will do very well," Captain Andor assured the smuggler. They all three watched as the tall officer systematically rubbed handfuls of mud into various parts of his clothing and dabbed it on his pale cheeks with the care of a lady at a powder table.

Once the plan was laid it was painfully clear that she must play the wounded part no matter how she dreaded it. She had played a boy a thousand times but the risk was high that they would be searched and the appearance of grave wounds might at least delay anybody's hands being laid upon her until they were well within the plantations boundaries.

Captain Andor's craftsman-like skill in deception, coupled with an English accent that could be flawless when he chose, marked him as the best to play the officer and Solo's accent was good enough to let him pass for the second.

Khaeuri's role as the savage captive seemed marked out by nature itself. While his appearance did not directly mimic that of any inhabitant of the local country it was so utterly remarkable as to defy any ready explanation.

Kay's extraordinary height would have made uniforming him as a soldier quite impossible but his other skills it was decided could be put to excellent service on the ground.

It was she who had proposed Mr. Kay for his roll in the infiltration, as they finalized their plans in the low cabin of the Falcon upon the previous night, for it came to her that his ability to speak with any of the captives they met, understand the engineering of the works if he could get inside them and swiftly dispatch resistance or alarm by the enemy guards with his bare hands would more than offset the need for what Captain Solo called "a hay rick's worth of cover."
The gentleman in his flat way seemed quite taken aback when she put forth the suggestion.
"Am I correct in my understanding?" He looked to Captain Andor as if seeking translation, "Does she suggest I take the ranger's part?"
"Yes, Kay' " his commander answered, " but you alone can honestly determine if you feel yourself prepared for it."

"Oh," the tall gentleman said blinking slowly after the fashion of a startled owl, "oh my, most certainly, yes. This is unexpected.....but, yes. I am quite confident."
From his seat upon the floor he edged around the lantern to peer at her quite directly and bow his head.
"Thank you very much, Mrs. Andor. I have always wished to see independent action in the field."

Before taking leave of the Falcon as the equipment and bits of costume were packed Mr. Kay sought out Captain Andor and made some show of the pair of leather moccasins he had put on....borrowed
Was it reluctance? Did he doubt Kay's "nature" would impede the assignment or was it only that he feared for his good friend? It grieved her that she, pirate-raised, did not know how to offer comfort in such a matter. They had taken their last hour in the darkened little "honeymoon" bunk for themselves quite wordlessly and now there would be no time to ask him.

"Do not concern yourself Captain Solo," Kay said calmly, appearing beside them like a very large woodland creature, "this is not in fact my first venture at wilderness reconnaissance and stealth attack. In boyhood I stalked the company of British soldiers who burned my birthplace and killed my mother for a number of days without being seen and in time dispatched them all without injury to myself or any alarm being raised."

"He wairua kaha ia, kaua e tawai ki a ia engari tukua kia haere," the lightly bound Khaeuri said. "Thank you," Mr. Kay addressed the cannibal and then having placed his carefully wiped knife into the sheath at his side turned to Captain Andor, "we are near enough to the line described. I should move into position."

"Good luck Longshanks," Captain Solo said.

Captain Andor reached his hand up to lay it briefly on the giant's shoulder. "Be careful Tim. We shall count on meeting you again inside this dreadful pace."

Mr. Kay looked at him quizzically for a moment, as if confused by the gesture, then bowed very formally. "Aye sir," he said. In no more than two or three strides he vanished with surprising silence into the forest.

Khaeuri took the front poles of the stretcher beneath his bound arms while Solo took and raised the back. They lifted her up and carried her forward.

Mr. Rook's maps had given them to expect the edge of one of the plantations outer drainage canal within under three miles of the beaching of their canoes but that good gentleman had also warned them to expect that the property might well have expanded it's reach.

He had guessed rightly for they soon heard the slow gurgle of water over stone within just over a mile from their starting place. The voices...of women perhaps...Became clear as well, singing as they worked, "Ai, Ai, Ai,..."

The sound was mournful.

She looked up one last time, for the plan required she must appear unconscious until Captain Andor gave her the signal, to see her husband's face as he looked forward through the trees...handsome,
keen and rough-shaven enough to pass for a soldier waylaid in the woods for a few days. Sensing her eyes on him he glanced down to her in turn and she saw him draw a breath of his own as well, as if for a dive.

He pressed her nearest hand for only a moment then released it. Jen closed her eyes and touched her wooden cross lightly, then quickly she returned her arm to it's assigned place, loose at her side.

As she felt them move her forward the weight of the pistol was against her side and the shape of the knife bound with tape to her leg.

*Trust in God, you told me Mama, when you went to try to fight your enemies and save your husband. Now it is my turn and I do not go alone.*

"Don’t shoot! in the name of God hold your fire! We are officers of the King!" *Him, but not his own voice.*

*Other were crying out. Women crying as if in alarm. Distant men shouting in English.*

“*We have a wounded soldier!*”

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**Chapter End Notes**

I watched Mission Impossible a lot as a child. It doesn’t hold up on the re-watch these days but I thought it was brilliant at the time.

*Kaua e pa ki ahau te tangata iti! Ehara koe i taku whanaunga! = Do not handle me little man! You are no kin of mine! (Maori)*

*como un encanto para la buena suerte = as a charm for good luck (Spanish)*

*He wairua kaha ia, kaua e tawai ki a ia engari tukua kia haere = He is a strong spirit, do not reproach him but let him go. (Maori)*
Convergence of Warriors

Chapter Summary

In which Mr. Galen Erso begins to set in motion a revenge that he has long prepared. An officer of the New Smyrna plantation must choose a course of action and Mrs. Cassian Andor (nee Jane Erso) suffers greatly in a role that requires inaction.

Chapter Notes

Ok Ok Ok here we go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

January 15, 1770

Oh Lara…Lara….help me. Guide my hand.

Our daughter is alive, Lara.

What will she look like?

You used to tease me that she had my mother's small chin....if so, please let that be her only legacy of mine.

How much will she remember?

What did Commander Gerrere tell her?

Was she lonely?

Surely she must have been afraid at first.
Did he set her in some foreign boarding school or take her to sea a pirate princess the way he used to joke he would?

My Jen, my little star.

Were you with him when the work of my hand killed him?

How did you escape?

Do you hate me?

I will not blame you if you do.

You should.

There are two places alone in all of Creation where self-deception vanishes, where truth is absolute, Paradiso and l’Inferno. Every step of the ladder was visible to him.

His use of the discarded waste from an abandoned dye venture at Madras to set a batch of nitrate...an economy really...had been the spark that set the whole cruel venture in motion.

He had focused his work exclusively on Indigofera, experimenting with samples from far-flung regions and poring through the published work of dozens of botanists. It was a fertile field of research. Hundred of keen minds were racing to find better dye plants, he however sought other properties.

A distinctive small-leafed American varietal performed particularly well, which led him across the sea to where he found the plant in some places as common as the grasses that Marchaud had once used.

Samples grown in a few pockets of the West Indies and Spanish Florida and tested by Melendez seemed peculiarly conducive...an obscure property of the soil he felt sure...and worth pursuing.

Storing the water for the maceration in a trough of the local porous stone had been a mere matter of convenience.

The combination proved the key.

Nearly identical “coquina” shell-stone from the Anastasia Island near St. Augustine and Cape Fear in the Carolinas or the quarries at Cuba and the Yucatán coast all proved useless. Only the early addition of water soaked through the stone from the quarry site inland from the Mosquito Inlet in then-Spanish Florida altered the the nitrates in the peculiar way essential to a sustained and stable reaction.

Herr von Welling had stumbled upon the truth in the Opus mago-cabalisticum. An ineffable interaction between the living and the inert matters was the catalyst.
The first “accidental” test of a stable thimbleful gutted the little manufactory they had set up. Lioni died and Galen Erso wished with all his heart that he had too.

Seeing the truth of what his employers sought at last he slipped the leash under guise of purchasing supplies in Antigua and fled.

Four years it took them to track him down.

In his absence Merck had all but re-created the work but a guard fell asleep after too much wine one night and unwatched the old man hung himself.

Krennik’s new guards were keener, for they never left him alone or even allowed him up on deck untethered during the voyage.

Mr. Oren Krennik had all the notes and parts and though he lacked the skill himself to assemble them no salvation lay in therein for Tarkin would quickly find some other ambitious or desperate alchemist who could. The Devil was patient and his resources were vast.

They dragged Galen Erso half-blinded back into daylight on the desert shores of Florida and he saw how it must be, understood that the only way out for him… as it had been for the poet… lay through Hell itself.

Hearing the unaccustomed sound of hoofbeats and English voices approaching the “Sugar Mill” Mr. Galen Erso’s heart was chilled for an instant.

They know. They are coming to stop me.

“I will go out,” he said to Sefla, “If you hear the signal set the levers and go quickly. By whatever means I will distract them. Get these men…”

Only three presently worked at the grinder and five others turned the pressers and unloaded the molds. All were shirtless and barefoot, their eyes swollen and arms and legs blackened purple from the stain. Most coughed, their breath ragged from the breathing vapors and dust associated with the “prime indigo cake”
They were likely dying but they would not die here if he could help it. Please God let that fate be his alone…

“….to the gathering place and yourself to the little priest.”

Sefla laid a battered hand upon his arm but did not argue or say more than “Allah ya kasance tare da mu,” before turning swiftly away.

As he walked out and up the path, lifting the gauze veil from his eyes and lowering the cloth that covered his mouth, Mr. Erso's mind was much relieved.

They are not here because I am discovered. The Devil has not won yet.

There were only two men, both petty ranked guards, messengers. One even remained well back and held the straining pony.

Thus the mute wisdom of animals, surely the stench of the place must be agony for it.

The panicked tone in the voices that called out instructed him as to it’s cause even before their words were decipherable.

“.Crown soldiers…giant savage..ambush…the Ylacco River…the Governor arrives…the Director sends for you…”

These lackeys lived in fear…of the fiery poison, of disease, of their fellows betrayal and Krennik’s casual cruelty….but only two matters put that particular childish tremor in them.

The deadly panthers of the forest, silent as shadows save when they shrieked before killing in the voices of women, and the Indians.

The wicked always cower in gibbering fear of that which they name “natural” or “savage” for their imaginations imbue it with all the supernatural power their guilty souls secretly expect Heaven to punish their sins by in time.

Nodding after the fashion of a weary man interrupted at his work but dutifully answering his masters command Mr. Erso walked out to them and doing so shouted back over his shoulder as if giving instructions to subordinates left within. “The molds must be turned every hour until the Evening Star rises, see to it!”

He had built the Mill’s apparatus in such a way that bags of sand hung on various of the poles could make it seem to turn for a time even when unmanned. Sefla knew to set them as he led the way out.

Galen Erso also opened the lock on the sluice just enough, under guise of checking it as he passed.

The canals that ran like veins through the works would carry the thin stream of flammable oil from the barrel tapped upon the word of the signal…Star…down the gradual slope from here. It would take several hours to pool reliably behind each little water gate along the linked canals but when that hour came a well-tossed spark would ignite it like a fuse run from the Inlet wharves through each section of the plantation and back here, to it’s dreadful heart.
Mr. Erso knew this for he himself had engineered the design of the flow of the water for flushing and transport throughout the plantation, had designed and supervised the building of each canal and trench, laid the arrangement of loading stations, tri-part tanks, warehouses, drying and storage sheds and set each with the blue-black powder that destroyed his life.

Within the same ten years in a prison of his own design he had devised an oil that would float, colorless and resistant to dissipation, and burn with the quickness of thought when touched by even the most fleeting spark. Once the distribution was complete a touch anywhere in the connecting streams would set in motion a series of explosions like links in a fiery chain.

Fires would fall against each other and move almost with the motion of a living thing until all was consumed, like the hundred little tiles of wood he and Jen had loved to arrange in long winding rows throughout the rooms and hallways of that lost refuge at Worlds End.

Oh, how she had clutched his coat with childish excitement when he knelt beside her and they placed the last little standing block. “Now Papa?” she would say, her eyes bright with childish excitement, “May I? Is it ready?”

“Yes, my star.”

Push but one small tile to fall at either end and all would go down.

Lara, my Beatrice, if the damned are permitted a glimpse of mercy as they fall then intercede for me….let me see her at least before I die.

___________

Lt. Matthew Adema heard the commotion even as the messenger reached him at the post by the South Canal path.

By normal schedule of duty he should not have been there at all and would have taken the field guards report at the yard. The Governor’s arrival that morning required inspections at all guardhouses, in the unlikely event his Honor be taken by the whim to check any part of the plantation personally. Two years had passed since the Governor had last been in extended residence and he had shown scarce interest in viewing the workings of the plantation then, only inspecting the product briefly at the warehouses and stone wharves and casting an assessing glance over the then-new-completed main canal.

Director Krennik had given orders only yesterday that field work would be suspended after today’s harvesting.
No reason for this had been presented. Hard rains had fallen the day before but the usual season of the great storms was past.

*One would needs be made of stone not to question why.*

The tanks had been ordered worked and emptied as usual but not refilled. The standing indigo was to be dried, bundled, and laid to side.

Surely there was more to this unprecedented slow-down of work than some supposedly routine inspection?

*The patrol sent to meet his lordship’s boat had caught good sight of the large frigate just visible at anchor outside the Inlet. Carreck, with whom he shared quarters had been part of the escort and passed him as the review of officers, largely consisting of a curt glance by the Governor as he quickly strode past to the the great house.*

*Tobias Carreck was as lean and hungry an English wolf as Adema had ever known and the Irishman trusted him no further than he could throw him on horseback in matters of advancement or cards but familiarity and close quarters breeds quick understanding and the younger officer seemed shaken.*

“What ails you, sir” Adema asked as they two moved in different directions, he to the checking of the canal posts and Carreck to the guard by the mansion house.

“Devastator,” the boy muttered, sotto-voice.

The Hell you say?

Be calm, Matthew, he admonished himself.

Do your duty and do not be caught out.

He would not put it past Carreck to try to ruffle him or trick him into spreading gossip.

Besides who knew what powers his lordship served or commanded here? It might mean nothing.

*The Lieutenant could not help thinking though, Perhaps the project is finished at last and we are transferred? Perhaps I will leave this dreadful swamp alive and be rid of the sight of that scarecrow Krennik once and for all?*
Now, one of the overseers had run to the post with a garbled message about British soldiers and Indians and a painted giant.

“Should the alarm be sounded sir? Shall I ring the bell?” the pock-scarred boy, Ford, was saying. The Corporal at post had musket in hand but stared blankly at Adema. As the senior present it must be his matter to deal with.

Adema looked down the path and saw not a hundred yards off what looked to be two men in British uniform. Both were hatless. One wore the gold braid, blood and mud-spattered as it was, of an officer and another a common soldier’s jacket. The half-naked workers along the canal way pressed back in panic but not from them. In front of the British marched a shirtless grim-faced savage of massive size painted in heathen black designs from eyebrows to waist. The creature’s arms were bound before him but he pulled a litter by a rough rope shoulder harness after the fashion of a pony and the soldier had a musket pointed at his patterned back.

“You sir!” the captain shouted out upon seeing him, clearly agitated, “Is this the Tarkin plantation? We need aid! Have you a doctor?”

Frenchie’s Powdered Balls! If Adema rang the alarm for three lost English and interrupted the Governor at dinner Krennik might be made to look the fool before his superior and would have the Lieutenants head as soon as Tarkin departed, but if he shot them without knowledge of the whys and wherefores and some other matter came of it the Director might not wait even that long.

“Ensign Ford, get to the mansion house! If they have not yet sat to eat take word of this with what discretion you can to Captain Pterro,…” the Director’s secretary…a snake but a knowledgable one, let him decide… “Corporal Raymond, whistle out to the next post for assistance. Let us get these people to the settlement for questioning and move these…” he waved his hand at the staring workers.. “somewhere.”

The fewer rumors that swept ahead the better and God knew these rag-and-straw-wrapped papists seemed to communicate as quick and inexplicably as bees.

He took it upon himself when the extra soldiers arrived to escort the strangers in to the settlement.

As they walked the officer gave his name as Captain Charles Fuller, and his Corporal’s as Henry Faucon, both 21st Royal Infantry presently stationed at Fort Saint Mark. The men seemed much the worse for wear, battered and unshaven. Fuller named himself second in command of a mapping
expedition camped near thirty miles distant on a strand of the St. Johns River. They had been savagely attacked by a group of natives and assumed the rest of their party of twelve to be now captive or dead. Fuller carried himself with an officer’s air despite his state but seemed most concerned for the boy their prisoner carried, Ensign John Arian, and frequently lay a hand upon the bloody youth’s pale damp forehead.

It seemed most likely they would all be ordered shot once identified and their bodies tossed to the crocodiles but in case custom was deviated from and physic called for Lt. Adema ordered a ragged worker to fetch the babbling priest to the wharf.

In plain truth it was hard to concentrate on anything the Englishman was saying in the presence of the silent, massive… my God the man must be close to six feet and ten tall and 17 stone or more and decorated like Chinese carpet… prisoner.

Rumor held that Dr. Tarkin had paid the Spanish handsomely to have his lands cleared of inconvenient natives when this isolated site was first chosen and in the years since Krennik carefully concealed all subsequent sightings, as well as any mention of losses, mysterious deaths and disappearances among his men in reports to Tarkin.

Still Adema had seen Indians of various stripes on trips away from the plantation, trading from dug-outs off the Amelias near Cow Ford and at St. Augustine. Outlandish as some of the younger natives dressed themselves and their dark hair the Lieutenant could not recall any being sized so far outside the standard frame of the sons of Adam, much less so savagely well-illustrated.

As he had hoped Captain Dunstan Pterro was waiting for them when they reached the riverside wharf and the central cluster of buildings flanking the mansion-house that the Director insisted be called “the Town.”

Unfortunately Director Oren Krennik himself was also there, in white officer’s coat and cocked hat, bearing an expression of well-veiled fury. Beside him hatted, wigged and in plain but fine dark grey silk coat and red brocade vest stood Governor William Tarkin himself.

But two hours before Lt. Matthew Adema had thought he glimpsed the phantom of release, now it would surely take all his dwindling supply of luck to live through the day.
How large is this place? Surely we have walked for miles?

To lie this way, like a sack, with eyes closed while the voices of her enemies spoke around her was all the torment Mrs. Jane Andor expected it to be and worse. Rather they had staked her to an anthill.

The bastard guards argued and barked, her husband in his polished English lied with practiced skill, sounding every inch the trail-harried British officer. This Captain Fuller sounded a brave enough fellow, she almost liked him, Upper-class but less a fool than many.

Solo managed to say no more than “Yes sir” and No sir.”

They carried her over rough ground for a time, swaying and bumping, though she had a sense that Khaeuri took what care he could. She forced herself to concentrate on what her other senses brought to her and thought of Mr. Imway.

The monk had become a great favorite among the crew of the Rogue’s Venture and the manner of his skill with darts had been an endless source of curiosity and debate.

No matter the toss of the ship or the placement of the painted-rag target on the post or barrel the blind man’s skill was unmatched.

“Damn you sir!” one old sailor, Masrich, had said. “I’ll wager a silver penny that you do it by ear! My old aunt swore when she lost her sight she learned to hear the plums ripen”

“Perhaps, perhaps,” Chirrut Imway had laughed. “Bring me a piece of good fruit and I will venture it.”

The ground grew flatter, indeed almost a well-leveled road.

The sun did not bear down upon her face so she sensed that the sky had clouded.
The blood on her coat had grown dry at the edges and she could tell by the buzzing that flies had taken an interest.

_All to the good,_ she supposed and pressed the concealed pad of sponge beneath her arm to freshen her “wound.”

Her love laid a hand upon her head or shoulder once or twice and the powerful if momentary relief the touch brought to her anxious mind nearly shamed her.

_Lilọ ni ifura ati onígboyà Ọmọ, _she admonished herself, _Sometimes they must be one and the same._

Once or twice it seemed to her that she felt a tap on the frame of the stretcher and thought it might be a companionable reassurance from Solo.

“You there,” he husband would say in his feigned voice, “lift that corner higher.” or “Have you water? What, five men and not a canteen between you?” So she would know the odds. She made out two voices speaking often, this Lieutenant Adema and some Corporal or other.

Birds.

Seagulls and the chatter of jays.

The grunts and breathing of men.

Once or twice she heard a wooden creaking that might be the wheels of a cart and through it all a steady trickle of water over stone that seemed to grow louder as they moved.

She heard other voices, some near and others muffled by distance and the breeze in what sounded like trees and grass. _Most she could make nothing of but once off to her left side she thought she heard a cracked old womans voice, as it passed whisper, “Caro Dio, non di nuovo.”_

Finally, the sound of lapping water. A river and beyond that the sound she knew best in all the world, the distant roaring hum of the sea.

The procession stopped. She was lowered down.

_Were they here? In the center of the plantation?_

“Have a care with him,” her husband’s voice said. “The ball looked to go clean through, if we can get it cleaned and bandaged he has a chance.”

“Easy up there savage, you hold still!” Solo’s accent was good enough…_too much time in Southhampton taverns,_ she guessed.

_Don’t overplay it fool!

The pistol was at her side and the knife along her leg within reach of her hand._
More voices spoke. ....Adema and two new ones, talking over each other.

A Captain Dunstan Pterro introduced himself to Captain Fuller, who repeated his summary and request for clean cloth, supplies and a place to tend to his wounded man and a place of secure containment for his prisoner.

It seemed to Jen that she could sense yet more persons gathered around her who did not speak.

*Above all sounds, louder than anything else, the beat of her own heart.*

Then...

“Rest assured, your bold courage has brought you to a place of safety Captain Fuller. Any aid the New Smyrna Colony can offer you and your men is, of course, yours for the asking.” *A cool, dispassionate voice, icily patrician….was this her father’s “devil?”*

“Have I the honor of addressing, Governor William Tarkin?” Her husband’s false voice asked respectfully. *She had no doubt he stood at perfect attention, a battle-weary but dedicated soldier of King George.*

“You do, Captain. Please, yourself and Corporal Faucon must come. My house as you see is adjacent. We can offer you food and rest and send messages at once to the Fort of St. Mark. While the wounds of your soldier are tended to we must hear your story.”

“Sir, you do us great honor, but I must beg…”

There was a rustling near her and the sound of men moving.

“Help I may...please, please. Through you must let me.”

*My God. Who was this speaking?*

The odd voice came from low beside her, as if someone knelt near her elbow.

“Ah ....poor child. Wounds of battle I have tended often but of water and clean linen I have but little.”

“Captain Fuller, this is Father Campo, who sees to the spiritual needs of my people here and tends as physician in general cases.”

“Yes, yes. See the boy’s wound. I must…yes…”

“Sir…” her husband spoke.
Without warning a small strong hand was laid directly upon her side, pressing hard upon the bunched coat, but not to touch the false “wound” or even open the cloth around. Instead the owner of the babbling voice had decisively reached across for the pistol hidden at her side.

He could not fail to know what it was.

Her near fingers reached for the knife at her leg but the speaker had already reached beneath her coat with his other hand and clasped her wrist tightly before she could move.

Startled out of any thought beyond panicked reflex she opened her eyes.

The wrinkled brown face of an ancient man, bald and tiny as a dwarf, hovered over her, blocking her sight of any of those who stood around her, and….

please Jesus and all the Orishas…their of her face.

“Yes, yes, I see…the poor boy,” the priest said soothingly. “Bleeding free but clean-edged the wound is…all will be well with God’s help.”

The hand that had pressed her side now lifted as if to shade her from some glare or lay some blessing on her head.

Jen quickly closed her eyes again.

“Yes. Yes. Quick one should be. To the Chapel I could take him but hot water and cloth to bind I have not.”

“A hopeful assessment,” the Governor pronounced silkily. “Captain Pterro, bring Father Campo and all that he requires to the further kitchens. He may tend the boy there. I would see his wounds myself but I am many years out of practice and in profound urgency of mind to hear your story Captain Fuller. Director Krennik, have men see to the securing of this prisoner. We must know more of where he came from and what if any new dangers have arisen to threaten us from the western borders before we trade or dispatch him for his crimes.”

“Of course, sir, at once. Ademo! Ross!”

No….It could not be. The dark walls of her nightmare closed around her again but this time she must hold herself there

Jen knew that voice.

Galen. I have come to take you back.
“Nga wairangi! He kino kino toku mo tenei,” Khaeuri growled.

“Now mind you behave yourself you savage,” Solo snapped in turn. “You will answer to me for what you do.”

“Get two more men and lock him in the cellars. Post a guard…” there was a sound of scuffling…”Two guards, armed.”

"...As always, defying God and Nature, dear Lara..."

No.

No. No. No.

“No of course sir, “ he said in that English voice that hid all the fear in his heart.

Cassian No. Do not go with him. No.

“This good man will care for you John. We will come and check on you soon. I promise.”

She was lifted again and carried away, nails digging into her own palms so tightly did she clench her fists.

She could not tell where they were taking her, only that Captain Fuller’s voice replying to the Governor was now some distance to her left and receding. Another man’s voice, also moving further off was saying “Director, I have brought Mr. Erso as you ordered.”

Chapter End Notes

Note: “Cow Ford” is modern Jacksonville

Allah ya kasance tare da mu = May God be with us (Hausa)

Lilọ ni ifura ati onígbọ̀à Ọmọ. = Stealth and courage, child. (Yoruba)

Caro Dio, non di nuovo. = Dear God, not again. (Italian)

Nga wairangi! He kino kino toku mo tenei. = Fools! This is a bad thing for me (Maori)
The Clear Path

Chapter Summary

In which Luc Ceil-Marchuer considers the partings of old companions and new upon their dangerous mission. Mr. Rook takes on the burdens of command and must make a decision.

Chapter Notes

A Luke pov with Bodhi and Han moments. The Pilot steps up. See the end of the chapter for more notes

Spruce Pine Creek

Being most likely upon the South Branch

As marked on the 1768 map of the plantation of dr. William Tarkin

British East Florida

January 15, 1770
Captains Andor and Solo set off with Mademoiselle Erso…no, he must say Madame Andor now….Khaeuri and Mr. Kay at the first flush of dawn.

"God is with us, for this the moment the Light has brought us to," Frère Imway had said by way of a blessing upon their party.

*Luc crossed himself without thinking and from the corner of his eye was most surprised to see Captain Andor do the same.*

Madame Andor did not copy them but stepped forward first and kissed the blind monk's cheek in farewell which caused that holy man to blush.

These brave people were strangers to him, all of them, perhaps almost strangers to each other. Yet even before departing the schooner he had sensed a unity that seemed to bind them all together.

Aboard the Rogue he had felt it first. No doubt born in part of the shared purpose necessary aboard any sea-going ship but there it seemed like a bright thread that bound them all to each other, officers and sailors, men and women of varied nations and conditions, stretched to include even small boys like little Toby, and very old persons like the smiling ancient who came above decks to present Khaeuri a large buttered roll before they left.

"Tell me pray, what the hell is that all about?" Solo demanded as the Mate leaned smiling against the rail, casually tearing up and devouring his toasted parting gift even as his captain was passing down a box of cutlasses and bundle of leather scraps to the shirtless Frère Malbus, in the transport boat.

"E hiahia ana nga wahine ki nga tangata kaha. He aha koe i miharo ai?" Pa Khaeuri shrugged.

*Captain Solo laughed heartily. "By God and the Devil! Every day in your company is a lesson of some sort, sir!"*

Luc considered that he had not seen the captain truly laugh since they had passed down river toward that cursed plantation, in November last.

"Bonne chance, jongen," Captain Solo said and looked back to where the sloop rested in the little river, shaded by the bowed and wrack-covered trees, her sails wrapped and mast tipped down. "Take good care of my sweetheart while I am away." The Dutchman smiled wryly, "We are a long way from that Marseilles wharf where you told Mistress Sabe that you did not like the look of her are we not?"
Luc saluted, one last time.

"Aye sir, only a little further than that first run under sail past the customs agents when you told me a smugglers trade bore poor resemblance to herding goats."

For all his sharp temper and pose of a doubtful cynic, Captain Solo seemed in these last days as if a weight of some sort, whether of conscience or doubt or merely the responsibility of unwelcome choices been taken from him.

"Est-ce que c'est un homme bon, tu crois?" Luc asked Madame Sabé on the docks at Marsailles.

"Ce n'est pas un méchant homme," that strong woman had answered with a shrug. "Il a bon coeur quelque part. Peut-être le sortira-t-il un jour. Qui sait?"

Khaeuri seeing the moment had come for goodbyes swept Luc into a bone-crushing embrace then released him so quickly he nearly stumbled.

Hands were shaken all round but Madame's parting from Mr Rook was most touching.

That good gentleman shook Captain Andor's hand in a most brotherly fashion but to Madame bowed as if she were a great lady to whom he offered the heartfelt service of a chevalier and she in her turn pressed his hand between her two tar-stained own saying, "He will be proud of you."

*Even since he had first boarded the Rogue, well before the pilot stood as her kin in the rather heathenish wedding aboard the Falcon, it had seemed to Luc that these two, the piratical she-sailor and the soft-spoken Turc, were bound by some additional oath almost particular to themselves.*

Frère Malbus leaned against a mossy tree on the bank while his fellow spoke and paid none of them any mind, until the lady came and stood before him rather after the fashion of a stubborn sparrow before a gnarled oak. The monk shifted his musket to take her hand with familial affection.

"Good luck little sister," he said and she answered him with a bright smile.

*How pretty she had looked in her green dress, the one that had matched her eyes and how full of hope her smile had seemed when she looked at Captain Andor that afternoon and his when he looked at her.*

It was easy to forget until such moments that for all her fierce skill Madame Andor was only a young woman little older than himself and as she walked away into the forest step by step beside her captain that for all the pistol in her belt and soldiers jacket she wore that she was a bride of but two days.

"À l'heure du procès, ils n'étaient pas séparés les uns des autres," came to his mind unbidden.

A cold shadow passed over his heart as he remembered the words of the priest when they laid Tante and Oncle to rest in the churchyard at Tournemere.

He prayed each night for the souls of his aunt and uncle, beyond harm now.

*The dream of the shadowed figure on the shadowed ship had so troubled his rest since they left the Mantazas that more hours had likely been spent importuning Heaven than sleeping.*
Luc Ceil-Marchuer knew the gravity of the oath he had taken, or thought he did, but to part with his old and new friends as they each moved by different ways into danger troubled him so he prayed for them as well.

He prayed for his former shipmates who he missed most sorely.

"How strange it seems," Darian Leonitus had laughed in genuine delight, as if the dangerous prospect that sobered other spirits lifted hers. Raising her sleeve she displayed for his admiration the small open-winged bird drawn in cochineal on the inside of her right wrist. It was only an inked mark that would wear off in a few weeks, there being no leisure now to mark it into the skin. He, like Zacharie, had elected to have his drawn upon his right arm midway between elbow and shoulder.

"We are all three soldiers together now!" she said.

Luc embraced them both and Zacharie had rubbed his head. "Make sure they know what a fine sailor and dead-eye shot they have taken on my friend."

At Nassau Madame Sabe had only smiled and embraced him as firmly as his aunt would have done, she or the mother he had no memory of, before turning away to climb down and row away to shore without wave or further farewell.

So he prayed for her as well, his unexpected defender when he had stumbled into that den of robbers at Marseilles and good councillor ever after.

Perhaps she would find peace in whatever errand she sought out in the Americas. Almost Luc wished that he had asked her the name of the little baby she confessed to having given up long ago and clearly still grieved bitterly for.

Deciding that God, reported to have his eye upon even sparrows and lilies, would not require particulars Luc prayed for that lost child too.

The blind monk laid a hand upon his shoulder, as if he sensed the trouble in his mind. "All will be as God wills it."

Doubtless, but Luc Ceil-Marchuer thought it best to pray anyway.
The news Captain Andor received from his fellows at the little fort had swept away all plans of bringing the surviving hostages of New Smyrna out en masse by sea.

The likelihood that a well-manned Enemy warship lay even now outside the Inlet and the mission assigned to the Rouge's Venture to distract her attention from the assault upon the plantation or die in the attempt meant that the only path North toward the relative safety of Saint Augustine must lie in the greater part over land.

Hopefully Mr. Kay's infiltration could pass word to as many as could escape or be freed that they must reach this far corner of the plantation beyond what Mr. Bodi Rook called the northwest canal.

Mr. Rook would move into position aided by the holy monks, either on foot and by means of one of the smaller craft they carried, to guide the hostages to the shores of the river. Some of the suffering captives would at least know his face and thus be forestalled from panic.

Mr. Rook's would be the hard task of command then and his the responsibility to determine based upon the number and condition of those who fled whether the survivors must hazard the journey north on foot through the treacherous forest or seek some hiding place along the banks while the Falcon ferried them North in parts.

Though he could not send ships or risk exposure by the movement of men to aide them beyond the clandestine handful loyal to their cause, the "governor" at St. Augustine had promised to prepare a ruse by which even as many as hundreds might find shelter within the English-held town and fortress.

The four men worked together to lift the parts of the shallop-boat from the hold and set about to assemble her two halves and lay her in one of the branching creeks. That being quickly accomplished they waited.

Mr. Rook took the bundles of leather off-board from the hold of the Falcon and stacked them, then some lengths of light canvas and tarp. Laying these out on the bank he began to most systematically cut the cloth into lengths.

"What are you doing, Pilot?" Frère Malbus asked him.

"It is for the people," Mr. Bodi Rook told him.

He described to them how among the privations the captives suffered one of the most painful was a lack of clothing. "The interests of those who force labor from them require that they be provided with some food and clean water...though precious little of either... but cloth they are much denied. Most have only the rags of such garments as they brought with them or wore upon their backs years ago when they were brought here. Families must often share one or two sets of ragged garments between four or five people. The women took some time ago to weaving mats from the grasses to form rough coverings."

"Why should they....?" came from Luc's lips but before he could form the question fully Frère Malbus growled, "Wūguī dàn!"

"Mind your language," Frère Imway interjected mildly, "this is not a day to besmirch your own
honor even in railing against evil."

"Wūguī dàn...." the bearded monk repeated, more slowly as if for emphasis. "Unto the 18th
generation. So I call the bastards for so they are and God must take my honor as it comes if I see
him."

He turned to Luc, "You understand what the pilot is telling you, boy? The wicked are everywhere
clever and everywhere the same. Aside from the cruelty of shaming modest people, they deprive
them of garments so that they cannot run away or make appeal to people who might visit. Their
nakedness would mark them." He kicked at the spikes of mangle-root that rose from the ground all
along the banks. "How quickly could even the hardiest move through such ground without shoes?"

Luc had wondered what the leather scraps were for, now he saw how Mr. Rook laid the triangles of
cowhide, each with a string upon the deck of the shallop.

Luc Ceil-Marchuer's assigned task was to move the Falcon back to wider water as necessary, ready
to retreat even to the great shallow lake and back to the River St. John's if necessary to keep it safe
and worthy. He was their parties last hope of escape.

Malbus took the knife from his belt and began to help Mr. Rook with his tasks. Luc would have
aided them but Frère Imway touched his arm as if to steady himself and held him back.

"He would see if he would look, but he is stubborn and it makes him blinder than me."

"Who would holy father?"

The monk smiled, "Baze Malbus was a devoted Guardian of the Temple before he was the fierce
protector of a wandering blind man, and before then a handsome young bandit and before even then
a shoemakers son. The path circles back upon itself like the maze within the Temple courtyard. We
begin the end where we ended the beginning."

He placed one hand beneath Luc's elbow and reached forward with his staff by means of the other.
"Help me down and forward to where some open sky is young warrior."

Luc did his best to guide the man along the wild bank ahead of their small ship to a place where the
tree canopy opened.

The red light of dawn had faded but the sky above seemed grown grey now and rags of cloud could
be seen chasing each other East and South as in a hard gusting wind, although sheltered where they
were the air felt still.

Luc looked up but Frère Imway did not, only turning his head as if listening.

"What do you see my son?"

"Clouds. High now but thickening. The wind rises, but if there is a storm it does not come from the
sea."
“Ah, and what do you hear?”

Luc listened and to better listen closed his eyes.

_These river shores were populated with a number and variety of birds beyond count. He had known it before but their sojourn across the shallow lakes of the St. Johns had exceeded even his powers of imagination. Mr. Kay’s interest in them was most fervent and upon each of his daytime watches he spent much time making notes and marks in his books. In the hours before dawn the choruses were varied and deafening and since their proximity to the battle of the great crocodiles upon the lake all aboard the Falcon had become most sensitive to the slap of the fearful lizards, great and small, as they flung themselves into the water at dawn and dusk. The skittering of the armored creatures Captain Andor called “armadillos” under the leaves along the shores and the raucous cries of the great turkey-cocks as their contests raged in the brush accompanied them in all their time upon the rivers along with the chatter of squirrels and bellows of frogs and other creatures unseen._

_All were quite stilled now. The forest was utterly silent, not merely in proximity to their manly talk and movements but, some sense told him, for miles beyond._

He opened his eyes, astonished. “Why is it so quiet?” he asked.

Frère Imway nodded his head as if pleased.

“They know what you know. Never doubt them, God’s creatures. A storm comes, but not from the sea.”

He called over his shoulder, “Gānkuài! Finish your work! We must go with this little river quickly. It is our path and hurries us to where we are needed.”

“What do you say fool?” Frère Malbus called.

“Now!” the blind man turned back and strode to the shallop’s side, his steps sure amid the roots and thorns even without Luc’s aid. “We must go up towards Jen! All of us!”

The bearded monk shook his head, “Bù hǎoole. Bùshìle,” he muttered with head bowed, then protested, “Jen went THAT way, blind fool…” while pointing toward the edge of the forest,…this seemed most odd to Luc because surely he knew better than anyone that Frère Imway could not perceive the gesture… “Not yet four hours ago.”

Mr. Rook was aghast. “My orders are clear, Mr. Imway. I must be ready by the…”

“You must be ready where the people will come. The Northwest side you said. This water changes course to take us nearer than your feet can go…”

Luc saw the Falcon herself, but moments before near grounded in the sandy bottom….._they had already set up to pole her back the way they had come while the shallop remained here….._was now floating free. There was no rain in this ground but somewhere West and South there must be much for the little river had risen noticeably.

“Mr. Rook, he is right. This is the way we came with Captain Solo,” he said. “If the water rises high enough this stream will join in time to the other River…the Halifax,…that feeds into the Inlet itself.”
“Late winter is often a dry season here,” Mr. Rook’s face looked troubled, torn by doubt, “If we take this chance and are wrong….”

The monk put his hands upon the Turkish officer’s shoulders, “You of all people know this, Messenger. God brought you across the dark sea on a piece of wood, through pain and fire and the doubts of men and your own heart, to this. He placed a rope of courage to guide you and your hands found it even in the dark…..do not let go now.”

“Sir!” Luc said, “He is right. The wind rises from the West. We cannot feel it yet but we will soon. I can have the Falcon ready to follow swift behind on that new current. “Wider water,” Captain Andor said…it will lie before us, not behind within the hour.”

He knew little of the strictures of Mohammadans save that they seldom cursed so Luc suspected the words Mr. Rook muttered as he clenched his jaw and looked up the stream were oaths picked up by a life at sea.

“Now do you pity me?” Frère Malbus sighed, tossing the last stack of folded clothe under the canopy of the shallop-boat, “Near twenty five years of my life have passed this way.”

Mr. Bodi Rook took a deep breath and let it out

“Aboard!” he said, “make the Falcon ready. I will go ahead in the Rogue’s Heir now and you will come hard on behind me and if you are wrong boy I will find you in whatever hells God sends us to and throttle you myself!”

“Aye sir!” Luc said and jumped to.

Chapter End Notes

In their hour of trial they were not parted from each other = À l'heure du procès, ils n’étaient pas séparés les uns des autres. (French)

E hiahia ana nga wahine ki nga tangata kaha. He aha koe i miharo a = Women want
strong people. Why are you surprised? (Maori)

Bonne chance, jongen = Good luck (French) Boy/kid (Dutch)

"Est-ce que c'est un homme bon, tu crois?" = Is he a good man do you think?

"Ce n'est pas un méchant homme" "Il a bon coeur quelque part. Peut-être le sortira-t-il un jour. Qui sait?" = He's not a bad man. He has a good heart somewhere, maybe he'll bring it out someday. Who knows?

(French)

Wūguī dàn = Turtle eggs (Chinese)

Don’t ask me why but many Chinese insults…at least from old people…seem to involve turtles/tortoises. For reasons lost to the mists of time turtles are a symbol of sexual misbehavior….yeah, makes no sense to me either…and to call someone a turtle egg was thus, as has been explained to me, equivalent to calling them a bastard, as in “You are a turtle egg and so was your mother and her mother too!!” Or so the older ladies at my work assured me, although they were very curious as to who I was planning to cuss out in Chinese.

Gǎnkuaì! = Hurry/Make haste!

Bù hǎole. Bùshíle = Oh no. Not again/anymore/another time.

(Chinese)
The Actions of Soldiers

Chapter Summary

In the midst of enemies alliances are formed and reunions sought. Father Yodan Campo tends to his "patient." Galen Erso realizes his hour of redemption and perhaps reunion is near. Captain Andor faces a fearful adversary and Captain Solo yet again finds himself "in over his head."

Chapter Notes

So much plot!!!!!! How did this become an 18th cen John LCarre novel? (Pirate/Rebelcaptain/Romance/steampunk/alt.history/art geek version??)
V for violence.
No fewer than 4 pov. (Sorry)
Father Yodan get tough. Jen gets tougher. Cassian is good at his job even while freaking. Han has poor social skills and hates undercover work. Galen Erso finally gets to hit somebody.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

January 15, 1770

The injured English boy was ordered carried up the path to the nearest of the kitchen buildings and two of the sturdier among the workers who had gathered there to stare at the commotion stepped forward to take up the stretcher while the Director gestured curtly for two of his own guards to escort them and ensure the compliance of the Governors order.

Leaning upon his stick Father Campo limped behind the men and their burden.

The priest knew his path well having had occasion to visit the outbuildings many times over the years, as well as to travel between the overseers houses and soldiers barracks. Most often his visits were made to care for wounds and illnesses of Krennik's men, but some years back an outbreak of scabrous lesions having afflicted the guards as fiercely as the workers permission was granted him to
use the hearths and products of the kitchen gardens and beehives in order to prepare simples and ointments.

Two or three among the women took it at turns to work in the "Governors" kitchen, under the supervision of a harsh but half-blind, half-deaf cook brought from one of the transport ship crews, dubbed Mr. Beesee.

Having keys to the cellars where the rum barrels were kept Mr. Beesee generally appeared only when shipments of supplies arrived and directly before dinners were served forth. Poor beer was brought up from Jamaica upon occasion and rum brought from Boston in the North through Charleston by regular shipment for the Englishmen’s daily ration. As the years passed the cook’s inspections of these items had grown more thorough.

Any sign of theft by the kitchen workers was punished, but if all remained according to account the women were left largely to themselves and took careful occasion to bake the loaves made by the other captive women from their meager allotments of maize-meal in the cooling ovens and place their precious pots of beans to cook in the stored ashes so long as they were not discovered doing so.

The women also prepared the simple if ample fare required for the overseers and the Director himself.

For all his other affectations of station Mr. Krennik, when not in company he wished to impress, seemed to care little for what his men, or indeed what he himself ate so long as it was sufficient and palatable. Only on those occasions when the Governor himself or his esteemed guests were in residence or expected was the second "winter" kitchen opened and other workers brought in to assist. The surviving Greeks were then sought particularly, his lordship having it was said a preference for the cooking of that region. Brandies, Madieras and bottles of decent wine were also kept, sealed under separate key from the stores Mr. Beesee supervised, against these infrequent visits.

A fire had already been set in the greater hearth of the second kitchen but fortunately only Maria Parta and two young boys, Carlo Fella and Photio Medici were within when the makeshift hospital party arrived. They three it seemed were set to the unpacking of victuals and supplies hurriedly brought in from the storehouse and up from the Governor's transport at the dock.

_The priest's keen eye could not help but notice that the baskets and crates were fewer now than on some former and better announced occasions of residence....Governor Tarkin clearly did not intend either himself or his men to remain longer here than a few days._

The sight of the bleeding youth and yet more the proximity of the Governors guards caused Maria Parta and her helpers to draw back in alarm but Father Campo called out to the startled woman that she must heat a loggerhead iron at once and draw bowls of steaming water from the kettles just set on the fire.

"Cauterized these wounds must be," he said to the English guard who had accompanied them all. "You two soldiers only we have here, so help hold him you must."

Neither guard looked pleased at this prospect but one, clearly the senior, ordered his fellow to do as the priest asked while affirming that he would remain at watch by the door.
“I see….No, no….pretty it will not be but regrettable actions we must take when no other path
remains,” the ancient cleric muttered distractedly as he paced around the bloody, pale and motionless
youth, now laid upon the low table.

Father Campo slightly loosened back the canvas and wounded English boy’s bloodied clothing
while the two workmen he had conscripted for the task of carrying the stretcher, one an African and
the other a young Minorcan, removed the poles.

"Back, back, Maria," the guards heard him say in his broken English, and he mixed in some rustic
Greek that neither of them understood, “.. gennaía gynaíka kratá kalá píso kai krývei ta mátia ton
paidión..." all while he made great show of washing his gnarled hands in the bowl of hot water.

"Though near to death this boy may be sudden movement will return when the moment
comes....Sefla, shoulders you must hold...Meni by this side...your honor brave officer by the head
stand please..."

The matron he had previously addressed moved away from the hearth toward the farther wall. Eyes
wide with fear she drew both boys to her, turning the smallest one’s face to her ragged skirt.

The lesser guard nervously took his place as instructed while his senior barked from the door, "Be
quick in your ministrations old fool, these men must return to...

"Quick yes, delay increases danger...it is true..." the priest clucked amicably while lifting the bowl.

"Ara!" he cried and without warning flung the steaming contents of the vessel full into the face of the
guard, then dropped nimbly to up snatch the heavy loggerhead from the bricks of the fire.

A killing blow cracked the man’s skull even as he raised hands to his blinded eyes.

Sefla stepped quickly to seize the other guard before he could cry out an alarm but even as he
reached to do so the bloody patient leaped upright from the table.

The plantation officer’s head was yanked back and his throat cut before any sound could escape him
save a final gasp.

Thereupon, with knife still in hand, the resurrected stranger shoved the dying man forward and fairly
leaped forward over the body in haste to reach the door. Meni moved to grasp the boy but was
knocked aside and rendered breathless by a blow to the ribs.

Father Campo himself arrested the fugitives flight only by darting forward with speed to grasp and
twist the slender wrist that held the knife.

Green eyes widened in surprise as the arm he pressed dropped the blade.

Though Sefla’s speed could not match that of youth enraged, some long-ago training clearly
remained for the Hausa man moved quickly behind to pin the young warrior’s free arm and block
any pivot to further action.

"Peace child! Among friends you are!"

The woman, for Yodan Campo perceived the person he restrained to be female, did not so much
cease her energies as pause them, arresting by force of will some well-honed instincts of combat.

Facing them then she cried.

"You must help me. Galen Erso is my father. We have come to rescue your people and destroy this place...I am with Alliance. Bodi Rook led us here."

What had Zephyrus called the Affinitas....that group formed at some time unnoticed among the unordained scholars and returning common foot soldiers? “Gleaners” he had named them like the humble and faithful poor who searched to sustain themselves and their children by raking together not in the blazing sun of day but the humble light of dawn and sunset. An army of purpose they had become. The torch his Order in pride of strength and supposed wisdom had dropped was taken up now by others.

Deus utitur et contritum ferrum acuit novus ones, came to Yodan Campo as if written in letters of flame.

The Light had found use for him again, and whether as punishment for his sins or the penance that leads in time to redemption hardly mattered. His heart was filled with hope.

"Bodi Rook?" Sefla said standing back from the woman. "It is true then....Allah mai girma ne."

Tears shone in his manly eyes.

"I speak the truth." The girl, still in torn, blood-clotted jacket sounded almost desperate now in her eagerness. "He waits to lead your people to safety on the far side of the Northwest canal...by the stream that runs east-west, the one English map calls it the Pine Creek. You must take as many there as possible before dawn tomorrow, the final attack will begin then...but I must find my father...." Yes, Campo recognized the fire now, "....and that apaniyan..." she fairly snarled now.. "that Ọmọ Òṣù who, has taken our men with him...him I will kill with my own hands."

"Tarkin?" Sefla asked.

"No," the pale woman said. Tearing off the fouled coat she snatched her blade back up from the floor, tucking it into her breeches belt beside the pistol now revealed there. "I do not care who kills that murdering snake so long as he dies. My mother's blood is on the other....."Director" I heard the bastards call him. His death is mine and if he harms a hair of my husband's head I will tear his heart out first."

The Alliance she might serve, Father Campo considered, but pirate-born she was.
Maria Parta, widow of a poor carpenter of Santerini deceived but five days after their wedding by the false promise of land and freedom, and now last survivor of the Greek women had learned in her years of captivity sufficient speech of Minorica to ask Juan Meni, "El meu fill, qui és aquesta persona?"

The man answered her, "Tia, no sé aquest desconegut, però crec que aviat l'admiro molt."

On the priest’s orders she banked down the fire carefully, closed the ovens and swiftly tidied the kitchen with the goal of deceiving any who casually came to inspect that the cooks had not begun their work there yet.

While the men dragged the corpses behind the woodpiles and raked sand to hide the blood she gave each frightened shirtless boy a woven grass bag filled with bread she had baked in the great ovens yesterday and bid them both run and tell their mothers to quickly gather and lead their families to the chapel.

Bold Sefla spoke to the newcomer in English and a tongue like that of the Africans. She who but moments before had pressed toward the door like a horse desperate to bolt must have been persuaded by his words because she stuffed the bloody coat of her disguise into a water barrel and made as if to follow them.

A "she" Maria Parta already knew the violent stranger to be. It was a habit of the English tongue to turn two words into one.

That "Husband" stood for "sýzygos ánstras" she had learned through bitter tears of loss years ago. None but a bride of less than a year could pronounce it so.

As Father Campo urged them forward swiftly to the gathering place Sefla picked up the kitchen knives in sight and placed them in the bottom of a bark basket to be rolled under his arm.

Maria took up the large one she had been using to cut the heavy squashes in her own hand.

If she could save her own life and that of her neighbors she prayed for the strength to do so but to bow down before the merciless, run, hide, or scatter could not serve the people of New Smyrna any longer.

The hour to fight had come.

They fled out through the kitchen garden, up behind and round the empty warehouses and between the workers shacks.
On any other day the sandy paths would have been trafficked but most of the guards who had not been sent to attend the Governor or his errands were forced to accompany the reluctant workers back into the fields and man extra watch for savages.

The remaining overseers were pressed supervising the work on the wharves for the indigo was being brought down and stacked as if for loading.

Those not so engaged had quietly vanished.

Maria, Juan Meni, Sefla and the aged priest...striding swiftly now, without use of his stick...guided the woman to the rough chapel where she found one of her companions had already arrived.

The "Mansion" was an impressive oddity. The design mimicked a style of English manor houses he had seen often enough, those supposedly based on some manner of Italian ideal. *The term "Paladian" came to his memory.*

The facade was righteously symmetrical with an arched central doorway reached by dual stairways and fashioned of large bricks of the local grey-brown coquina-stone. Wide open doors and placement facing the breezes of the inlet seemed the sole concession to the tropical climate.

*Captain Andor did not doubt that Mr. Kay might go at length with the subject but his own research into the architectural fashions of the noble and wealthy were largely constrained by his interests in the most effective means of entrance and escape.*

As they were led up the slope he forced himself to make careful record of his surroundings, a discipline aimed to keep himself calm.

When the crippled priest darted forward to lay hands directly upon Jen, disguised in the litter, his
heart had nearly stopped. From where he stood the old man could not have failed to perceive the pistol.

Dios...the strain of not moving in that moment....his ribs still ached from it.

Had he imagined the sparkle of excitement in the old man's eyes as they glanced up briefly to meet his own? Mr. Rook had spoken of the Catholic chaplain as a sympathetic if somewhat pitiful figure, but clearly the ancient Minorican held capabilities in reserve.

If the man were likely to betray them he would have done so at once he told himself.

With eyes closed and all but bound on that stretcher, it must seemed to her that she was trapped in the dark.

The memory of that nightmare of darkness and abandonment which had tormented her on the Rogue returned to him, as did the voice of a terrified child telling herself that she was not afraid.

The training of his lifetime taught Cassian Andor to make decisions of life and death quickly and by reflex he did so.

“This good man will care for you John. We will come and check on you soon. I promise,” he managed to say.

No doubt her parents had promised to return for her. No doubt Gererre had as well. Perdoname mi amor.

In the space of a moment they had taken her away from him.

His rough map of action had assumed not being separated this early....gambled indeed on Governor William Tarkin having not yet arrived and on Captain Jared Fuller's rank being sufficient to press authority against a mere Director with regards to the disposal of his own men and prisoners.

Two guards were assigned to accompany the removal of the injured "boy" to some supposed rough surgery. Even if the priest's aid proved limited, when armed and able to avail conditions of surprise Captain Cassian Andor was confident in his wife's ability to dispatch two grown men.

Este no es el fin, he told himself. You will see her again. She knows how to hold on to a mast in a raging storm.

With these words as armor around his guilt and fear he went on. They must buy Jen and Kay time to work if they could.

They were led into a parlor, finely furnished in the English fashion. Not as opulent as many he had seen but most impressive for an English provincial venture...everything consciously purchased and placed, he did not doubt. The Enemy had access to funds capable of furnishing this as a palace if it served purpose. The intent here...mahogany table, damask-covered chairs, silk and wool carpets.... Chinese but cleverly reworked and enlarged in New Spain, expensive and no doubt meant to cue knowledgeable visitors of the Governor's clandestine access to Cuba's markets...all placed in distance from each other just sufficient to maximize appreciation of their quality. The intended effect was one of well-managed prosperity, education, taste and international connections, even on the edge of this supposed wilderness.
The Governor seated himself at the carved table and gestured for them to take the chairs that his servant brought forward.

“Thank you, your lordship. Faucon, sit down.”

He tried to catch Solo’s eye.

“Sir…yes, sir.” He coughed then like a man whose throat was roughened by thirst….a good touch.

The accent was convincing enough if the Dutchman stayed to simple phrases but he needed to speak as little as possible.

“I’m to be junior officer, eh?” Solo had asked when they began to set parts aboard the Falcon. “It’ll be all “yes, sir,” “no sir” and ”by your leave sir” then, as long as you’re in the room. Well and good. I remember the soldiers drill well enough.”

“You served in the army?” Luc Ceil-Marchuer asked, astonished.

“Aye,” Captain Solo affirmed, looking out across the dark water. Long ago and far away….for a very little while…enough to say that it didn’t take.” In whose army? Captain Andor had wondered.

It was essential that Solo hold to his part here. They were outnumbered and far from aid, too ignorant of the particulars to accomplish their mission even if they could fight their way out. Seven men against two in this room alone, counting the icy Governor himself.

Mr. Galen Erso hung back, silent as a standing tree by the opposite door, largely ignored. Captain Andor forced his attention away from Jen’s father, the man he most earnestly wished and needed to speak to, and toward the other men.

The Governor’s appearance matched descriptions Captain Andor had read previously. A man near to 60 of lean but patrician appearance, elegant in manner. Intelligent and articulate while given to listen with as great a skill as he spoke. Dangerous.

The “servant”...a silent and capable man of perhaps 27 years and near 13 stone was obviously a trained bodyguard, surely armed but discretely so.

Two guards… in what seemed the Governor’s own grey livery…stationed at the door. Fresh fellows, good swords and carefully tended English muskets.

Two other fellows in well-maintained but sun-faded red…regularly stationed here and thus likely answerable to the white-waistcoated “Director.”

The care-taker Director Krennik...48 at a guess, slightly overdressed in white silk waistcoat and an ivory coat…. had the lean and striving look of a rich man’s hound, just as likely to lick boots as snap….From Mr. Rook’s report he was also a petty tyrant who bit cruelly.

Other servants might be confined to the lower levels or upper floors.
"You must be exhausted," Governor Tarkin said, "I wish that I could offer you rest and greater succor before we speak Captain Fuller but your tale is clearly an urgent one...Ecksem!" he waved to a liveried servant, "....brandy for these officers!"

Dr. William Tarkin, presently fashioned Royal Appointed Governor of the experimental colony of New Smyrna, had a history in the service of the Enemy well beyond Captain Andor's lifetime. One Wilhelm Tarken was first noted in Vienna at the time of the Successionist Wars. A Viennese officer, although Mr. Draven believed him British by birth, he was described as a dispassionate man of temperate habits and feline concentration. Though said to have had some skill with a blade in his youth, he had lived long and risen high in his masters regard not through any great personal charisma or skill in battle but by a gift for preternaturally shrewd assessment of the weaknesses and usefulness of those around him. His appearance in the West Indes and the Americas at the closure of the last war had alarmed the Council mightily.

"Tarkin plays the long game," Lady Mary said. "He will sacrifice every piece on the board without hesitation in pursuit of the greater goal."

In any other place or circumstance Cassian Andor’s duty would have been clear and direct upon finding himself within striking distance of such a monster.

For now he must reach with feigned gratitude for the proffered spirits and nod to grant “Faucon” permission to do the same. The eagerness with which the Dutchman accepted was well within the character of their charade but still…keep steady fool.

Wetting his lips with the brandy…strong, barely watered, clever serpent…. “Captain Jared Fuller” drew breath and sitting upright with the military determination of an utterly spent man, began his report in the terse and circumscribed fashion of an officer who had seen his men slaughtered.

It was the great defining feature of the British in disaster, their stoicism.

“Sir, word of this must be sent to Sir William Duncan on the plantations south…and Saint Augustine as quickly as possible sir, they came upon us without warning..”

He had seen enough men speak so, seen enough Englishmen speak so to construct a facsimile. A man can only convincingly tell a lie he can make himself believe.
Mr. Galen Erso stood in silence beside the guard and felt the minutes pass like slow beats of a drum heard only by himself.

It would take yet several hours for the trickle of igniting oil to connect the reaches of the warehouses through the canals.

If….No, when….the precious letter had said that Mr. Bodi Rook lived. Courage that had carried a man so far would surely not fail so near to the goal…. help came it must do so from the Northeast or Northwest.

Sefla must move the people as far away as possible. Some had already gone. The force of a blast would be mighty and the fires that likely moved after would make the central stream of the Halifax or the great Lake to the west the safest place. He could not deceive himself that all would escape.

Eyes down and mien drained of emotion he hid his racing heart behind the mask he had constructed for himself these ten years and listened to the Englishman speak to Tarkin.

These soldiers were young men both. He had caught a glimpse of a stretcher carried away even upon his arrival, one of their comrades, mortally wounded. There would be no medicine for him here, or for any of the poor fools.

A huge and alarmingly painted savage was dragged away as well. He had over heard Krennik giving instructions that he be well-bound and locked in the bricked cellar of the malthouse. Six men were sent to guard one.

_The glimpse he had caught puzzled him. It seemed to Galen Erso that he had seen such tattoos before but was reasonably sure it had not been in the Americas._

God help them all, whoever they were. The report the weary captain gave to his supposed countryman was one of confusion and death. A mapping expedition on the Western banks of the St. Johns…some sequel to the Bartram expedition. Ambush by natives hitherto undescribed. Most of the party killed within moments…musket and arrow shot from the banks and trees. Numbers of enemy uncertain. Perhaps several dozen. A near escape by himself and two companions with a prisoner. The grueling walk of three days to this place of safety. It was a harrowing tale for all it was told in the spare style of a plainspoken soldier.

The other young man, the sergeant, hung his head as if listening to his officer's tale numbly.

_You seek safety in a house of murderers boy and apply for aid to a heartless devil._

Like travelers in some dark tale his grandmother told by the fireside, these unlucky men of King George's had fled one nightmare only to walk all unknowing into a further hell. Tarkin would surely kill them all as soon as he was clear in his mind on what they signified.

The Governor had returned to forestall Krennik's ambition and commence the final clearance of the project. Mr. Galen Erso was in no doubt that a ship stood offshore to move the remaining false and true indigo.

Krennik stood attentively…Tarkin having most pointedly not offered him leave to take a chair.
Oren's face wore the shrewd expression he reserved for conversations that held interest for him because he sought advantage to himself therein.

“Sire,” Captain Fuller was saying, “Forgive me but I fear we are both too spent to manage good report.”

“Indeed,” said Tarkin, pitiless “Most distressing but we should prepare the messages while some details are fresh. Speed being essential.”

Cruel. No messages would ever be sent of course.

I am sorry, English, I can do nothing to save you. Guilty or innocent your fate was sealed when you crossed the canal into that filthy field.

“Director,” Galen Erso said quietly. “If my presence is not required, the loading at the wharf…”

“What?…yes, yes of course,” Whatever petty cruelty Krennik had called him to witness was momentarily displaced in his memory by the present interview. “Do so…” the Director acceded, waving a hand, “But remain there until I arrive. We must review the disposition of…equipment matters.”

"Equipment" In the parlance of the plantation usually referred to the workers themselves.

“Thank you Director,” he bowed and moved toward the door.

Tarkin was pressing the unfortunate Captain Fuller with more questions….not about the attack but the expedition itself. Who had authorized it? What had it’s purpose been?

The Englishman seemed taken aback, for the direness of the attack, grief and concern for his comrades were of course forefront in his mind.

Galen Erso heard snippets of his broken replies as he moved carefully to exit the room without drawing attention.

“At Cow Ford, sire.....no we were to accompany a Mr. William Bartram....... one of those captured, at least I did not see him fall…I cannot say….Captain Reynard Dutch is…was our commander. Governor Moultrie gave him orders…”

Moultrie. The New Provincial Governor?.... one of whose men had secretly placed Jen’s precious letter in his pocket?

Mr. Erso paused to look back from the shadow of the doorway and focussed his full observation on the Englishman for the first time.

Though drawn and clearly exhausted the man appeared nowhere near thirty. His dark unruly hair and rough cheek bespoke days spent in hard travel as did the battered uniform... coat gone and neck stock missing. The officer’s waistcoat had been well re-buttoned, in deference to his interview with high authority but remained visibly flecked with what must be dry blood and not the man's own from the pattern of the stains.

Nothing in his eyes or expression betrayed anything save great weariness and shredded but soldierly discipline.

Tarkin was coolly informing Captain Fuller that while messengers would be sent at once out at once to inform the named authorities but that men could not be spared from the plantation to mount any
sort of search.

The young English officer finally seemed to sag then and bowed his head like a man unwilling to accept an unendurable truth.

“You may be right sir, but I cannot give up hope yet,” he said, “my father used to tell me that the stars are constant even when unseen.”

_Hon är här. Den här mannen känner henne._

Mr. Galen Erso laid a hand upon the doorframe as if to steady himself.

_Painted oak from the inland forest. Well-carved and pieced to mimic better wood. Carlos Fortuna had done the work._

The movement drew Tarkin’s attention as that of a mouse draws the hawk.

“Mr. Erso, please report to Captain Motti on the wharf. There will be some changes in the packing and placement of the cargo. He will inform you.”

Krennik bristled but could say nothing at present.

“Sire,” Captain Fuller said, drawing the predators eye back to himself, “I will provide all that I can, as you see best, but perhaps Sgt. Facoun might be spared to rest if you can provide a place of respite for us.”

“Sir?” The other Englishman looked up for the first time. Concern flickered in his eyes.

“It will be alright, Henry. Go. See to yourself and to John’s care if possible.”

Mr. Galen Erso bowed then slipped out and walked quickly down the hallway.

______________________________

One of the redcoats was set to accompany him.
Captain Han Solo did not doubt that the guided tour offered “Henry Facoun” was intended to end with that fictional person’s earthly corpse cooling in some convenient place.

_Jezus! The Spaniard had nerves like cold steel. Solo had seen some show of them before in Kingston but that had been as nothing compared to this. That bastard of a “Governor” could have been painted red and played Satan in any churchyard parade._

He needed to find a way to slip this guard and get to Khaeuri and the woman. Andor had clearly cut him loose to that purpose but if the man thought Mrs. Andor likely to play the good soldier and leave her husband in the heart of that nest of vipers he did not know his own wife.

_Captain Syndalla’s speech hung in his mind._

Places like this were full of side rooms stocked with shiny furniture in his limited experience of the rich. Assuming the interview to have been taking place in the “good parlor” there would be other lesser ones nearby hopefully unoccupied if Governor Satan’s wife and twelve little devils were not in present residence.

Somehow this redcoat at his elbow must be persuaded into one.

Solo paused beside a closed door to his right and made as if having stumbled.

“A moment sir, my boot heel…”

Redcoat stopped

There had been a notion of shoving the fellow through the door in the tissue-thin sheer hope of it being unlocked but that needed the bastard forward another damned foot to make it work.

Han Solo’s brain worked… “Look here..sir…”

_Domkop! Is dit een gesprek?_

On that instant the door beside them opened and a tall grey man struck the startled guard with what looked like a fireplace brick.

Solo shoved the falling redcoat through and landed on top of him while his savior kicked the door closed behind. The fellow on the ground looked fairly well caved in but just in case a moan might escape Captain Solo hit him again.

_The room was indeed another ridiculously well-polished sitting parlor. What explained this passion of the English for absurdly thin-legged chairs?_

Solo struggled to his feet but his companion was in no mood to receive thanks. With a strength that belied his grey hair and previous beaten-dog demeanor Mr. Galen Erso flung the Dutchman back against the nearest wall and pressed a forearm against his windpipe.

“Who are you? Where is my daughter?”

The brick was raised ready to strike again.

Reluctant to stare Captain Solo had previously stolen only curious glances at the Engineer and had
found himself unable to see any resemblance at all between the stooped and faded man who had stood like a ghost at the edge of their Devil's conference and the fiery little fox-eyed buccaneer and part-time lady of his acquaintance.

*He saw something of an inheritance now however. This man would clearly kill him if he did not approve his answers.*

“Calm yourself, sir,” he gasped and the fellow lightened his pressure….ever so slightly, “…I....We...are Alliance…here with her and the Turkish pilot.”

The tall man who had held him with a grip like iron now bowed his head like as if overcome and changed his stance.

"Bodi Rook....and my Jen...guiding each other..."

Lowering his weapon the man leaned on Solo’s shoulder for support rather than in contest.

“Sir?” Captain Solo said, worried... *What was he to do with the fellow if he fell apart? God alone knew what was being done to Khaeuri...or by Khaeuri.*

“Come now, sir, man yourself. How can we get out of here?”

“The servants door…” Mr. Galen Erso stood on his own, tears choked back and shaking stilled. The gentleman pointed behind a massive cabinet of sorts toward a small door, painted to match the walls.

Solo strode across at once and opened it a crack, peering through into a dim passage that descended by stairs.

*Voices could be heard...women? What was that? Spanish or Arabic?...someone was below but the stairway seemed empty.*

“Where is she?” the man behind him asked again.

“I told you sir, here. It was she who parroted the injured boy.....an old ruse” Solo explained himself in whispers, his attention on the passageway, “….and a good one if one player does not get carried away by a Papist dwarf before you are even through the damned stage door."

“But Jane...my daughter…You, you know her…she is well?”

“....oh yes, quite hearty I assure you. A lovely girl. Once it seemed likely we would kill each other but on further acquaintance we have grown most fond.”

Mr. Galen Erso’s face was a picture of hope and grief mingled.

*As they prepared their departure from the Falcon he had asked Mrs. Andor for some description of her father, so that he might recognize him and she had stared as one struck.*

“I ....I cannot say,” that normally fierce lady said with something as close to a girls tremor in her voice as he had ever heard from her. “I have not seen him since I was a child of eight. I think...at least I remember....that he was tall.” Rook stepped forward to lay a hand upon Mrs. Andor’s
shoulder and painted for him in words an image that matched the man before him of a tall, thin-faced Scandanavian, grey haired and dark-browed with piercing blue eyes.

Han Solo found his heart wrung with an emotion kin to pity.

What would his own father look like now if he had lived…aye, or even the old lady herself? Would it be possible that they should pass him in the street and not know him?

“Come now sir, steady yourself,” he patted the older man’s shoulder awkwardly, comfort not being a mode of address familiar to him.

“As to her health, I have known tigresses with less vigor and that clever only slightly-mad officer …” Solo jerked his chin back toward the vacated hallway and parlor in which they had left Andor, “he is your son-in-law, a man of keen talents who I assure you prizes the wench above rubies. With luck I can introduce you but presently we must leave him to exercise his skills and execute such rescues as we may.”

“There is not much time,” Mr. Galen Erso told him. The steel of action had clearly returned now for the man stood tall and his blue eyes were direct. “This place must burn within a day’s span…no more.”

“Aye,” Han Solo assured him, “That matches my understanding of the plan. Where is this malthouse my friend has been taken to?”

“Follow me.” Galen Erso said and after together dragging the limp body of the redcoat onto a narrow landing of the little hidden staircase they departed by that way.

Chapter End Notes

O my I hope this makes sense. An actionish/plot sequence where half the people do not know what the other hand are up to and several people are pretending to be someone else.
I gennaía gynaíka kratá kalá píso kai krývei ta mátia ton paidión = a brave woman keeps/will keep good distance behind and hide the eyes of the children.

Ara! = Now! (Greek)

Deus utitur et contritum ferrum acuit novus ones = God uses the broken blade to sharpen new ones. (Latin)

apaniyan = murderer

Ọmọ Òṣù = son of the Devil (Yoruba)

El meu fill, qui és aquesta persona? = My son, who is this person?

Tia, no sé aquest desconegut, però crec que aviat l'admiro molt = Aunt I do not know this stranger, but I think I will soon come to admire him greatly. (Catalan)

Perdoname mi amor = Forgive me my love (Spanish)

Hon är här. Den här mannen känner henne. = She is here. This man knows her. (Swedish)

Domkop! Is dit een gesprek? =Idiot! Is this a conversation? (Dutch)
Angels

Chapter Summary

In which young Sera Fortuna bravely leads Mr. Kay to the chapel and the gathered captives of New Smyrna. Mrs. Andor and Mr. Kay are briefly reunited.

Chapter Notes

The plot is slowly moving and so are all the characters in it.!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

Late in the morning of

January 15, 1770
As Sera Fortuna listened to the talk of Sefla and the holy father she had labored to form a picture in her mind of what “help” might look like. All she could fashion in her imagination were troops of soldiers...dressed in any color save red, grey or black..or perhaps Angels.

In the chapel Father Campo told them of Mr. Bodi Rook and how he had been sent secretly by Sefla and Mr. Galen Erso to the enemies of the Governor and was even now returning bringing with him men and women who sought to aid them. Whispers followed along with cries, prayers in all three languages of the colony and many many questions.

"Sí sí. Bodi Rook va ser un dels més joves," Senora Calderon recalled aloud. Most of the older people agreed, vouching that a man by the name of Rook had indeed been among those sailors kept alive after the passage to care for and sail the boats that belonged to the plantation. Eight or nine such men still lived although Sera recalled there had once been more.

The boats were carefully tended and went out the of inlet and up the greater River on the wicked Governor and cruel Director’s errands and to guide the large visiting ships in. The people sometimes saw the sailors and boatmen but seldom spoke to them except during the loading of the indigo and unloading of supplies. Most of the sailors were English and Protestants but some of them were not and though they were allotted better clothing and food they were much scorned by the other guards and slept apart in a barracks of their own on the other side of the great canal.

Mr. Rook was surely one of the not-English for Sera remembered an occasion of hearing him speak Greek.

As the crates of blue indigo cake were lifted aboard with the ropes Vangelis Mudas arm had become entangled between the hauling lines. As the man was dragged forward screaming in pain, one of the jacketed sailors on deck had run forward swiftly to the rail and thrust a board of wood between the twisting lines, shouting down as he did so in the Greek tongue that the man stay calm and let his fellows lift him. The ropes were stopped for a moment and though the block screeched with strain the wedge acted to loosen just enough slack so that some of the other men were able to pull Vangelis free. Papa had been alive then and among those men who rushed to carry the wounded man away to Father Campo, who bandaged his broken and torn arm as best he could.

Sera Fortuna ran forward with the other women to lift the fallen crates and repack the spilled indigo cakes lest worse punishments befall them all at the hand of the cruel Director. As she did so Sera caught a glimpse of a thin young man with haunted dark eyes at the rail.

That was the first and last she knew of Mr. Rook until near the end of last winter when she overheard some guards say that Rook the Turk had thrown himself in the sea and drowned.

Her father raved loudly about angels in the hours before his death. Even while Mama pressed the wet compresses of folded palm leaf to his head and begged him to lie still, he had shouted “Els àngels vindran no els veuré, però els veureu Sera!”

Though it would have grieved her mother to hear her say so aloud very few memories were left to Sera Fortuna of Menorca. The plantation had devoured nearly all. One treasure that did remain was of her father carrying her as a very small child through the Basilica de Ciutadella de Menorca....beautiful words for something so beautiful. Lifted up in his strong arms she had passed
through endless white pillars of stone that rose in the likeness of smooth, straight, impossibly tall trees to join in branches above their heads.

"Has fet tot aquest Papa?" had been her childish question and he had laughed his deep laugh while answering no, no that he carved wood not stone. His grandfather had worked for the masters who made the the altar screens and benches that the singing priests leaned upon during the service and before she was born he himself had helped repair the carvings of the small chapels. With pride he had shown them to her.

In dreams she could still run her fingers across the ends of the railings and kneeling benches. There were leaves, blossoms and curved lines skillfully carved amongst marvelous figures. On one there was a bearded king seated with a crown on his head. Elsewhere there was a bull, and a sheep and a lion that lay at the feet of a man. In circles at the joining of each panel were smooth-faced people with the wings of birds attached to their shoulders. These were àngels her father told her. One even held a sword and struck at a snake with it.

According to her mother and good Father Campo àngels were not ordinary persons but beings made to carry the messages of God to the people and fight against Devils for the mastery of heaven and earth.

Sera pulled the wagon with difficulty to the crushing floor. There the bundled fresh plants were sorted from debris and laid down with rakes so that the great rollers could crush the stems. After some time drying thus they would be bundled again and carried first to the grinding mills and then to the stinking tanks.

Sure the pounding of her heart must be visible beneath the rag of her only smock, she made a false show of trouble with the wheel hoping to draw the eye of the overseer away from the back of the cart but the man mostly sneered and paid her little mind.

Usually there were two here, one within the great threshing barn and another who walked back and forth between the works. Presently only one was in the barn. Fear of the "savages" had likely drawn most of the Directors men out to guard the boundary fields.

Nothing seemed to be ordered as it usually was.

When the men pulled the heavy cart aside and began to pull the bunched plants out with rakes it was all she could do to stifle a scream but the sharp tines struck nothing but green indigo. The strange messenger was no longer hidden inside.

When telling the tale to children and grandchildren many years afterwards Sera Fortuna could never explain with certainty how it was that she had felt no fear, had known in her heart at once that this unearthly person meant her no harm. A being so strange in form and utterly dispassionate in manner it seemed to her then could only come from God.

After taking his hand away from her mouth the pale giant asked her questions about the various warehouses, which she answered and also about "pols" and "pols negre" which confused her greatly until she realized he meant the índigo negre. "El molí de sucre" she whispered though
unable to describe more about that dreadful place than its general location for she had never been near, much less inside.

"La casa del senyor Galen Erso està a prop d'aquells dels supervisors," she told him. "No puc anar-hi ara. Vine al Pare Campo. Ell sabrà què fer."

Knowing all tongues as an angel must the man nodded in agreement. "Per alterar el vostre patró d'acció, us podria posar en perill i avisar als nostres enemics. Aneu a aquest lloc si és segur fer-ho i us seguiré."

By orders Sera was bound to return to the fields again after bringing in her load but it occurred to her that if she walked away while the cart was being unloaded the lone overseer might not notice if or when she turned left instead of right. Picking up an empty bucket propped beside one of the raking tanks she kept walking quickly, eyes down as if upon some errand. Skirting the works she walked the path along the main canal, trusting the angel to follow her unseen. When at last quite sure that no eyes were upon her she abandoned the prop by the warehouse wall and began to run. Keeping well behind the Greek shacks she hurried toward the Minorcan ones and on to the high shaded bank and the chapel beyond.

The sky had grown grey after the sun of the morning and the wind had dropped, or rather as she ran it changed direction.

The breeze most blew almost constantly from the inlet, either a steady zephyr blocked here and there by the high grass dunes and thick mangle-rafts or as a gale that jumped them. Even the cruel flat heat of Summer's end could be broken by fierce storms that roared in without mercy, also from the sea.

It was only rarely and in mid-winter that a wind would come from the North or West rattling through from the inland forest with a sound like dry bones and blowing the sharp palm leaves out to sea. One of those storms approached now and Sera shivered even as she ran.

Nearing the little chapel at last she saw two figures sheltered in the doorway. Juan Cassera and Old Nicholas pulled her inside the dim shelter.

"Sera, Sera. Que està passant? Per què corres?"

"On és el Pare sant?"

"Va ser retirat pels guàrdies. Que està passant?"

As her eyes accustomed to the light inside she perceived perhaps a dozen of the older children and women huddled in the back beneath the low table of the altar. Others were under and behind the benches.

It has begun, she wanted to tell them but even as she struggled to find words that would not frighten the children a section of daylight was closed from behind her as if blocked by a curtain. The people in the humble chapel stared astonished up and over young Sera Fortuna's head.
The muddy and leaf-covered Arcàngel had indeed followed her.

The strange little priest moved quickly despite his short legs and bent back.

"We must not be seen," Mrs. Andor said.

Every sinew ached as if trying to tell her that she was moving in the wrong direction, that her husband and father were behind in that wretched pile of cut brick.

"We will not be," the old dwarf said with a firm yet almost amused confidence.

Indeed as they moved behind and between the sheds and outbuildings Jen saw several of the black-uniformed English turn away as if they heard some call or felt a sudden present need to walk inside or away toward the docks.

A number of the captive workers saw them clearly but these recognizing the priest nodded and moved on quickly, often crossing themselves in the Roman fashion.

The place was unlike any plantation or camp of work that she had ever seen before but mismatched pieces she recognized. The canals, almost like those of Cairo or Holland, stretched as far back as her eye could see. Far far grander than mere ditches for sewers for the irrigation of fields all were fully paved, ditched and edged with the pressed shellstone native to these coasts. A central Great Canal divided the built parts of the settlement, was wide enough to pole good barges down and looked a good ten hands or more deep. Narrow branches fed into that main channel from common gardens on one side and rows of sheds on the other. The "mansion" that rose behind them aped a rich English house in shape but was bricked with the same pocked golden stone, as were the rounded great-ovens visible beyond. Everything seemed skillfully fitted together with scant or no use of mortar. Other buildings were fashioned of rough-cut pine and oak lumber and roofed with palm leaf all no doubt cut and dragged from cleared forests such as those they had passed through on their journey here. The structures lined up along the waterways to face the shore like little boxes.

In true European fashion they held their faces toward the prosperous sea whether conditions advised it or not.

These vast fields of indigo, canals, house, wharves, roads, mills, works and manufactories had all been raised on a wild malarial shore in less than ten years...and not one brick of it laid for the good of they who perished building it.

If you were here Baba Saul this place would be in flames already, she told herself...but first...first there was work to be done.

On a path behind the warehouses they moved quickly but carefully from building to building.

Crates were piled at the river's edge and ragged men, some wearing only circlets of torn cloth around their necks as if in mime of shirts, were lowering down and stacking more onto little flat-bottomed
boats.

The Greek woman, having sent her boys to run ahead, stayed close by the priest, a great kitchen knife tucked into the rope waistband of her apron of palm leaves.

The Hausa man remained close by her and spoke again they paused in one shadow, his voice roughened as if with smoke. "There will not be much time brave warrior, a day perhaps, no more. Galen Erso has sworn an oath that none of the evil made here will leave this place again and he has set the fuse of oil. As many as can be saved must be away from here before it is lit...da wuta wanda makamanta yake maza da duwatsu."

Mrs. Andor almost stumbled then for something in the cadence of the man's speech took her back to a room of fire, to Alphonso speaking and dark walls closing around her.

"You wrote his message? The one that Bodi Rook carried."

Taidu Sefla smiled, “So our hope passed from hand to hand like a message in the blackest dark.”

Taidu Sefla smiled, “So our hope passed from hand to hand like a message in the blackest dark.”

The little priest whistled like a bird in signal that they must move again.”Come, we must hurry daughter."

Soon they passed further from the rivers edge into a narrower path between small rough huts each with a tiny plot of what looked like dry corn and a few squash. Woven grass mats curtained most for doors but some instinct told her most of the people within were gone. Father Campo and the cooking woman were lost to their sight now but Mrs. Andor's companion pointed ahead.

Around a bend in the waterway a low hill could be seen and beside it a small building with a rough wooden cross fixed to its peaked roof.

The wind now blew from the West and the cries of gulls and the smell of the sea was gone. As they reached a gap in the scrub one gust carried such a stench that Mrs. Andor found herself coughing.

A small child, bare except for a shift woven half of torn blue thread and half of grass stood watch at the doorway and ran toward them upon seeing Mrs. Andor's guide.

“Oncle Sefla! Sera ha portat un àngel amb ella!”

The woven curtain parted and from the dim interior stepped Mr. Timothy Samson Kay.

Made thoughtless by the strength of emotion Jen threw her arms around him.

The startled giant stood as immobile as a stone, seemingly fixed between horror and extreme discomfort.

“Mrs. Andor! Come, come. Please compose yourself.”

Later it would occur to her that not flinging her bodily from him at that moment was the highest compliment he would ever pay her.

Mastering herself quickly Jen released her fellow soldier and stepped back.
Father Campo emerged from behind Mr. Kay and she was able now to see people huddled within. Yet others stepped from behind the chapel building and from concealment in the low scrub of the slope above. There were fifty, perhaps more.

Mr. Kay loomed over her and his pale eyes met her own most directly. “Where is he?”

The Scotsman’s posture if not his tone displayed an anxiety kin to her own.

Before she could form an answer another young man, thin and shirtless, his legs and arms stained in darkest blue, came running up from the tall grass by the water’s edge.

“Pare!” The boy was nearly breathless, “Un home sense ulls camina al bosc cantant….Un vaixell es troba al petit torrent de pi…. El senyor Rook està a l’interior del vaixell.

“Oh,” Mr. Kay shook his pale head morosely, “This is not going according to plan at all.”

Chapter End Notes

Ah! Too many tiny bits of action. Also too much Catalan. Sorry!!!
Wanted to get this up because it's the holidays and Kay is of course an angel.

Sí sí. Bodi Rook va ser un dels més joves, = Yes, yes. Bodi Rook was one of the younger ones

Ewls àngels vindran no els veurué, però els veureu Sera! = The angels will come I will not see them, but you will see them Sera!

Pols= powder
Pols negre = black powder
índigo negre = black indigo
El molí de sucre = the Sugar Mill

La casa del senyor Galen Erso està a prop dels supervisors. No puc anar-hi ara = Mr. Galen Erso's house is near those of the overseers. I cannot go there now.

Vine al Pare Campo. Ell sabrà què fer. = Come to Father Campo. He will know what to do.

"Per alterar el vostre patró d'acció, us podria posar en perill i avisar als nostres enemics. Aneu a aquest lloc si és segur fer-ho i us seguiré. = By altering your pattern of action, I
could endanger you and warn our enemies. Go to this site if it is safe to do so and I will follow.

Sera, Sera. Que està passant? Per què corres? = Sera, Sera! What is happening? Why are you running?

On és el Pare sant? = Where is the Holy Father?

Va ser retirat pels guàrdies. Que està passant? = He was moved by the guards. What is happening?

(all Catalan)

da wuta wanda makamanta yake maza da duwatsu = a fire which consumes men and stones (Hausa)

Oncle Sefla! Sera ha portat un àngel amb ella = Uncle Sefla! Sera has brought an angel with her.

Pare! Un home sense ulls camina al bosc cantant. Un vaixell es troba al petit torrent de pi. El senyor Rook està a l'interior del vaixell. = Father! An eyeless man walks in the woods singing. A boat is in the small Pine Stream. Mr. Rook is inside the boat!

(Catalan)
The Evening of the Fifteenth of January

Chapter Summary

Lady Mary receives a letter posted some weeks prior.

In a room within the Governors Mansion at New Smyrna, William Tarkin and Oren Krennik each consider "Captain Fuller's" testimony and how it affects them. Three of the colonies soldiers find themselves guarding a mysterious savage.

Chapter Notes

Sorry. Bad men worry about their fates. This going to be little fragmented in tiny bits but I swear the pov's will come together.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

February 20, 1770
Tavin Park
London

The outer envelope in which the letter was sealed bore the writing

“...tis worth my Sufferings to gain so true a Knowledge…”

and thus lady Mary knew the cypher to decode it would come from “Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave” a slender volume published in 1688 by Mrs. Aphra Behn.

Dispatched sealed by my own hand January 12, 1770 from The Fort of Saint Mark by Cmdr. Rex Quitus Fetta
Mantazas Inlet

January 11, 1770

Madam, and Sirs;

I leave this message with haste in the care of Commander Fetta to be posted from St. Augustine in the event that I myself and other of my principal officers may be unable to report in due time. Summaries of Mr. Timothy Kay’s technical notes are also enclosed. More detailed outlines and originals of his reports are concealed by his usual cypher and secured in the care of our Bahamian agent.

The operation at New Smyrna has proved to be all that the Council feared and more. Freiherr Vader himself is present and I have determined that decisive action alone can prevent transport of the material directly to Europe.

We will destroy the plantation and its facilities along with any and all records and matter that might enable the weapon’s recreation. Toward that end we hope to reach Mosquito Inlet by land and in coordinated action also by Sea within six days.

Mr. Rook’s assessments concur with those of Commander Fetta’s operatives to give us some hope that Mr. Galen Erso’s heroic actions toward sabotage and corruption and jealousies within the ranks of our enemies have restricted practical and essential knowledge of the weapon’s manufacture solely to this location and his reports will no doubt follow but at present we can be absolutely certain of nothing beyond our own scope of action. You must advise our agents in Europe and the East as you can and be prepared to act swiftly.
As you yourself said Madam. We buy time and it may well be that we buy it at great cost. I pray for success but even should all trace of this venture be wiped from the earth there will be sequels. We can but strike the spark. It will be in the hands of others to keep the light burning.

If I am prevented by circumstance from further communication,

let it be recorded that five persons were recruited to our cause on my authority and administered the oath by me upon January 8 of this year 1770 at Nassau:

- **Darien Leonitus** age 20
- **Zacarius Leonitus** age 20
- **Han Solo** age 26
- **Luc Ceil-Marchuer** age 18
- **Khaeuri** age unknown

The service of the Rogues Venture and her officers and crew throughout this mission has been exemplary. I would single out the valor of **Mr. Bodi Rook**, present Midshipman and former **Captain Hera Syndalla, Mr. Baldwin Cor, Miss Jane Erso, Lt. Ruescott Melshi** and **Mr. Timothy Samson Kay** for most particular commendation.

It is in the hearts of such men and women alone that hope lies and I stand grateful to Providence for the privilege to serve beside them.

May God stand with us all.

**Captain Cassian Andor**

The Rogues Venture

_The other reports and accounts would doubtless reach England over days and weeks following to fill the details of events, but true in his word as given to a brother soldier of the shadows Rex Fetta dispatched the missive North and East by the swiftest sure method the second day after it's writing._

_Upon reading the letter Lady Mary Monmouth laid the single page out for the review of her officers and repaired to the private chapel where for the space of a few hours her thoughts and prayers could be utterly her own._
The Mansion House of Governor William Tarkin

New Smyrna Colony

East Florida

January 15, 1770

Young Captain Fuller inquired once more about his wounded man and Governor Tarkin made some show of dispatching one of the servants.

Again? Was this the paternal care of a guilt-stricken commander or some more personal attachment?

It hardly mattered. Any advantage of interviewing the man while he was still unsettled by trauma was clearly diminishing although Fuller had given away much of use already.

The “mapping expedition” was clearly a cover for espionage. Bartram’s name for instance, the weary officer had seemed surprised when asked to describe the scientist but halting spoken of a young man, fair-haired, tanned and damnably interested in the natives…“William” Bartram not John.

The Royal Botanist was a known quantity but clearly this was the son….rumored to have connections in Philadelphia. What was the significance of his presence? Franklin had long been held in check by blackmail but what if the Alliance had finally persuaded him? Was the “Acting Governor” Moultrie seeking to better Grant’s arrangement? Simple greed was enough to explain it but the British had a history of being unable to control their own people.
Vader was right. Krennik’s ambition had clearly ceased to to be a useful goad to productivity and become a cause for dangerous inattention to detail quite some time ago. Tarkin must set accounts right quickly.

Such of of the commercially valuable indigo as could be salvaged over the next day or two would be loaded onto the plantation’s own boats and shipped out to buffer expenses but New Smyrna had served her purpose. Any equipment necessary to recreate the experiment elsewhere must be removed. It might be even be necessary to retain the Chief Engineer unless it was determined whether his his notes and samples were sufficient but Director Krennik would be dispensed with as soon as the last barge was loaded. Tomorrow at the latest. Sooner if it could be arranged.

The stockpiles of the explosive deemed stable enough for transport would be loaded aboard the Devestator and moved to Jamaica for dispersal to Europe.

Further tests might even be made there and various issues relating to the Maroons, depending on their Master’s instructions.

Within weeks he might be able to present His Holiness the world-changing technical triumph he had first spoken of some twenty years ago as a veritable fait d’compli. The bright light of this triumph could be counted on to obliterate smaller errors. The potential of this weapon to alter the progression of their Empire in Europe and it’s expansion into Asia was incalculable.

Enough, he was decided.

“Thank you Captain Fuller,” Governor Tarkin stood and signaled his guard, “This gentlemen will accompany you to quarters prepared for you.”

The Indian should be inspected. If he proved a genuinely new or unique specimen they might arrange transport. A gift of tribute. *Their Masters's keen interest in the biological specimens of the New World was ongoing.* Otherwise he should be killed. The boy soldier was likely dead already and this fellow and the lesser officer ought best to be dispatched downstairs. This was valuable carpet.

“Sir,” the English officer interrupted as he rose, the habitual deference of his kind perhaps failing at last in his weariness. “I beg of you sir...We had but little opportunity in our urgency to question our prisoner ….He cursed us in what seemed to be several tongues including Creole and what sounded like Creek mixed with Spanish. If there is any chance that ….I was stationed on the Louisiana border and might be able to assist...”

Despite the foolish fears of Krennik’s men Governor William Tarkin cared little for anything the local savages might be up to so long as they did not inconvenience the evacuation of the manufactories and fields, indeed they might later prove a convenient scapegoat should one be necessary but something of the officer’s pathetic plea brought him up short with suspicion.

*Creole? French?*
It might signify nothing. The French were the satin-suited devil every Englishman was reared from the cradle to see behind any and all disasters but....if it was even remotely possible....

According to Tarkin’s last intelligence Lord Huxton was still in Paris, solid, brutal and a fool easily bested but one of his aides, Madame Solaine, was rumored to have been dispatched to New Orleans. Little more than a girl but she had previously expressed interest in the weapons research and their Honored Master had been known in the past to suddenly promote brilliant and ambitious young women.

He altered his hand signal to the guard.

Not yet.

The stubbornly loyal Captain Fuller might yet contain useful information.

The wind was rising outside. The winter sunset was but an hour or two away. He could wait until morning.

The Malthouse

Corporal Vellors had seen many savage Indians before in his service.

Though the assault on the western fields had been before his time of posting to this wretched place he knew some half-Christian bands lingered North and west inland and traded on the Duncan plantation to the South, but none he had ever seen or hear tell of looked remotely like this specimen. The fellow was near ten hands high and face, chest and arms down to his fingernails was marked with black curved shapes and lines that would have put any artistic schoolboy’s foolscap scribblings to shame. Legs like tree trunks he had and a neck as thick around as his head.

Were he loose Vellors had no doubt the heathen could crush any one of them like a wasps nest.

“Jesus! Do you think those chains will hold?” Sawbeck asked, only half in jest. “I would feel far better about the matter if we had leg-irons on this Gargantuan. Ought we to send back to the ship for some?”

The prisoner bared his teeth at them ....or perhaps he was smiling?...but made no further movement after being pushed at rifle point into the cooling cellar other than to stand muttering as he faced the back wall of the cistern-like stone room. His dark head fairly scraped the wooden ceiling for all it was raised to seven feet in order to accommodate the barrels.

Smith laughed nervously.
“Sit!” Reynolds ordered the savage, striking a blow with the butt of his rifle at the prisoner’s knee. The savage stumbled forward and turned.

The men by reflex jumped back and pointed their weapons but the decorated pagan only displayed square teeth again in that perilous grimace and rumbled,

“Ka mate koe rar I toku waewae.”

He seated himself upon the damp floor cross-legged and other than glaring at them remained still enough after.

“Calm yourself boys. I have killed many such savages up in Georgia,” Reynolds blustered, “Paint them or dress them as you will when shot they bled like regular men.”

“This big were they? Liar. Nay, and that’s not paint neither. The fellow is tattooed I tell you. I have seen such in the Marquesas.” Smith had served on a whaler in his boyhood and somehow found the means to compare everything to the Pacific from fruit to storms to the wretched stinkbugs.

“Well he’s a long swim from the East Indies then,” Reynolds laughed.

“Enough!” Vellors had no patience with banter at the best of times and less now. The Governor was in attendance and his grey-coats were watching. There could be no play or disorder. “Two will stay in here with him and two stand outside. Without other orders we switch in two hours and then gain two hours after that. Smith and Reynolds, park your asses on these barrels clam your jaws and keep your distance but sing out if he moves. Sawbeck, you and I will take the door.”

The men obeyed.

“What is this thing doing here?” Jack Sawbeck asked as they took position by the malthouse doorway. “Why should the Director not just shoot him and be done with it?”

“I wasn’t informed and neither would I expect to be,” Vellors snapped. “The Governor gives the orders now. Whether he’s wanted for sport, questioning or a bloody Maypole is none of your business. We keep him until we’re told otherwise, is that clear to you Private?”

The sunny morning had grown into a grey afternoon and now the wind had picked up the stink of the tanks as evening approached.

“Vellors,” Sawbeck said after a half hour or so. “They’re cutting down the fields and packing the blue and the black both. Do you think the wretched pit is being closed in at long last?”

The Corporal did not answer.

As if any of them would know anything until ten minutes after the order came.
“Ah. You’re right. I expect it’ll be like Campeche,” Sawbeck said dejectedly. “You can’t sell them so we’ll only know it’s finally time to go when the order comes to burn the huts with the Greeks inside ‘em.”

_Fool. This was ten times or more the venture the Honduran shore had been._

“No,” Vellors said, “At Campeche we didn’t have the alligators. We’ll know when they start packing up his Highness pretty chairs.”

_There’ll be no matches struck here until the very end. The damnable swamp is all but paved with black powder and I wouldn’t want to be the man that loads the last transport either._

____________________

The Mansion House

He had sent Erso to Mott for orders....

_He knows._

_He knows about Portugal and he knows you sent to Vader in a play against him._

With those offhand words Tarkin promised him sure death with humiliation as it’s prelude.

Fury gave Oren Krennik a nimbleness of mind that fear would have denied him.

There was still a way out.

Surely if Vader thought him utterly without merit he would not have heard him through but killed him where he stood.

_You gambled that Vader calculated as a simple military man, Oren, that vision and strength would impress him. What if you miscalculated in degree only?_

Vader was not merely a soldier but one whose limbs have been hacked away and whose gaze was forever narrowed by a mask.
A veritable creature of war whose definition of “power” perhaps no longer stretched to include even the boldest intrigue but paid tribute only to death in its most direct form. The law not of the battlefield so much as the dog pit.

*Perhaps he genuinely expects the older, more experienced mastiff to win but if a new dog emerged the bloody victor what did he truly care?*

*Vader sits in his black ship waiting.*

He did not doubt that two reports to His Eminence were already prepared, one crediting the discovery of the weapon to Tarkin and announcing it’s delivery, the other disparaging Tarkin’s management and suggesting Krennik’s rise. Frieherr Vader would send one and toss the other in the fire depending on who sailed out to meet him tomorrow and for the Dread Commander the matter would end there.

*I must get out of this room.*

Tarkin had three trained bodyguards here to Krennik’s two men…and even that disparity quickly worsened to one.

The Governors dispassionate smile upon sending Vale out to dispose of the sergeant was unconcealed.

His brain raced, seeking some means of escape.

Tarkin would likely not kill him here, unless Krennik made a mistake and forced his hand.

The Governor likely meant to make an example of him…*partly for his own vengeful cat-like enjoyment of seeing Krennik plead* … but also because dragging him forward to be shot or strangled before his remaining men at the proper moment would eliminate wasteful confusion as to the transfer of authority.

Tarkin meant to dissolve the plantation, to seize the works and stockpiles and move the operation in its entirety. It was possible that Erso would be kept alive for time as insurance against any losses in transit but Tarkin would surely transplant the manufactory to one of his own personally controlled bases. The most likely site would be the Carolinas where he had estates and proxies prepared.

The Pickney bitch had been no doubt been enlisted and her slaves could be commandeered to service. The costs in chattel and cash would of course be exorbitant but the widow would be made to bear most of them and sale of the indigo could conceal the worst until Tarkin placed the mighty weapon Krennik had slaved Vulcan-like to fashion into their Master’s hand, thus establishing himself so firmly on the hill of Krennik’s own achievement that he was unassailable.
Damn the cold-blooded bastard to Hell!

Tarkin moved forward in his fine chair and stood. The guards held their positions unflinchingly but the "servant" took the back to assist. The blood-spattered soldier stood as well. Ah, such military discipline...standing for his own execution.

There was a pistol concealed under the desk. Krennik loaded and primed it himself every day that he was in residence and unloaded it again every night. Such were the hazards of life on a plantation but there was no chance of reaching it from this side of the room and there was only one shot......

The English officer, unconscious of his utter disposability, was still speaking...something about the Indian prisoner.

Tarkin was hesitating. Why?

Krennick’s choice would have been to shoot the man as soon as it was clear this was not some plot of Moultrie’s and that the savages numbered in the dozens three days away instead of the hundreds an hour away.

“The...No, Captain. I assure you, your men are being well looked to, I will send my officer to check at once and advise you of their conditions. Mr. Patrick, take the Captain to the quarters prepared and provide him with some refreshment and a change of clothing. If you feel your strength is sufficient after a few hours rest Captain, we shall proceed to interrogate your prisoner.”

Yes. Here it was.

Tarkin’s strategy of knowing the puppet at the end of each string, including those he meant to cut, and every play left upon the board even as he prepared to turn it over might have made him powerful in Rome, Europe and her Provinces but it was weakness here. Poor ignorant Captain Fuller had given him the chance he needed.

Oren Krennik had only one puppet and years in this wilderness had focused his energies upon a single game board only.

“Director Krennik,” Tarkin said silkily. “Please do not think I have forgotten you. These emergencies must be dealt with but our business is of primary importance to me.”

“Of course your Excellency. If I may have leave to return to my offices the accounts ought to secured...”

“Of course, Director. My personal secretary Mr. Jeems will accompany you. The security of the indigo accounts is vital. You will find one of my men already there and prepared to assist in any way required. Indeed, they will work with you through the night if such is required.”

As obsequiously as he could manage Krennik backed out of the room even as the skilled Mr. Jeems and one of the other grey guards fell in close to each side of him.

His own man was sent to escort the young Englishman to his last rest. Krennik hoped the boy enjoyed it.

As for himself he had a pistol primed in his quarters as well and plans to make.
Galen has outlived his usefulness but the ideas of geniuses find their way onto paper the way roots find water….blindly.

There is only one place he could have hidden notes.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the ratcheting-tension-thing and the gratuitous Aphra Behn reference.

Ka mate koe rar I toku waewae. = You will die under my feet (Maori)
Risks Weighed and Chances Taken

Chapter Summary

In which some of the history of the Rogues Venture herself is related and Captain Rostock and Lt. Reuscott Melshi test the ship and their own resources to follow Captain Andor's last order to rendezvous at Mosquito Inlet and desperately engage the Devestator.

At nearly the same time Captain Andor himself contrives his escape from Tarkin's clutches.

Chapter Notes

Oh heavens! So many pieces in motion. Darkness gathers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

off the Coast of East Florida

moving north from Canveral shores

The Rogues Venture

near sunset January 15, 1770 - the early hours past midnight January 16, 1770

The brig had carried many names since she was first launched on the waters of the Thames. Daring, L’Damsel, Lady’s Fortune, l’Primera Estrella, the Dageraad and others as need arose but those few who raised a glass to her memory in decades to come would honor her as the Rogues Venture.

In common with perhaps a quarter of her crew upon that final voyage she was English-born, her keel having been laid of Baltic oak at the famed Woolrich Dockyards. War loomed in the concerns of Mr. William Pitt's government in that spring of 1759 and though the building of ships was a matter of some urgency one one brigantine remained at dry dock several months longer than her siblings. The gestation of a ship being both lengthier than that of most mortal creatures and more subject to bureaucratic entanglements and inefficiencies, delays sometimes occurred. By chance, if one's experience inclined one to believe in chance, more than the usual number clustered around one particular half-finished ship in that Kentish yard. The result being that by the time she was ready to
be fully fitted the whims of His Majesties Admiralty relating to the fashions of naval war had changed to favor different arrangements of cannon and quarter-decking, thus delaying her launch yet another extra year.

“Unlucky,” some shipwrights of the Woolwich dock began to cluck.

It was in this idle youthful state, planked but still unfinished that she first caught the eye of one who recruited for an army other than that of King George.

Ships being investments of time and treasure one would think that all must be as carefully counted as lambs but as is too often the fate of children in an unjust world one or two, here and there always seemed be lost track of, seeming to vanish by accident or neglect, if not exactly without notice at least without much question.

Sailing on God’s oceans was understood to be a most dangerous business.

And in time of war others, though never more than one from any a single nation or action lest the harvest draw notice, joined the service of the Alliance by more direct and colorful means.

Under British colors as the HMS Daring she entered brisk action at the Baie de Quiberon only to quickly be marked as boarded taken by the French.

Her officers were listed as ransomed piecemeal back over the following months but most of her common sailors it seemed remained to serve Louis rather than George.

It was true enough that she sailed out of that battle’s smoke under French flag but the cause did not lie in either boarding or capture.

Clouded in the fog-like haze and deafening boom of cannon fire her sails were dropped and reordered even as her officers used the selfsame cover to reverse their red coats to blue. The identical crew that sailed her into battle turned and sailed her out again under French flag as L’Damosel, her first actress-like change of name

The naval forces of Louis XV having lost the critical engagement her commanders slunk back to port to face a rash of court-martials and recriminations. Under such circumstances even the normally fastidious French were unlikely to carefully inspect the teeth of a gift horse.

Skilled work was done later at Rochefort to better fit her to Alliance standards and those English guns were cleverly re-set.

Those extra months of seasoning on the banks of the Thames had given her luck rather than taken it, Captain Serchil Rostock considered.

Born in Lelystad within sound of the great Batavia yards and at sea since the age of ten the old sailor felt a strength in the little brig from the moment his feet first touched her boards.

To his mind good bones make all the difference when a ship was forced to action in rough weather.
He hoped that Captain Andor had mentioned her by name when he sent his last secure dispatch from the Mantazas. She well deserved it.

“Sir,” Mr. Antilles said, uncovering his lantern only briefly to show his face as he approached in the dark. “Lt. Melshi requests you below decks.”

Captain Rostock recalled that Mr. Antilles had only last year married a high-spirited widow with a young son. “My father would be right pleased to hear me teaching a good English babe to sing songs about Scottish chiefs,” he had been heard proudly regaining Mr. Cor at dinner, “Norah rolls an eye but has shown great patience, all in all.”

Very good, Rostock thought. The infant mind holds tightly to songs. A snatch of ballad heard on an indulgent knee was often retained even into old age, persistent when sterner matters and instructions were faded by time.

The Alliance clandestinely pensioned the families of those who perished in her service but coin could not replace all losses and even the half-memory of paternal care might give sustenance to a fatherless boy as he grew.

“Thank you Wendell,” Captain Rostok said, “Let him know I will join him with good speed”

“Aye sir.”

"Mr. Dreis, you have the helm until Mr. Antilles returns. Hold steady. Keep an eye to the floats and to that wind sir. She boldly favored us in crossing the current but she is turning quarrelsome now. Legend tells of many a famous Spanish wreck on the shifting bars near Canaveral.Let us not, for the love of God, join them.

"Aye sir." The man looked suitably nervous.

In truth they had made better time than Rostock might ever have hoped.

Though Captain Cassian Andor was a keen tactician of cool nerve and possessed of enough experience to know that his orders demanded skilled seamanship he was not sailor enough to understand that they did in fact require near the nearly miraculous.

Or perhaps simply took for granted what the Alliance demanded of all who served her. Miracles.

Lt. Melshi, being charged with the task of executing Captain Andor’s orders, addressed Captain Rostock forthrightly.

“I require your honest assessment, sir. A plan of attack presents itself to me but it will require passing round our enemy by night and to drawing them out to meet us coming in on them from the South at dawn on the sixteenth. Can it be done sir?”
In Serchil Rostock’s experience miracles seldom arrived as fully wrapped gifts but were more often assembled by men and women from parts previously provided by the Divine.

The navigational skill required of them was keen but a fine species of chronometer enabled Alliance ships to calculate position far more accurately than the standard Naval almanacs of other vessels.

A clever fellow named Mr. John Harrison had been struggling still in 1769 to persuade the British Admiralty of the usefulness of his particular design, but some five years earlier the a gift of an early “unsuccessful” prototype to his patron Lord Verpix had been obtained by Lady Mary Monmouth, by flattery or coercion, and secretly copied. Admiral Akbar had ordered one hundred clandestinely placed aboard each of their flagships.

The plan of attack required dangerous proximity to the treacherous Florida shoreline until near to the last moment.

Captain Han Solo had shared many of his idiosyncratic but well-updated charts. For all his Dutch schoolboy handwriting young Solo’s smugglers eye had enabled extensive and detailed notes regarding depths of draw, landmarks and sight lines near every shore and passage of the Bahamian and Florida coasts.

The usual currents of these waters, a highway of Spanish trade for seven generations, worked against their purposes and the miscalculation of wind or weather by even a few hours might wreck all their plans and hopes.

The redoubtable Mr. Kay left behind almanac-like tables and predictive charts of the currents and winds hereabout. These had already proved so nearly supernatural in their prescience on the voyage that Captain Rostock was willing now to trust them blindly.

With such resources under his arm he begged a half hours grace of Lt. Melshi even as they raced south from the mouth of the Mantazas and went himself down amidships to consult one whose knowledge of these American waters he knew to have previously accomplished marvels of seamanship in all seasons.

Hera Syndalla in her sailors garb looked over these papers and maps where he laid them out on a barrelhead by lantern light.

“You know your ship best sir,” Syndalla said. “Can she jump the twist of the Florida current intact and will her masts hold to circle round against a wind likely to block her one way or drive her to shore the other.”

“She can,” Captain Serchil Rostock answered with confidence.

“Then with God’s help it may be done in time,” said the captain of the famed Espiritu.

Thus assured he returned to the foredeck and placidly confirmed to Lt. Ruescott Melshi that they
would be in position within the allotted hour of dawn on the sixteenth.

That selfsame wind pulled cold at Rostock's coat as he made his way back to the ladders. A light but steely rain had begun.

They were now committed to as dark a running as could safely be managed but the Captain needed no lantern for he knew the way along his ship by feel.

He glanced up but nothing could be seen above but shadowed moving shapes of white. Through the gusting breeze he could hear the snap of sail and rigging.

_Het was een eer om met je te dienen, brave dame_, he thought as he laid his hand upon the mast in passing.

The Rogues Venture would not survive the action that lay before them with the coming of dawn and it seemed unlikely to Serchil Rostock that he would either.

“Will wearing King George’s colors not buy us a moment of consideration.” Second Gunner Timkin asked.

“None so measurable as an eye blink once they perceive our gun ports open,” Lt. Melshi answered her. "Timing shall be all."

_Miss Erso's account of the encounter witnessed in her youth between the dreaded Devestator and the pirate ship Onderean had brought to him a gleam of inspiration and after time spent closeted with Mr. Cor and over such drawings and accounts as Captain Andor's black document case could provide, a bold and desperate plan was formed._

"When the best possible position is reached we shall on order open every door and fire a single round to her side," he heard Mr. Baldwin Cor explain to his crews, "in the order and according to method explained. Uniform action is absolutely vital. This accomplished every gunner of you save those ten assigned to the second round shall take up your arms and get double-quick above decks."

Arms having previously been shared out among the crew word of the details of the coming action
Mr. Melshi moved among the crew from one end of the ship to the other, to confirm with each section.

It seemed to him only right that he look as many as he could, man woman and child, in the eye to tell them what he asked of them.

“I am a trifle deaf sir,” the old cook, Mr. Decks, asked calmly, adjusting the arm-long blade that seemed to serve him as both kitchen knife and cutlass in his belt, “and have not seen action since Colachel off the Malabar Coast when you sir, if I may be pardoned where doubtless still at your blessed mothers teat. Am I to understand that we mean in the sunrise to lay ourselves as bait for this terrible sloop-of-war and harass her in some way, hopefully surviving long enough to buy Captain Andor time to complete some assault on the ground?”

“No, Mr. Decks. To be most brief, just after dawn our intention is to commence attack, close at ramming speed, board and destroy her.”

The ancient Kanata threw back her head…Melshi believed the Second Quartermaster to be a woman although it occurred to him that he had never had this specifically confirmed….and laughed, “Sasa unasema kwa busara!”

The old American smiled broadly. “Well and good,” he said, “That is a far sweeter proposition for an epitaph.”
January 15, 1770

The winter sun would not set for two or three hours more but the gathering clouds outside dimmed the hallway the guard led him through. Extravagant daytime candles were being brought into the grand parlor even as they left it.

The situation here was complex with maneuvers of the “Governor” and his men against the Director and his.

Therein lay a way out if he could find it.

*Like climbing the mast my love. Once chance to another.*

*No. Not now.* Pressing his fingers together in the gesture taught him in boyhood he closed off all thought of Jen, lest he falter here.

They were taking him upstairs.

*Not the original route planned, he knew.*

A lamp had been lit along a descending staircase at the back. Had his Louisiana bait not been taken up, Captain Fuller would have been taken down that way to some lower room on a pretext and killed somewhere conveniently distant from the finer furniture

*A very near thing.*

Shoulders now stooping ever so slightly with weariness, Captain Fuller allowed himself to be led to the second storey.

From the corner of his eye he glimpsed two grey-liveried African servant boys on the landing hurrying with stacks of linens.

*The red-coat ahead of him would be easy to manage. A feigned stumble and the razor in his boot would likely be enough.*

The well-dressed “footman” was the challenge. Near his height, well-trained and well-rested.

*I can take him but it will cost several minutes of hard-pressed labor. A noisy struggle here will bring disaster.*

*Numbers, Cassian.*
Tarkin had sent four guards in black to the docks. One had followed in attendance but had remained outside, likely stationed at the front door.

These were Vader’s men and presented by far the greatest danger.

The eight senior “overseers” Rook had warned them of were likely still in the fields or on the docks… Packing must be continuing, likely at a swifter pace if the weather looked to turn… no doubt there were others scattered

Eighteen men had surrounded them in the yard. Six in grey. Nine in red. Four reds at least would stay with Khaeuri. One was sent with Solo. Another dispatched here to hold up the facsimile of British order. The other three would likely be sent out to some task. Tarkin would not trust them fully.

Two grays guarded the slinking Director. One remained with Tarkin. One was here. Where were the last two?

He had faced worse.

The room would surely have a lock…of no consequence. Guard would be posted, but discreetly. Tarkin wanted Fuller alive and helpful for a few more hours.

The door opened on a bedroom well but sparsely furnished. A good bed with mattress just laid down. A straight-backed chair. Small standing chest. A framed palm-sized mirror hung from a cord on the wall. Net hangings had been hastily put up against the less-than-wholesome air and a chamber-table with a basin and pitcher on top. The water within not yet still from the servant’s placement only moments before.

The grey-coat bowed. “Clean clothes will be brought for you as soon as can be arranged Captain. His Excellency will send for you after you have had some hours of rest.”

*I think not sir, I have work to do before dawn.*

“My thanks, but I wish to see to my men first,” he told the footman. “Take me to where you have billeted Sergeant Faucon. I will rest better with some report on John’s care as well.”

*His sole comfort was that if Solo had jumped out a plate glass window there would surely have been outcry by now.*

“My instructions from His Excellency were that you should remain in the room prepared for you Captain,” the man said smoothly, “your soldier is quartered elsewhere.”

*Faucon* was supposed to be dead then, or at least dispatched to be so.

The single guard who led the Dutchman away was one of the plantation’s own men and likely ordered to dispose of the body afterward. How long until someone checked to see if the menial job were well-done and an alarm was raised?

Solo was surely enough to handle one brute, hopefully he was also clever enough to have cleaned up after himself this time.
Which way to push? Where was the next hand-hold?

*How likely was it that an officer of the Crown who had since Sunday last seen his commander murdered, narrowly escaped torture and death at savage hands, and marched near sleepless through snake and alligator-riddled swamps for three days and two nights, would give a damn for some waistcoated lackey?*

He stepped dangerously close to the supposed servant and in the tone of a man well past the breaking point of English deference snarled, “Your instructions may be hanged sir and you with them. I am an officer of the King and I will know the disposition of my own soldiers.”

*It was a risk. This assassin doubtless had a weapon concealed more ready to hand than Captain Andor’s own. Cool blue eyes regarded him appraisingly*

Of course, Captain,” the fellow stepped back and bowed slightly. “I will find out at once. You, Mr. …” he looked at the redcoat, “Mr. Cressy, please go enquire as to where the Captain’s man has been lodged.”

The Director's man looked puzzled for a moment.

“Captain Fuller” turned in seething frustration back into the room, giving the grey-coat time to whisper instruction in the less-than-quick-witted guard’s ear.

*There were a number of ways a combative but unknowing captive might be dealt with without revelation of his true situation as a prisoner.*

*A false report, a drugged draft, various delaying tactics.... How Tarkin’s man chose to go about it did not matter. What mattered was bettering the odds from two against one and getting to the wire threaded into the hem of his bloodstained waistcoat.*

The redcoat stalked away towards the back stairwell.

Mr. Franklin Cressy had been upstairs in the Mansion-house all of three times in his hellish seven-year sojourn at New Smyrna so the layout of the various rooms was not well known to him. The
bloody palace had only been completed the year before last and Director Krennik made use only of the first floors when he was in residence. The lower levels, which he had more if not vast experience with contained pantries, laundry and work rooms and a small buttery where food brought in from the outside kitchens could be served and carried upstairs.

Mechlin was supposed to have seen to the other English soldier down here and carried the body out to the barn but there was no sign of him or Beckett. No sign of the Greek wenches who were supposed to be bringing in the food either.

It didn’t seem right.

His Lordship’s man had said to wait down here a few minutes then bring up a mug of rum.

Doubtless he’d slip the ragged bloodyback something to shut him up about his cooling comrades until morning. There was enough to worry about with the news of savages on the boundaries. These Royal Army swains from St. Augustine brought nothing but trouble. Regular order had broken down.

Cressy could hear the wind picking up outside.

It was coming from the wrong way, which ought to have comforted him but did not.

Get a grip on yourself, Cressy. The ones from the North are chilly but they haven’t a patch on the ones from the South.

The tempests of Summer and Autumn hereabouts bested anything he had ever seen. The third year a wind in August blew for three days and laid trees sideways like pins. All the wretched Greek huts had blown away like leaves and so had nigh on half the Greeks. One of the Company men, dead from snakebite in the fourth year, was a planters bastard from Dominique and said an old nurse of his told how the pagan Indians there had never heard of God, but believed in the Devil and feared him greatly. When Spanish priests had asked them what they thought he looked like they pointed at the sea and said, “He comes in the the autumn and is called el Huracán. Wait long enough and you will see him.”

There’d been a hundred of them here once but now even with the new men brought in they were down to thirty-five and a handful of the bastard boatmen.

Where the hell was everybody?

At the warehouses and on the docks likely. Word was they were shipping out the whole crop to the Governor’s ship off shore. All of it, the black and the blue and maybe the stinking works too.

What would happen after, who knew? Whispers ran that they were shipping out at last. Please Jesus it was true. They’d be shipped back to Jamaica likely, but some said north. Anyplace that brought fresher prospect than half-starved Greeks in rags and grass was fine with him.

Mr. Cressy, having decided that sufficient time had passed, took a pewter cup from the cupboard,
filled it with rum from the barrel on the table then proceeded up stairs as if he were a bloody chambermaid.

Upon reaching the upstairs room he found the grey-liveried footman nowhere in sight and a straight-backed chair placed outside the closed door.

It being unlocked he peered cautiously inside.

The room was dim as no fire had been lit but the English officer’s jacket and waistcoat could be seen laid out on the chest in very soldierly fashion, torn and bloodied as they were, with mud-caked boots set neat beside. Through the net curtains of the bed Cressy could make out a man lying on his side, facing away from the door and covered to the shoulder with the linen sheet.

Soldier-boy had put himself to bed it seemed but where the hell was the Governor’s pet?

Damn these Carolina courtiers. They came marching in each time his Eminence was in residence and lorded it over everyone. He would not put it past the fellow to have sent him on some fools errand just for the sport of reprimanding him for leaving a prisoner unguarded.

Waiting for here for orders seemed by far the safest option so Mr. Cressy locked the door, took possession of the chair and treated himself to the rum.

If His Lordship’s man came back he’d say the soldier woke up and drank it.

In his brief survey of the room he had taken no notice of the absence of the wall mirror.
Het was een eer om met je te dienen, brave dame = It was an honor to serve with you, good lady. (Dutch)

Sasa unasema kwa busara! = Now you say wisely! (Swahili)

Historical Note: My knowledge of sailing is scant at best. Why am I doing this then? Because I am crazy is the short answer, but it is true that if you talk to people who know about such things they will admit that the fact that anybody ever sailed anywhere and survived prior to the early 1800's when ships began to routinely be fitted with functional chronometers and longitude could be reliably calculated is a freaking mystery. Read a marvelous book called "Longitude"....people did it but it must have involved incredible courage, self-delusion and a fair amount of ESP because there was almost no way to reliably figure out where anyone was going....and yet they did. Poor John Harrison was a real guy who designed no fewer than 4 working ships chronometers (one's at Greenwich Observatory still) between 1760-1778 trying to win a prize offered by the British Admiralty. H1 his pilot design worked but was rejected on a technicality. His second designs H2 and H3 seem to have disappeared, supposedly because he didn't submit them being obsessed with perfecting his design (Lady Mary, wink, wink) for H4. Also, the word Hurricane does indeed come from the name of the Carib personification of evil.

Other Historical Note: For reasons partly having to do with propping up Turnbull/Tarkin's cover story to his British investors and and partly to do with the fact that none of the New Smyrna plantation officers/overseers seemed to give a damn all of the captive workers (mostly Minorian with some Italian, Greek and Turkish thrown in) were almost always referred to by the English as "Greeks."
In which Mr. Galen Erso and Captain Han Solo escape the Mansion house. Captain Solo makes a promise. Khaeuri keeps one. The guards at the Malthouse are taken by surprise and Mr. Erso meets his son-in-law.

Everybody moving and great big bunches of 18th violence and inconvenient moments to meet your true love's dad.

Catalan....it sounds a little like Spanish but it is not....oh my no.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

the evening of January 15, 1770

Emerging from the dark and narrow wooden stairway into the lower pantry, Mr. Galen Erso could see that the normally unused room had lately been the site of much activity. Small kegs of rum and the brandy favored by the Governor were stacked along the near wall, while Chinese platters and serving bowls had been fetched out, unboxed, wiped clean and laid out on tables ready to receive whatever victuals were brought from the outdoor kitchens.

Presently however, by some gift of Fortune, all seemed blessedly quiet.
A lone Minorcan woman tended the small fire in the warming oven and she drew back in alarm but...*thank God*... did not scream at the sight of two bloodstained men emerging from the dim entryway used only by servants.

He held his finger to his lips.

“Senyor?” she gasped upon recognizing him.

*This was Rosala Faros. Her hair had been black when she stumbled ashore from the ship nine years ago but her face was lined now and her hair fully grey for all that she was not yet forty. Her eldest son had died in the grinding mills some three years past, pulled under when a stumble caught his foot between the rollers.*

Three other women came in from the drying room adjoining. Tarkin’s “visit” having been unannounced, doubtless they been conscripted in the morning to unpack and hurriedly air the stored bedding and linens needed upstairs.

The new arrivals looked equally startled. The youngest ran at once to Rosala and threw her arms about the older woman’s waist while another, Francisca Pellicer, tall and strong despite the scars criss-crossing her arms, stood forward as if to protect the others from danger.

It was she who demanded of him in a low but direct tone, “Ha arribat l’hora?”

*They knew. Sefla’s warning must have spread among them all.*

But before he could speak his companion did.

“Wait, wait,” the false Englishman said, “I do not quite understand... but... Señora,...Señora, esperar...debe quedarse aquí un poco más.”

The women only stared at him.

What was this man thinking? As if the sight of a stranger in a red coat did not hold terror enough for these women.

“Yes do not speak Spanish,” Galen Erso said, “not if you want them to trust you, they are Minorcan.”

“Verrek...” the young man hissed under his breath...*he must be Dutch... “if we pause to debate the sins and preferences of nations we are all right royally buggered sir...I promise you the devils upstairs will not.”*

“As they know all too well,” Galen Erso told him, “they will not betray us but they must run from this place. The little priest has promised to try to get as many away as possible.”

“Aye, aye and we have men set to lead them through,” the stranger said, “I do assure you, Mr. Rook waits even now by the north stream with some clergy of distant Cathay to aid the escapees.”

“Qui és aquest home?” Francisca asked.

The man took his arm, his tone somewhat desperate. “Sir, if an alarm is made too soon even your son-in law’s silver tongue and steel dagger may not be enough to save him.” *Galen Erso had averted his gaze from the soldiers as Tarkin cruelly “interviewed” them. Now he struggled to remember what this “Captain Fuller”...his Jen’s husband...had looked like... “I promise we have a sea attack*
pending with the dawn to buy us distraction and at least 17 stone of mad Scottish saboteur running through the works as we speak looking for ways to burn this plantation. Your fair daughter is hopefully free by now and on the move to search for you. Where will the dwarf take her?”

His Jen....a woman grown...here, even now..

“The chapel.” But of course the man could not know what that mean, so Galen Erso explained...
“Some portion of a mile north west from here, up from the river channel against a low forested bank.”

“It sounds well enough, but these ladies must give us some cover sir. An hour or two at worst to set our plans in motion and gather our men.”

Dear God. They have no reason to trust you boy, Galen Erso thought, and if they but knew even less to trust me.

Still, he tried.

“Rosala, Francisca..Han arribat els servidors encara per reunir els llençols?”

“No, ” she answered cautiously.

He begged them in Catalan to remain here in some semblance of calm, at least until that was done, lest their disappearance be noted and remarked on. Tarkin was notoriously ascetic in his habits with regards to meals and his men being fed might well send for no more than bread or brandy until morning. Once the liveried servants had passed through the women should set all things as if they had only stepped to the well or gone out to the kitchens and flee as quickly as possible for the chapel, stopping for nothing and staying wide away from sight of the docks and the canals.

The Minorcans as one looked to Francisca for the tall woman was by nature a leader.

“Blood...” she used her broken English and pointed at both men. “Where blood?”

They looked like murderers no doubt, or executioners.

“Could you kill a man?” Saul Gerrere had asked, unwrapping the spare pistol and placing it in his hand.

He remembered laughing bitterly as he lifted the cold, heavy thing. “How many do you think already lie dead because of me? And how many more might follow them?”

But the pirate had only shaken his head. “It is not the same, brother, I assure you. Not all men can so be honest for that I see is your nature. With your own hands could you do it? For yourself or others, “ he glanced to the other side of the darkened carriage where Lara lay wrapped in a wool blanket on the un-padded seat, asleep at last with Jen in her arms, “for them?”

I answered that I was able, but for all I meant the words they were then but that...words.

Now at least I know for certain.
Mr. Galen Erso glanced back at the stairway. “Guàrdia. Mr. Vale. Ha arribat el moment, Francisca,” he told her.

The woman nodded but looked past him, still not content.

“Your mother has life?” she asked the stranger.

The man blinked in astonishment at the question and it came to Galen Erso that for all his swagger the fellow looked very young.

“No,” came his answer. “She lies in a churchyard on the far side of the world. Of a quiet night sometimes I think I can hear her telling St. Peter himself to stop slouching and find an honest trade.”

Francisca seemed to consider carefully, likely understanding the sorrowful tone and steady gaze of the speaker better than his meaning.

“On her grave you say…..” she laid her hand over the thin sacking of her smock and tapped her chest to indicate the placement of her heart. She asked for an oath…”you come to help us?

“Ja.” The man turned to him, “How do I tell her yes, on the grave of my mother and my father that I will do my best to aid them.”

Galen Erso translated as best he could.

The women must have believed them.

“Come, come…” Francisca said then as she and the others led them into the drying room. A brazier heated several irons and tubs of starch water and river water for rinsing sat on the stone floor. Among the tall racks of sheets were lidded willow hampers. The young woman, Rosala’s daughter, opened one and within he saw folded shirts, neck stocks and grey uniform coats. Some of Tarkin’s men and others from whatever ship waited offshore had sent mending and pressing to be done while fresh water and labor was briefly convenient.

Both men splashed their hands and faces in the brackish water and sorted quickly through the offerings. As they were both tall it was not easy to find something that fit and no time could be spared for adjustments. Mr. Galen Erso contented himself with a clean shirt and half buttoned vest. He was at least a known quantity if seen hereabouts and his state of undress could be excused in various ways if need arose. They found a grey coat and neck stock for the soldier to at least cover his stained shirt. In poor light at a distance it might deceive.

“What is your name sir?” Galen Erso asked.

“Captain Han Solo,” the young man said, “lately a free son of the sea, currently affianced to the angels of the Alliance, at your service sir.”

One of the women peered outside, nearly losing her grip on the door as the wind pulled at it. Rain had not yet begun but the damp cool air promised that it soon would. Dry palm and oak leaves were flung on the gusts.

“Aneu! Aneu!” Francisca said, holding the door open. Captain Solo took the woman’s scarred and roughened hand in his own, bowed and kissed it as if she were a great lady bidding him farewell. “Perdona una mala lengua. Estoy a tu servicio. Dios te guarde valiente dama.”
Francisca Pellicer shook her head, “Vés, ximple. Assumeixi el seu comerç honesta i no ens fracassi.”

The way seeming clear they moved quickly from the back of the house toward the shelter of the pigeon shed. The half-door of the pantry quickly closed behind them and the light of it vanished.

“First we must free my Mate from this malthouse, by force or subterfuge,” the young man said, as they paused in the low building’s shadow. “Then get he and you to this chapel where we may hope your daughter waits. God willing our Commander, currently upstairs with Governor Satan, will have enough time to extricate himself. If not I shall either return to undertake his rescue or assist in the lighting of matches....whichever the lady orders.”

Before he could question this further Captain Han Solo thrust out a hand and pressed Mr. Erso back against the shadow of the wall. One of the guards in black, hatted, with gleaming musket well shouldered and coat wrapped against the wind walked around the near side of the mansion and back toward the front, as if on patrol.

They had missed him by only a moment.

Who were these guards? Mr. Galen Erso had never seen them before, not even in Jamaica if he could trust his own memory so far. Surely he had not imagined the fear in Krennick’s eye has he passed the one stationed at the mansion house door? Tarkin had dispatched them with a cool nod but his own people seemed to give them wide berth.

When the guard had passed like the angel of death he pulled Captain Solo’s new coat sleeve and pointed to the next convenient cover, a wood shed, near behind the large bread ovens. The Malthouse lay just beyond this and the two men made for it at a brisk walk.

THE MALTHOUSE

As arranged they traded watch upon the passage of the second hour...at least it seemed so by Vellor's estimation.

At any rate the wind had cooled dramatically and a mist of rain was making a trial at beginning so an indoors watch at guard, even one proximate to a giant savage gained in appeal compared with one standing outside the Malthouse door in the gloom and wet.
Sawbeck, as he turned up his collar and stepped outside with Reynolds, reported that the prisoner hadn’t so much as twitched a decorated muscle from his contemplative seat facing the wall.

A long chilly but quiet night with a colorful execution in the morning seemed the best that could be hoped for.

Indeed, Vellors had just begun to think longingly of rum when he heard the sound of voices outside the door.

A thump struck the wooden door from the outside, quickly followed by a brisk knock and a familiar if unexpected voice.

“This is Chief Engineer Mr. Galen Erso, open the door, we need to see the prisoner at once.”

Erso? What the devil would would the stinking Ghost be needing with the Indian?

The Malthouse key scraped loudly in the lock and the door opened outward to reveal the Engineer and a shadowy grey coat behind him.

Sawbeck stood back at attention but as Mr. Galen Erso entered Vellors perceived that the grey-liveried man had a musket trained, fully cocked and pointed at him.

“Stand back a bit boys,” the fellow said steadily, his rough cheek and pigtail would have shown him false even if his low accent had not, “Let us keep our wits about us now.”

A flash of lightening showed outside the door’s frame and Vellors could see that the man’s coat was spotted with rain.

It’s a bluff.

The damn thing wouldn’t fire even if he had it primed.

Jack Sawback gave a shout but a great roll of thunder outside swallowed it.

Mr. Erso leaped toward the private as if meaning to tackle him but before he could do so the savage, who had somehow swiftly risen from the ground, flung his chains over Sawbeck’s head.

Vellors made a move for the door in the melee. The imposter swung the musket barrel hard at him but the Corporal dodged the blow by dropping low beneath and shouldered the man to the ground. He made the outside and scrambled to his feet even as his adversary grabbed for his leg.

At the instant Vellors tried to shout an alarm something seemed to strike him briskly in the neck.

No sound would come out.

He reached for his throat by reflex but even when his numbing fingers felt the protruding handle of the knife he was unable to comprehend what it was or how it had gotten there.
Corporal Phillip Vellors fell dead to the ground without ever seeing the man who had struck him standing just outside in a stolen grey coat already damp with rain.

Khaeuri was unnecessarily manhandling the corpse of the guard.

Captain Andor raised an eyebrow as if sympathetic to the impulse but in urgent need of better military order.

“Solo...?” the Spaniard inquired, no doubt conscious that he had rubbed Khaeuri the wrong way back on the riverbank and being unwilling to repeat the interplay.

Han Solo laid a hand on his friends mighty arm.

“Khaeuri? We must secure things here...Are you alright, brother? Did they hurt you?”

“Nama,” his friend said with his normal fierce gravity, “I hanga e ahau he kupu whakaari mo ratou,” but calmed himself thereafter.

Poor Khaeuri. This theatrical had demanded much of the honest heathen.

The Engineer seemed for all his pallor a sturdy old fellow and helped them drag three of the bodies back inside to strip them of daggers, powder and shot and to conceal them behind the empty tubs.

The storm was a strange one. Rain came in gusts and then vanished. The wind blew hard from one direction then shifted, as if two fronts of weather contended. Such squalls in the summer demanded a flight to deep water or a safe harbor.

Solo shivered a little. They would find neither here.

At Captain Andor’s direction the extra red-coated corpse was propped on a box outside the Malthouse door, buttoned to a rake pole in order keep him upright and hopefully give the impression from a distance that all was still manned here.

Finished with this the Spaniard tossed Solo the keys to Khaeuri’s irons.
It seemed the wrong moment to point out to Mr. Erso that his son-in-law was quite a clever fellow.

“The people are gathering at some rustic chapel up the bank of the Northern branch,” Solo reported as he worked to free his Mate. “This gentleman...Mr. Erso... he could not escape the feeling that he ought to be making familial introductions...” says the people have been warned and prepared to gather there by the priest. It is likely Mrs. Andor will be there as well.”

The captain nodded, drawing breath as if seized with a moment of pain but quickly moving past it. “Sir,” Andor inquired directly of Mr. Galen Erso, “they are loading large numbers of square crates onto the barges directly from warehouses on the wharves. Are there other depots of the material?”

“Yes, but they have been have been emptied now for this final transport,” The older man said. “What remains in the tanks is unfixed and thus little more dangerous than ordinary nitrates..”

*Sweat Jesu.. does he mean no more likely to explode than black powder? As if great tubs of gunpowder were hardly worth mentioning.

Kneeling, Captain Andor placed one of the lanterns on the ground beside him and scraped the dirt smooth with his hand.

“Can you draw me a map sir?” He held out handed a splinter of wood from one of the crates. “We must set fire to each. Nothing can remain of this operation.”

Erso knelt as well,“I will show you the placements but you need not reach each and every one. I have prepared an unseen fuse through all of the necessary canals. An ignition at one of two key points will quickly spread through the manufactory.”

The captain regarded the older man as if only now understanding some matter that had puzzled him. “Is this what you mean when you said you had laid a trap...wrote that fire must be set in the canals.”

“You saw our message?” Mr. Galen Erso did not smile but tired blue eyes lit keenly, as if with pride. "You were with Commander Saul Gerrere?”

Captain Andor’s expression changed in some manner Solo could not quite factor. It occurred to him that cold, hot, sure, unsure, disguised or...presumably...true he had never before seen the fellow look so much at a loss for words.

“No,” the captain said, “I...met the Lion only on one occasion. My wife...your daughter...described that portion of your message to me.”

Galen Erso laid aside the bit of wood then and took his son-in-law’s hand most earnestly.

“Jane...my Jen,” his voice broke as it had in the parlor of that grand palace up the path, “How did you meet my Jen? How long have you been married?”

Andor looked up at Solo as if pleading somehow for assistance.

*Dear God man, I can’t help you. I have only met a woman’s father once and firearms were involved. I had to jump from a second story.*

Doing credit to his training as an agent of clandestine armies Captain Andor managed to fix his features calmly and answer, “We met in London. Our wedding was....three days ago.”

*Two, midnight is still some hours off,* Solo considered correcting him but thought better of it.
If Mr. Galen Erso questioned either of these answers he gave no sign.

“Please...what is your name, my son?”

“Cassian Andor, sir.”

"She will hardly know me, or I her....Mr. Andor...." the man faltered.. "What is she like?"

"Sin miedo," came the answer, quicker than Solo would have expected of such a careful angel. Then as if catching a slip the captain corrected himself to no less heartfelt English, "Utterly fearless, strong, beautiful."

The older man bowed his head, "Like her mother then, in every way."

“Me haere matou,” Khaeuri said. “He maha nga tinana mate he kino kino.”

It was not the kind of logic you could argue with.

Andor stood, leaving the lantern on the ground by the door and laying a hand on his father-in-laws shoulder steered him out the door into the rain.

The muskets were useless encumbrance at present but Captain Andor had procured himself a pistol from the Corporal’s coat and Solo a decent short sword from the belt of another. The lights of the mansion house burned steady behind them and despite the intermittent rain and gathering gloom the sound of men and the crunch and creak of loading crates continued down by the water’s edge.

Lanterns bounced and flickered on the transport boats that continued from there out onto the now choppy waters of the Inlet.

Galen Erso, needing no lamp it seemed, led them back around some sheds and along one of the small canals.

Chapter End Notes

Qui és aquest home? = Who is this man?

Han arribat els f death encara per reunir els llençols? = Have the servants come to get the bed linens?
Per què esteu aquí senyor? = Why are you here sir?

Ha arribat el hora? = Has the hour come? (Catalan)

Señora,…Señora, t …debe quedarse aquí un poco más. = Madam, ... Madam, wait ... you should stay here a little longer. (Spanish)

Guàrdia. Sr. Vale. Ha arribat el moment = A guard. Mr. Vale. The time has come.

Aneu!= Go!
(Catalan)

Forgive a bad language. I am at your service. God keep you brave lady. (Spanish)

Vés, ximple. Assumeixi el seu comerç honesta i no ens fracassi = Go, fool. Take up
your honest trade and do not fail us. (Catalan)

Nama. I hanga e ahau he kupu whakaari mo ratou. = No. I made them a promise.
(Maori)

Sin miedo = Without fear (Spanish)
Me haere matou. He maha nga tinana mate he kino kino = We should go. Corpses are
bad luck. (Maori)
Chapter Summary

In which three Minorcan children are sent by Father Campo to look for a sign of hope and find one. Some of the captive workers of New Smyrna gather in the chapel and prepare for a desperate flight. Mrs. Andor and Mr. Kay consider their next actions.

Chapter Notes

Kay and Jyn bonding.
Indigo.
Rain,

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

the evening of January 15, 1770

THE PINE CREEK

The children heard the blind man before they saw him.

Roman Solano had led his younger brother Felipe and Anita Rogez very carefully up from the river
along the edge of the forest.

Father Campo had chosen the three because their youth might allay suspicion if they were discovered by guards or overseers venturing near to the Northern boundaries of the plantation.

_After the work in the fields was done the children of the workers were allowed out to gather grass, reeds and brush for weaving._

_The task was a dangerous one for sunset was the time when the tigers were known to prowl and the great crocodiles were most active near the water but the matter that grew along the banks of the little rivers and streams was essential not only for baskets but a growing share of the people’s coverings, clothing, and bedding, even the walls of the cabins themselves._

In the mid-winter the waters inland would sometimes lower dramatically and many of the smaller streams dry up altogether but hard rains two nights past had greatly freshened all the creeks here. Even so Roman was surprised to see the waters near to the depth common after the heavy rains of spring and autumn and still rising almost as they watched.

_“Ves amb compte! Mireu el terra!”_ he warned the others sternly.

_Sudden floods often drove the serpents from their hiding places._

Once ‘Nita would have made some remark about how he should not treat her like a baby or simply stick out her tongue but now she nodded quietly and took Felipe’s hand. In such a place he had not expected noisy argument but this was so unlike her, reckless, stubborn Anita. That she would look at him with such deference almost made him more afraid. Then he looked down down at his legs and feet stained with blue and remembered. For a moment on these familiar banks, mimicking this childhood task, he had almost forgotten. She looked at him as if she and his brother were children and he a man for so he was.

The stain of indigo was the mark of adulthood at New Smyrna as well as the touch of death.

_Only a few weeks before he had been taken from the fields and set to work as a “presser” in the tanks._

_It was the task of the strong and tall women to stir the rotting indigo in each of the upper stone tanks on a set schedule. Thereafter when Mr. Galen Erso or another overseer judged any batch to be ready, whether by its seething or some texture of the mud itself, a wooden door at the end would be lifted and the stinking liquid drained out into a lower vat below. Roman and some of the other larger boys would be put into the tank as it drained with boards tied to their feet to press the decayed matter down and wring every drop of liquid from it. After each crossing of the tank they would be handed heavier stone weights to carry for the next pass, going back and forth until all but a trickle had been pressed out. It was hot work. Part of the work of the stirrers was to keep the stuff from boiling with the heat of its own corruption, for that would spoil the batch if allowed too soon. The women tied scarves around the faces of the boys to protect their streaming eyes from the acrid fumes and so they walked the circuit of the stone square blindfolded. Crossing through the center in the first passes was the most dangerous part since a slip might cause one to fall and be choked by the poisonous mess._
Felipe asked what it was they were to watch for and Roman did not know how to answer.

The holy priest had only blessed several parties of the children and instructed them to creep North and West as far as could safely be done, make note of anything that seemed out of place and return to the chapel in good time before sunset.

“Veurem els salvatges?” his young brother asked wide-eyed.

Nothing was as it usually was. The flag that signaled the Governors return had been raised in the “town” center and the cooks and house servers called in from the field to attend. At the same time other crews were ordered to the fields to harvest even though the ground was not dry. His father and the other men were pulled from the barns and grinders and sent to the warehouse docks to load barges in double shifts.

The black and the blue indigo alike were being transported.

Old Sefla and Juan Cera had moved here and there from house to house the night before, whispering with the adults.

In the morning a single overseer walked past the tanks shouting the orders but not long after...before the first raking was even finished...horns sounded a cry Roman did not remember ever hearing before. The lone guard barked at them to do their work and ran out with his musket toward the canal and up toward the field road.

When he was gone a little while the four women paused their raking, waited. “Indis?” he heard Dolores Pellicer whisper, but the others told her to be quiet. After more time one of the women, Maria Cassera as it turned out, reached over and grasped his arm. “Roman, sortiu d'allà,” she said softly. The other women at the same time pulled Juan Martin and Andros Costa to the sides and bid them to stop as well. Callused and blue-scarred hands reached in and untied the boys feet from the fouled boards then helped guide them over and out. When María untied the rag from his face Roman blinked in the daylight. The others were kneeling on the ground nearby.

“Correr.” “Vés a casa teva.” “Trobeu la vostra mare” “Córrer cap a la capella.” He heard the women saying and first Juan then Andros staggered to their feet and fled.

Roman Solano’s mother had gone to God three years before along with the baby she had carried nearly to term. They were buried together on the far side of the hill above the chapel after the field work was done. He had helped his father dig the grave while Father Campo held the lantern.

“Maria? Que està passant?” he asked, terrified. Although he knew. He had heard the people whispering. Before his father left for the grinding mill at dawn each day for the last three he had told
him that if L’última trucada came he must not wait for him but go.

The last hour, Papa said but not what that might mean or how he would know.

The image of the gallows they had hung Sr. Forni and the other men from was sharp in his mind. His father’s cough was worse. Anita lived with them now and Felipe was only eight. If he made a mistake…if the batch was ruined they would all be….

“Coratge, fill meu,” the woman lifted him to his feet and kissed his forehead as his mother used to do, as if he were not a man but still a boy.“Déu va amb tu. Intenta viure com un bon home i estar lliure d’aquest lloc. porteu el vostre germà i vagi.”

Roman ran then to his fathers cabin to find his brother and foster sister already there. Anita had made ready a basket. Inside was her dead mother’s scrap blanket, some bread and green oranges. Senora Usina was there too with Tomas and told them all to follow the path behind the Greek cabins to the chapel and stay out of sight. As they climbed up the sandy slope Juan Cera limped from empty house to empty house along the row, closing some curtains, half opening others, adding wood to some of the small cook fires inside and propping tools with straw hats on them just inside a few doorways, so that to a quick glance from the path in the dim light of the gathering clouds it might look as if the people were still there.

"Yes, but there were worse things than savages," Roman thought, but he only patted his brother’s head and did what he thought a man should do, repeat Father Campo’s promise that God would protect them.

The wind had risen and now gusted hard in the trees above them but even so they all heard the rush of water ahead.

The flat stream bed was full of water, up and past the knees of the nearer trees. The ground was damp beneath their feet.

“Fins on hem anat?” Anita asked finally admitting she was afraid and Roman felt suddenly unsure himself.

None of the children had ever gone further than the near bank of the Pi and that stream for most of the year ended back a mile or further from the bank of the Mosquito River at their backs.

Even two miles from where they stood now the creek was for most of the year an arms length across with the mud and pebbles of the bottom so shallow a fish or frog could be grabbed with bare hands.

There had been other times though, in seasons of great storms of rain when it swelled and became
deep and dangerous. Only months ago in the great storms of November it had flooded far past the plantation, tearing loose great rafts of the mangle and pushing all the way through to join the River for a few days.

Through gaps in the trees above Roman could see that the sky had turned dark with clouds and that they rolled fast toward the sea almost as fast as the water had before the feast of San Catarina. It was not raining here but it was raining somewhere upstream.

*We should go back*, he thought, *we should go back now.*

It was then that the children heard the man singing. It not in any language any of them understood, being neither Catalan nor Greek nor the English of the guards, but none of them doubted that it was a song, a cheerful one no less.

“Qīng qīng ǎi pèi, yōu yōu wǒ sǐ.
Zòng wǒ bù wàng , zhù bù lái?”

A strange person walked bare-headed tapping before himself with a long thin branch as he stepped nimbly between the spiked roots. If he was an Indian he at least dressed as a European in blue patched jacket and trousers along with a red scarf and his black hair was cropped very short. A tilt of his head made it seem as if he were listening even as he smiled and sang and the way he reached forward with the stick told Roman that something was amiss with the man, even before his face turned toward them and it could be seen that his eyes were clouded as white as bleached bone.

On instinct he pushed Anita behind the nearest tree trunk and pulled Felipe behind him.

“Brave children! Hello…Hola…Amic…little ones we come to help you. Min fovásai.”

The man called out in a garble of languages.

“Mira!” Anita called out, dodging from the other side of the tree’s shelter before he could reach to pull her back, pointing through the trees.

There, ahead of them, moving through the branches, carried on the swelling stream was very a small boat with a white sail. By the mast stood a thin man that Roman recognized from the days when he helped to roll the coils of rope on the docks. It was Mr. Bodi Rook, the pilot.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
The darkness of approaching night was hastened by the rain clouds and the wind blew colder.

_These people are so poorly dressed_, she thought and remembered the squares of blanket and canvas that Mr. Bodi Rook had laid out.

_How will they manage a march through such weather all the way to the Falcon?_

Half of them wore skirts or capes of rag woven with straw but they huddled together for warmth in the little wooden church and waited quietly in the poor light.

Mrs. Andor saw the effect of the cold rain on others but she did not feel it herself. It seemed a wonder to her that the drops did not steam off her skin so much did she feel on fire.

It took all the strength she could marshall not to run back toward the mansion house where every hope she possessed lay.

_Thank God for Kay._

For a person so unconscious of the feelings of others he seemed keenly aware of her torment and his measured words calmed her heart to a degree nothing else likely could have. “He will find means to escape. He always does.”

The Hausa man, Taidu Sefla, told them quickly of how matters lay on the plantation. The layout of the roads and works. The preparations he and her father had made since the receipt..._here her eyes stung with tears unshed...of her letter._

Her father had laid traps, by means of some sort of fuse. Fire surely lit near a place called The Sugar Mill would spread unstoppably down the South bank of the Main Canal and ignite charges concealed near the warehouses.

_Fuses of oil were hardly unknown to her but..._

“Surely the rain would render such...” she began.

“No,” Mr. Kay cut her off, with something like a a shiver although his expression as ever remained unchanged. “Your father has clearly rendered more than one type of remarkably insoluble volatile
compound here. Water may limit the spread of ancillary fire but will not forestall explosion.”

“The fuses are set. The fire must be lit before morning,” Mr. Sefla said. “Those who can escape must do so tonight.”

_Oh Papa, what have you done?_

“For all the suffering it may cause,” the little priest said, “From God this storm comes.”

He called out to the people to ready themselves.

Jen looked at those sheltered in the dim chapel. A single glass lamp burned over the little table that served as an altar, but the only faces she could see belonged to women, children and a few older men.

_This was a vast camp of labor, these could not be nearly all, surely._

“Where are the others? Where are the men?”

“Those too infirm to walk far remain in their homes. Some still in the fields will return soon and most know to come here.” Mr. Taidu Sefla said quietly. “But neither your prayers or ours anticipated the Governor’s return. He has given orders that all the prepared indigo be moved to a ship offshore with great speed and thrice the regular number of the men were pressed to pack and move the crates and load the barges and boats.”

They spoke in English, which most of the captive workers knew little of but Jen Andor saw some of those nearest by in the fading light bow their heads. A young girl crossed herself and a woman near the wall wiped tears from her eyes, pressing the child in her arms more tightly. These people understood enough.

They knew that that some husbands and sons, mothers and fathers would not escape, accepted it as the price of giving their children hope.

_You know where to go, brave girl. Wait until I come, it will not be long._

The shallop-boat could carry no more than a handful, the Falcon only a few more. Dangerous weather or no these people must move out and find shelter as far from this place as possible.

She stood in the doorway of the rustic church and felt the wind

“Priest,” she said, “Can this boy lead the people back the way he came? He must find Mr. Imway….the blind man he saw along the banks of the Pi.”

Solo and Luc said the Falcon had reached through to the Halifax or the Mosquito in high water. If the streams had risen enough to bring the shallop so near there was a chance to move the people North a quicker way than through the forests.

_If there was any person in Creation capable of leading people safely in the dark it was Chirrut Imway._

“How far out is this ship? How many loads have they already taken?” she heard Kay questioning Sefla in English and other people in several languages,

Father Campo approached the carved cabinet box set on the table and bowing and crossing himself
opened it. Inside Jen saw a cup and plate….no doubt the vessels of his church…but to her great surprise also a small bright-bladed sword within. This he took and used to cut open the woven screen that formed the back wall of his church.

*Mrs. Andor had taken a favorable view of the little priest when he struck the guard in the head with the poker but now she felt more charitable towards him than to any churchman of her previous acquaintance.*

He ordered Sefla to lead the people out this “back door” through the rain.

“Do not be foolish grandfather of grandfathers,” Sefla said, “It will be full night soon. This storm comes fast and the fire will come after. Go with these children. I will leave word that any who can still run should go North to catch up with you as they can.”

“I fear very little,” the priest said with a laugh, “Night, storm and fire least of all.”

At that moment the ancient man’s head turned and he held up a withered hand in warning. They all drew back into the crowded shadows, even Mr. Kay.

Lightning flashed to reveal people, four women to judge by their skirts, holding the hands of two small African boys in rain-soaked grey velvet livery. All were running quickly up the mud-soaked path.

“Francisca,” one of the women within the chapel cried and many of the Minorcans reached forward to pull the newcomers inside the cramped shelter.

Once under that rough cover all of the six wiped the water from their eyes to stare at Mrs. Andor with astonishment, then drew back from the looming Mr. Kay with understandable alarm

One of them, a tall and fierce looking woman whose long black hair streamed with rain, gasped “Esteu amb el senyor Galen Erso? Tu ets el seu poble?”

“Sí. On és ell?” the muddy and leaf-strewn giant answered.

The women spoke rapidly to the priest and Kay, pointing back the way they had come. The liveried boys only looked terrified and held each other’s hands and the ragged skirt of the youngest woman.

“Són només fills. No podríem deixar-los,” the tall woman said half-defiantly, and the others nodded.

Sefla knelt to speak to the children in English, “Little brothers, this place will burn and these wicked men with it. I know you are afraid but can you run with us?”

“Yes,” said the taller of the boys.

Mr. Kay bent to speak to her, “Your father and Captain Han Solo have escaped. It is likely they will attempt to free Mr. Khaeuri and come here. These women say the Governor ordered a room prepared for a man upstairs. I take this as evidence that Captain Andor has retained his liberty through subterfuge and will doubtless make his way out soon if he has not already.”

*She had not realized how tightly her free hand had been pressed around the wooden charm within*
her borrowed shirt until she released it and felt sensation return to her fingers.

“You know the way of my husband’s mind in such matters, dear Mr. Kay, far better than I likely ever will. How will he proceed?”

Her pale comrade considered.

“Captain Andor’s priorities under the conditions you and these other persons describe would be to wrest your father out of the Enemy’s control, ascertain with his aid the essential points of sabotage necessary to destroy the manufacture of the weapon and arrest the removal of the functionally explosive substances and all records of their potential recreation. His methods would necessarily require improvisation, but I think…I think…” Mr. Kay tilted his head in birdlike concentration, “Your father, being doubtless enlightened by Captain Solo as to your role as the injured soldier, will expect his ally the Roman Catholic priest to have brought you to relative safety here. Assuming that Captain Andor is able to express his orders to Captain Solo and further assuming that Captain Solo and possibly Khaeuri will obey them…”

“Mr. Kay, please…”

“He will ultimately order Solo and his mate to bring your father here to you and pass instructions through him that you yourself should take him and the assembled captives to reconnoiter with Mr. Rook. Captain Solo and Khaeuri then being on this side of the settlement he would likely assign them to disrupt the readying of the shore-to-ship transfer if the inclement weather and darkness have not already done so. If my location and status of mission continues unknown to him he will himself attempt to systematically locate and destroy any records, notes, models, or technically knowledgable persons that your father has apprised him of but his primary goal will be determining the attack position optimal to the destruction of the remaining supplies and manufactory by ignition of your Father’s “trap.”

Images of falling stone, of a vast hillside falling into the sea like crumbled bread, of her Commander turning away in flames, came to her mind as did her husband’s oath to his officers on the Rogue, “No thimbleful of this may leave shore. Whatever we must do to prevent it we are sworn to do.”

He will do it himself.

The Rogue’s Venture would attack at dawn, in just a little more than twelve hours, for surely the sun was setting.

He will give us as much time as he can but he will light that bomb with his own hand.

“Is he fool enough to think I will take my father to safety and leave him here to die Mr. Kay?”

“Under the present conditions it seems the best plan. At the very least I think it likely he will have ordered Captain Solo to encourage that scenario.”

“I see….”

Night had fallen in earnest. The captives filed out through the new opening, in groups, holding each others hands. The tall woman, Francisca, led the way with the young messenger beside her. She and two or three others held precious tin lanterns that the little priest produced and lighted by his own hand with a twist of straw from the tabernacle lamp but they kept them well covered and vanished
silently into the wild dark.

Lightning flashed and she caught clear sight in its illumination of Mr. Timothy Kay’s face. Pale, calm and unconcerned.

“..as nature has made him,” indeed.

“All duty done, when the hour comes will he order you to leave him too, Mr. Kay?”

“I can imagine a number of circumstances in which he might, all duty done.”

“And would you obey such an order?”

“No.”

“Let us go together and find him then, Mr. Kay,” Mrs. Andor said.

Then she turned to Taidu Sefla and the old priest, who alone still remained in the near dark chapel, “Janumi, Ka mayar da mu zuwa gidan Iblis.” Light from the flickering pitch and fat lamp on the table lit the mens faces. “Nuna mana hanya da mahaifina zai dauka.”

“You must go Grandfather. Your people will need you,” Sefla said.

“Go I will, but not yet,” Father Campo demurred. “Guide these soldiers of Light my son. Leave the tabernacle lamp lit, for those who may yet follow. I have hope that we will meet again, if not here then in my Paradise or yours.”

The other man smiled sadly and shook his head “Ee. Bi ni. Come then. I will show you the way.”

The three of them went out into the dark storm.

“Hold on to the back of my coat, Mrs. Andor,” Mr. Kay said so she did.

Father Campo remained waiting and kneeling alone in his little church.

Jen could hear the little man praying in Latin even long after the howl of wind and lash of rain should have erased the sound.
Ves amb compte! Mireu el terra = Be careful! Watch the ground!

Veurem els salvatges? = Will we see the savages?

Sortiu d'allà = Come out/Come out of there

Vés a casa teva. Trobeu la vostra mare Córre cap a la capella. = Go home Find your mother Run towards the chapel.

Maria? Que està passant? = Maria? What is happening?

Coratge, fill meu. = Courage, my son.

Déu va amb tu. Intenta viure com un bon home i estar lliure d'aquest lloc. Porteu el vostre germà i vagi = God go with you. Try to live as a good man and be free from this place. Take your brother and go.

Fins on hem anat? = How far have we gone?
(Catalan)

Qīng qīng zǐ pèi, yōu yōu wǒ sī.
Zòng wǒ bù wǎng , zǐ zhù bù lái? = Blue-belted lad, you’re in my loving thoughts.
Although I cannot go to you, couldn’t you come here to me? (Chinese)

Hola.= Hello.
Amic = Friend
(Catalan)

Min fovásai = Do not be afraid. (Greek)

Esteu amb el Senyor Galen Erso? Tu ets el seu poble? = You are with Mr. Galen Erso? You are his people?
Són només fills. No podríem deixar-los = They are only children. We could not leave them.
(Catalan)

Jarumi, Ka mayar da mu zuwa gidan Iblis. Nuna mana hanya da mahaifina zai dauka = Warrior. Bring us back to the Devil's house. Show us the way my father will take.
Ee. Bi ni = Yes. Follow me.
(Hausa)

Did I say at one point that this would absolutely positively not be nowhere near as long as “Over the Edge?”
*sigh* Something is wrong with me, clearly.
Enough to Know

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Cassian Andor, Captain Han Solo, Mate Khaeuri and Mr. Galen Erso work their way to the waterside and witness the transport of the dread weapon. Captain Andor attempts to gain information vital to the continuation of his mission while remaining separate from his anxieties regarding his wife and crew. Mr. Galen Erso in his turn relates what advisement he can. Khaeuri is less than attentive at times. Captain Solo has a bad feeling about this. Everyone is wet. The fate of Director Oren Krennik is a question it is time to answer.

Chapter Notes

Small snippet. Four men are running around on a dark and stormy night hiding in doorways and providing exposition.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

the evening of January 15, 1770

A drenching of rain struck them sideways, almost colder than the air around it. Such chill was rare in the tropics, even in winter.

He retained some hope that the powder and pistol he had taken from the dead guard were still dry in the waxed bag bound beneath his arm but there was no question of using either in such conditions.
“Er bestaat niet zoiets als slecht weer, alleen slechte kleding,” Solo muttered sarcastically turning up his sodden collar behind one of the empty warehouses. “Or so my mother, who people do keep bringing up today, used to say. At least I shall greet the Devil well-washed.”

“Your man talks too much when he is nervous,” Mr. Galen Erso whispered.

*Oh sir, you do not know the half of it.*

“Yes,” Captain Andor agreed.

It was near full dark as they worked their way inside. Mr. Galen Erso wordlessly led by pulling at his sleeve while Khaeuri and Solo made shift to follow.

Covered pitch torches lined New Smyrna’s stone wharf and attached wooden docks while others were fixed at the bows of the flat-bottomed transport boats. Here and there one would gutter out in the soaking wind and be quickly re-lit by a short redcoat with a glassed lantern.

Another lightning flash lit the scene before them as if with daylight for an instant’s span.

Ragged men and a few women could be seen passing small crates hand to hand in a line from a tow barge tied in the now-gated Canal to the dock beside the tossing transport boat.

The Director’s three men stood back in red, Tarkin’s two in grey and two others cloaked wholly in black. *Lord Vader’s private guard.*

Light glinted off the hilts of the latter’s swords before all vanished in soaking torchlight darkness again.

The pounding of rain on the roof and rattle of boards would at least conceal their words. Drawing near to his father-in-law in the shelter of the doorway he asked in hushed tone, “Mr. Erso…sir, have you any notion what quantity has already been transported?”

He felt as much as saw the older man shake his head.

“I cannot be sure… this barn was filled with barrels of the standard indigo but yesterday morning….” Galen Erso gestured as if to indicate the narrow and all-but-empty warehouse they presently sheltered in. “but they can have begun to move the Mors ignis… the explosive…from the smaller sheds inland at best a few hours ago.”

*Why did Tarkin even bother with the indigo? Was it simple greed …prime dye indigo being presently prized at more than twice it’s weight in gold …or was it deemed necessary as concealment for the explosive in port or for some later shipment?*

“I cannot tell why they have taken the dye first,” Mr. Erso said as if following Captain Andor’s thought. “Whether because of nearness or..”

“They fill in order of weight and size,” Solo spoke at his elbow, “If this black warship that had your crew all a-tremble moves as quick as legend holds and yet is as hedgehogged with weighty cannon as your bold lady reported her she must be packed damned carefully. Those pressed cakes of hellfire
you have made are the small crates I take it, Mr. Erso?...but any shift of weight, be it slight as three ladylike kegs of Darjeeling leaf, will need to be balanced for its effect on speed and maneuverability.”

There must have been just enough light for an expression of surprise to be seen on his face because the Khaeuri muttered something from the shadow, “Ha! Kei te whakaaro enei tangata kaore matou e mohio ki te mahi i to maatau mahi,” and the Dutchman chuckled softly. “Aye Capitán….though my talents of occasion fail me in shore matters I know how to pack a ship with varied contraband and still run her against the wind. This devilry they will surely want in a dry powder magazine, center or astern.”

_The image of the dreaded Devastator used as a cargo packet and the fearsome Vader leashed like some guard dog at Tarkin’s beck would have been blackly humorous under other conditions._

“How much is there?” Captain Andor inquired urgently.

Mr. Erso had indicated to him four locations where the weapon-material was stored. These depots were distant from each other but all connected by water. _He must try to re-reckon tactically. They had only hours and this “fuse” mattered only if the stuff and materials central to its nativity were still on the plantation….“the explosive matter..what quantity is finished, deployable?”_

Mr. Galen Erso did not speak immediately.

Then again that pained whisper... “Without progress they would have killed the people and taken all North or to the Miskito in the South..brought in other labor enslaved and begun again…at least here…. his jealous ambition meant he concealed details from Tarkin and Tarkin thus from Rome….I flawed as many batches as I dared in the beginning with inert material, delayed for years but…..he….Krennik began to test at random…”

“Sir…sir…there is no need…” the captain took the man’s cold arm in hope of bringing his focus back to their present task.

_I am neither confessor nor judge Father-in-law, only a soldier and a sometime executioner, help me do my duty so I can get you to your daughter and she can assist yourself and these others to flee this place._

“Sir, how much?” he repeated as gently and firmly as he could.

“As of this morning when I was brought in, 4940 pounds were packed and ready to for transport. Each crate you see there holds twenty pounds in the form of forty wrapped cakes at a weight…” _Dear God where was Kay when he needed him?

“247 you say, then,” Solo ventured. _Syndulla had not been mistaken. The man was surely quick to many skills of his trade. “God’s eyes, but that seems damned little to show for…”_

“Nine years, many hundreds dead, hundreds still yet in torment and swords of fire given into the hands of the wicked to loose upon nations unsuspecting…” Galen Erso’s voice had lost its flatness. “Ja. Det är en dålig bargin, pojke…I assure you, I sold far more than my soul to keep the profit so modest.”

_Ah, that was a snap of anger Cassian Andor recognized._

“Enough,” Captain Andor raised his hand.
Both men fell silent at once for something was happening on the docks.

One of the barefoot workers had slipped, doubtless from weariness on the wet boards, and dropped a crate. Several of the guards let out shouts and jumped back…the nearer grey jumped furthest and at least one of the reds must have laughed or made remark because argument seemed to break out between the various officers. The workers cowered back. One grey was heard to use a word of dread insult.. “provincial”…Ah, British pride of place, the near-equal of Iberian. Blows might have broken out had not one of the two black coats stepped forward. Whatever the official order of command Vader’s men held the greater authority. Good to know.

Order was somewhat restored but debate continued and the rain having lessened for a moment shifts of wind brought them snatches.

“Fools…Governor’s orders…tonight…” and then… “Director…supposed to supervise…and the Engineer” … “Where are they then?”…. “…dangerous…might lose all”.. “second run …wait until morning for the rest.?”

There were perhaps fifty of the small squared crates stacked here. These men seemed to imply that at least one load had already gone to the waiting Devastator.

Captain Andor forced his thoughts away from any consideration of the brave souls aboard the Rogues Venture. The thing was done. He had given the orders. All rested in Melshi’s hands now.

These were soldiers of Empire, trained to fear taking initiative almost more than anything else and in typical blind obedience to the letter of order they were trying to transport another load out to the Inlet despite the storm. They must be persuaded to set the task aside. How could this be accomplished without revealing themselves?

The redcoats were brutal, stupid and confused by this usurpation of their usual order. The grey feared the risk of disaster and Tarkin’s wrath over any loss of craft and cargo. Though the men of the Devastator’s formidable proximity to wizardry might have left them stoic they were still men accustomed to the handling of cannon, powder and gun and as such surely had a just and proper caution of the cargo itself, likely thinking of it as a mighty variation of black powder as delicate as it was powerfully dangerous…..

Leaning forward crouched and low for a better view, Cassian Andor’s hand touched upon a flat, rounded stone on the wet sandy ground.

Long ago the ratas de muelle of Veracruz had run under the ramps and over the roofs, dodging the wardens of the watch and the Viceroys men. How many times had breaking a lantern with a well-aimed stone enabled escape or plunged a stall into darkness long enough for hungry boys to snatch a string of dry sausages or hardtack and run?

His fingers closed around the stone.

Danger lay in movement and the sound of breaking glass but…

“Fuera de la vista,” he warned the men with him through clenched teeth.

There was soft scuffle as Solo pulled Galen Erso back behind the doorway.
Inside the covered boat that was their “cabin” on the Falcon she had slipped from his arms in the
dark before dawn, brushed his hair back with her fingers and kissed his mouth one last time.

“One handhold to the next, until we fall or gain the top my love.”

A flash of lightning lit the sky again and Cassian Andor took the chance.

Standing he flung the aimed stone and dropped flat to the ground on the instant of releasing it.

The shattering of the lamp-glass at the torch propped nearest the dock edge was quickly swallowed
in the roll of near thunder.

The officers of the Devastator were chosen for their razor-like focus in action, and those of Governor
Tarkin’s escort for their cool discipline but it was beyond the scope of most men not to react with
profound agitation when lightning strikes and sparks of fire fly from a wind-broken lamp
simultaneously in the near vicinity of fifty crates of explosive.

It was one shock too many. Picking himself up off the ground, Commander Fox of the Devastator
made a decision upon his own authority. “Enough!” he cried. “Get this stuff back inside that nearest
dry warehouse. We will load the rest at first light! Secure the transport!

The ragged conscripts moved the boxes back under cover as the lashing rain returned and with that task accomplished were roughly dismissed to their hovels.

All attention being focused on trembling slaves moving volatile cargo none of the officers noticed moccasin prints of unusual size in the damp earth near the doorway of the nearer shelter before they were quickly obliterated by the boots of the troopers and bare feet of workers.

The plantation’s two redcoats were set at guard in the rain while Fox and his fellow returned with Grand Admiral Tarkin’s people to the relative dry comfort of the mansion and Guard quarters to report and receive further orders.

It was only later while emptying water from his boots that Commander Thrice recalled a glimpse, caught in the moment of the lightnings too-near flash, of a waistcoated man unexpectedly revealed in one of the empty doorways.

“One of the traitor plantation men,” Fox said dismissing the sight, “likely sneaking off or hiding from the rain.” Thrice could not but agree. Alligator bait was almost too good for the cowards.

Captain Mott was also missing but the self-promoting striver was assumed by his fellows to have taken some invitation to shelter with Lord Vader’s men after escorting the Chief Engineer out. The rest of Tarkin’s men were more than glad to be out of sight of the fellow for a few hours. It was an open secret that he had been supplying information to Rome for some time.

_____________________________

Galen Erso’s heart pounded.
He had reached the icy reaches of the bottom of despair, the ninth circle of Hell, and now he himself was the guide through Purgatory as a storm swirled around him.

These were young men, save perhaps for the tattooed giant. A South Sea islander? The brash and haunted Dutch boy had an accent of Batavia. Well why not? Saul’s men had been of every earthly nation. There was a comfort in it.

That this Spanish youth, his Jen’s husband, held command here would have been clear even had the Dutchman, Solo, not said so clearly. He surveyed the scene like a hawk and adjusted for the wind.

*Lara, our little Star is a woman grown. Giving orders to men in battle. Three days married.*

For all the sharp wariness of a soldier behind an enemy’s line, this Cassian Andor could not be much more than twenty five.

He killed Vellors with a knife at fifty yards, gulled Tarkin by some subterfuge clearly still undiscovered and played the shaken English officer well enough that the Devil himself had not known.

Another father might have asked “Are you a good man?” but what would such an answer tell him? Galen Erso had earnestly believed himself good once upon a time.

It was not until he spoke of Jen, answering in what could only be the swift reflex of childhood …that Galen Erso felt he truly saw a young man of flesh and blood.

“*Sin miedo.*” ‘Without fear’ he had answered.

He knows her. He loves her. He fights the Enemy beside her. It was enough to know.

They had reached the empty shed that served as shipwright’s shop and took shelter again.

“Andor,” Captain Solo whispered, “We can’t keep running around, all four of us like a press gang. It is too hard to keep this great walking carpet out of sight. We ought to split up, I can manage to find this Mill and set a charge before daybreak. You and Khaeuri could take your honorable Father-in-law to Rook and then …” his voice trailed off as if he himself had not thought through what he was saying.

Even in the dark Mr. Galen Erso perceived that Cassian Andor shook his head, and it seemed as if he might even have smiled, if only slightly. “No, Captain Solo,” came a quiet answer. “We both know that is not how this will go.”

“Ko ou tawai ko te wai, he kuri iti. E kore ahau e whakarere ia koe. Ka mate koe i roto i te rima meneti,” the giant rumbled.

“Mr. Erso, where would notes of plans be stored? Samples or prototypes? Any means to enable the copies of this experiment elsewhere?”

“There are none,” he said.
Even as he spoke the words to these young warriors, these strangers, Mr. Erso realized how naive they must sound.

Why should they believe you Galen? All around us stand the fatal results of your blindness.

His son-in-law’s voice remained calm but relentless. “Sir, I have a man currently reconnoitering the plantation who has great skill in both engineering and alchemy and it is yet my hope to make contact with him but if I cannot or he is lost your advice will be my only map. I have seen this weapon at work sir, the advances are unprecedented. The Alliance’s mission is to prevent this weapon’s present use and future manufacture at whatever cost and I can leave nothing to chance.”

He must mean Krennik’s “test”. dear God.

“You saw…”

“I was at Portugal, sir. I saw a hillside fastness and stone embattlements that stood against siege and cannon for centuries taken down by a single shot. My orders are that all must be secured. Papers, equipment or persons who could recreate either.”

Commander Saul Gerrere was surely no stranger to death, but that it should be at my hand...

“Was she there?”

For a moment silence and the rain were his only answer.

Do not be afraid of adding to my guilt, my son. Until a handful of weeks ago I thought that I had killed my only child.

“Yes, sir.”

“I destroyed all, years ago Captain Andor, I swear it on my daughters life. What papers remain are falsified beyond re-creation. The tools and methods of this place while cruel are no different than those of any other indigo or nitrate manufactory. The great secret of all, indeed only secret of this vile innovation, is that it’s genesis lies in an accident of place. The most innocent of natural materials…this particular water, these singular stones quarried from a solitary spot on a barrier island near the Inlet’s mouth, the green leaf of a common indigofera grown within three miles of this shore…combined by accident and corrupted by man’s ambition yield tenfold the destructive power of the finest black powder. Eternal death…the very reverse of every alchemical goal.”

“Who knows this?”

“Myself alone.”

But words came to his memory. The varied guards had argued on the stone wharf. “Director… supposed to supervise…” one had said. Galen Erso had recognized the voice as Halvax, one of the younger guards… “Where is he then?” Tarkin’s man had snarled.

His master had ordered him to the docks and the ever publicly-obedient Krennik had not gone.

A chill came over him far greater than wind or winter storm could bring.

“We must find Oren Krennik.”

“You mean the Director of the plantation?” Captain Andor’s question was sharp, “Is he privy to the
“No,” the answer came from him quicker and louder than he had meant it to.

*He is a snake who would not know lye from vinegar and I wish I might share with you the number of times I have wished to pour both down his throat to teach him the difference.*

Galen Erso mastered himself and went on, “Krennik alone has been here from the beginning.....before the beginning...has seen all the pieces of the puzzle, though he possesses not the slightest knowledge of or interest in the picture they form. It is even possible that he read Lioni’s notes, though he lacks the skill to have understood them....if questioned by someone with enough skill....it is barely within...”

Captain Cassian Andor swore softly in a tongue that was not Spanish.

“And this fellow is missing?” Solo asked, “The boot-polisher in the dandy’s coat? Where would he go in this soggy corner of hell?”

Captain Andor enlightened them. “Tarkin made some show of not trusting him. Two of the Governor’s picked men marched Director Krennik out to his quarters after your removal,”

“I suppose it is too much to hope that a pair of grey velvet cutthroats will do for him and spare us the trouble?”

“He can seem the common sort of murderous mill-wheel when it suits him,” Galen Erso told them, for there was not time to tell them all, “He is not.”

“Can you lead us to these quarters?” Captain Andor proposed urgently.

“Yes. When the Governor is in residence Krennik is banished to a house set a little above those of the overseers. It is up the western path from here, near where the South branch of the Canal joins.”

“Lead us there sir. Then we will find some means to get you to this chapel, your daughter and escape from this place.”

Mr Galen Erso was glad he could not see his son-in-laws face clearly in the dark for in that moment his voice lost its clear and professional edge once more. He sounded like a brave but hard-pressed young man of slightly provincial Spanish accent, holding on to a hope he knew himself unlikely to find. He laid his hand on Captain Andor’s damp shoulder.

*Come my son, he thought, We both know that is not how this will go.*

Captain Solo seemed to have crept back into the shed a little.

“Khaeuri, Khaeuri…come on, rouse yourself, we must move again.”

What Galen Erso had taken for a slight rumble of the storm ceased abruptly.

“Kua oti ia tatou? He wa ano ki te tahu i tenei wahi?”
“Not just yet. We have to go kill a bastard first.”

There was a great sound like the heaving of a sigh.

“Pai rawa. Kia tere tatou.”

The rain and wind continued but blessedly the lightning seemed to have ceased for the moment and he led them out again and up the muddy path toward the overseer’s houses.
(Maori)

Point A to Point B with hopefully a little character study along the way.

Oy! So much plot!!! So many moving pieces!

Too much? I could not agree with you more.

The trouble with extended reenacting gigs is that your days are chock-full, you have no free time for reading and writing because you fall asleep exhausted at 8pm, you cannot use your devices when the public is around and they always seem to involve open fires and locales where the wifi bites. Back to the 21st cen. next week!!!!!
Che farò ora?

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Andor Mr. Erso seek Mr. Oren Krennik. Both men suffer agonies of mind over the best way forward and despite great sympathy come to different conclusions. Captain Solo is struck in the head with a log.

Chapter Notes

Some men bond with their fathers-in-law by going fishing or something. Yes Galen is losing it a little.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

Late upon January 15 and near to midnight in the early hours of January 16, 1770

Where is she?
This storm bedeviled and blinded but...please God...would delay the evacuation of the greatest share of the explosive and purchase more of the captive people time for escape.

“It seems certain now that this enterprise is not merely allied to but wholly an enterprise of our Enemy,” Mr. Kay had argued. “Surely his Officers have demanded regular and extensive documentation of...”

But Mr. Baldwin Cor had shaken his head, “Proprietary secrecy is the sole security of powdermakers.”

The occasion had been a conference he and Mr. Kay held with that gentleman at Nassau just after their escape from Jamaica and the topic a review of Mr. Rook’s account of the plantation in light of Captain Solo’s notes and the evidence and observation of his crew. Another man might have taken offense at such spirited interruption but Kay being Kay merely tilted his head to take in the new information.

“I assure you sir, the mold of thought engendered by such work is unique among practical alchemists. It is true that the product of their admittedly brutish labor cannot be simply taken in hand by rivals when finished or and its material secrets unraveled backwards by patient experimentation because it is utterly destroyed in the achievement of perfection yet it is also constructed of elements so utterly common and it’s action derived by the refinement, however arcane or careful, of effects routinely observable by any man who has seen a mass of compost smoke on a winters day that masters of such a craft can ultimately guard only their processes, tools and measurements. Knowing this they do so with greater jealousy than a royal cook guards their recipes, or a renowned apothecary his unique lists of medicines. The engineers of this venture have cleverly pantomimed under the covered noses of their English neighbors as an indigo works for dye-makers too must defend the minutest details of their work but the makers of weapons hide not only from their rivals but as much so or more from their own patrons and customers for these they know to be willing dealers in death.”

Years in Kay’s company had toughened him or else Captain Andor’s head would have ached.

“Restate your argument and simplify it please, Mr. Corr for the less expert.”

“I point out that the habit of concealment is second nature to the craft, sir and will inform both design and action. See how even in such a remote place they have gone to such great expense and labor to conceal the refining works from casual sight? I assure you, they may have sent back samples for testing but no accurate diagrams, models or formulae. Documentary notes will encrypted and kept close to hand. Few men will be privy to the full details of the process, indeed often the innovator will...” here that good gentleman paused as if struck by some painful memory, but mastered it and went on. “...take extraordinary, even painful steps to assure that they are known only to himself.”

“An admirable summary Mr. Corr,” Mr Kay stood and bowed.

Timothy Kay gave no higher praise. Captain Andor hoped the young Master Gunner had understood the tribute.
The situation as Mr. Galen Erso reported it followed Corr’s projection most exactly.

*There is still hope*, he told himself. This Sugar Mill...*some four miles distant along the branching canal...* must be reached before the dawn or the breaking of the storm and set afire. He would not yet let himself believe that Kay was lost, but their plans had gone so far awry there was no knowing what improvisation might have been required. Time was running out but even if Kay were detained it was still achievable, he could manage the task alone if he must.

*There was a time you preferred to work alone was there not Cassian?*

*Where was she?*

In the absence of documents or other movable particulars that required location and destruction, the only essential preliminary was the elimination of a single man.

*... or two men.*

*The words of Mr. Draven’s order burned in his mind as keenly as the knife in his side in Vienna and just as he had done then he ignored the pain and kept moving.*

They progressed along a sodden path, incongruously lined with plantings of magnolia much battered in the wind. These they hugged to closely for cover on this largely treeless flat but a party of four men would still have been in plain sight had there any light to see by or eyes willing to endure the wind and rain. There being neither Mr. Galen Erso led the way quickly and directly.

Behind on the docks and at the canal the torches had all been doused or else guttered out. A few faint flickering lanterns gleamed, two or three moving away along one side of the rivers shore *... Toward the settlement houses reserved to the guards...* and others up toward dimly-illuminated shapes that could only have signified the few candlelight windows of the great Mansion house.

The amount of time that remained for them to move without keen risk of discovery was growing short. It could not be long before someone would check on Captain Fuller, enquire after the disposition of the mysterious “Indian” or notice that the guards sent to attend to Sargent Faucon’s murder and disposal had not returned. An alarm of some sort would be raised then and he must be in better position to act before it was.

*Where is she?*

A dimly-lit square of window came into sight just ahead through the rain. But for Mr. Erso’s guidance and that faint illumination he might have passed the low wood and tabby cottage unseen even from this distance of a few yards.

On sight of it he grasped at the back Mr. Galen Erso’s waistcoat and pulled the tall man down. The
light within flickered with more than wind. A person...more than one person surely... was moving about inside. Voices could be heard though he could make out no words. There was no shouting...two men, their tones conversational....By reflex he also reached back toward Captain Solo but this action had been needless for the smuggler’s instincts were twin to his own and both he and his large mate had already crouched down low to the muddy ground.

Suddenly there came a guttural shout, a sound of some object shattering and immediately behind it the crack of a pistol shot.

¡Mierda!

“Verrek!” Solo hissed.

Another sound. The slamming of a door within?

Far enough from the Mansion’s guardhouses or muffled by the wind enough for the shot to be dismissed as thunder? Was anyone housed near enough by to have seen the flash that lit the small window?

Four men lay flat on the streaming ground, counting heartbeats for minutes

Nothing. No light. No shouts or sound of running feet.

The “overseers” cottages reportedly adjacent must be empty.

God was with them still.

Mr. Erso, seized by sudden desperation, climbed to his feet first and slipping from under Captain Andor’s hand ran ahead toward the house.

The cottage door stood open and as he entered Galen Erso all but fell over the man, one of Tarkin’s grey-coated courtiers, lying just inside the open doorway. Captain Andor grasped his shoulder to arrest his father-in-law’s stumble and entering behind him most carefully took a cursory inventory of what lay before them.

A pistol-shot, close enough to have scorched that fine waistcoat, a few feet at best straight into the chest. Dead or seconds from it, the fellow had crawled a foot or two but no further. A glass lantern lay broken on the tabby slab floor nearby a fat wax candle within the shards still smoked, no doubt extinguished in its fall.

So. The guard had been bringing it in for more light....and been taken by surprise?

The dim room was lit only by another small glass-sided lantern which still burned undamaged on a carved chest at the farther side and the low fire of pine knots that flickered in grate of a coquina-stone fireplace.
Rough walls plastered and unadorned, a tabby floor covered with rush mats, the chest, plain curtained bed, small gated table…askew as if shoved, a cubbied desk with drawers pulled open and papers spread across the floor, ledger books thrown about, an overturned chair.

A second lifeless body, velvet comrade of the first, lay face down in a dark and widening puddle of blood on the floor near to the small fireplace.

Cassian crouched to turn the corpse over. This man had been facing down…tending the fire? Tossing documents into it?…and taken kneeling or so it seemed from the tale the gore told. Doubtless confident enough that this foppish Director was no kind of threat else he would never have turned his back so.

Ah, you were sorely mistaken it seems, sir.

Throat cut…. fast, brutal…a sharp blade though not a thin one. No hesitation to the blow but far more force had been used than needed to accomplish the task. Mr. Krennik might be desperate but he was also angry.

From the look of matters he was still in possession of the knife.

There was no sign of pistol either but that mattered less…even with powder or shot kept dry by some means the fellow could make little quick use of it in such rain.

“Ought we assume the bastard’s scampered, then?” Captain Solo’s voice came from the doorway.

Galen Erso stood by the opened desk and reached to lift one of the ledger books.

“Stay back. Touch nothing!” Captain Andor ordered both men. He lowered the dead guard back down carefully, holding a clean section of the coat to not further smear the blood.

Footprints and signs of their presence must be concealed as best as possible. The Enemy would set a search for one of their own turned traitor very differently than an incursion or general escape and such confusion might delay their apprehension of the true events.

“Where is Khaeuri?”

Solo jerked his head back toward the dark exterior, “Keeping watch outside…for a man who seldom troubles about the disposition of those he shuffles by his own hand he sometimes takes a superstitious dislike to cadavers left by the labor of others.” Thunder rolled again.

Mr. Galen Erso stood like a pale statue, fists clenched. He stared at the blood on the floor but seemed distracted, whispering to himself.

Was that Italian? It sounded like Italian but of some phrasing or accent Captain Andor did not know.

“Mr. Erso…Where will he go?”

When the man did not answer he stood and grasped his father-in-laws sleeve rather roughly. “Sir…we need you here. Where will he go?”

“The river,” Solo ventured. “He’ll look for a boat, it’s the only way out of here.”
Incongruously Galen Erso laughed.

“You mistake the devil’s mind, modiga soldater,” The Engineer said, “for you are accustomed to adversaries either more clever or less complex. He will give no thought to flight until he has what he thinks is his own…the weapon.”

“Tarkin’s men have gathered the bulk of the material to the docks, by your own report,” Captain Andor reminded him. *Please God, hold together a little longer sir. I cannot manage otherwise… “If there are, as you say no notes or journals of work how…..”*

“He does not understand that,” the older man spoke as a teacher giving a practical lesson on the nature of the sabotage. “Power is the only science he understands and the only coin he values. The “black indigo” is power. Another villains attempt to steal it’s secret for their own is all he can comprehend. The idea that menials might betray the same to rivals has surprised and enraged him but that he has been utterly deceived from the first, that this dog he has beaten for a decade will rise up now and snatch his prize away with no other goal than to destroy it….that he cannot fathom. He will search first for notes to bargain for his chance and not finding them he will look for me. In the end he will surely go to the Sugar Mill.”
They were brave men all three, he saw that clearly but there was no way to make them understand. Whatever wickedness the world had shown them they did not know the nightmare of New Smyrna, they did not know Krennik.

What do you hope to find Oren? Where would you go even with some imagined plan or diagram in hand? Do you think you have allies with the potential to rival Tarkin’s on whatever ship waits out in the Inlet beyond the swollen Mosquito and Indian creeks?

He knelt carefully to look at the scattered papers...even in the shadows he could make out numbers, notations...financial accounts. Was Tarkin so mistaken in his appraisal of you as to suspect common theft Oren?

“The house that was allotted to me is a little way further up this path on this side of the greater canal before and some quarter north of the crossing with the south canal. He may try there, for the sake of thoroughness.” It was essential that they know what they dealt with. Tarkin’s men had not “...despite the knowledge that men have searched it to the boards many times for he is a methodical man in pursuit of a goal. Then he must move up the South Canal, past the tank works for it is likely he will skirt the guardposts and move from that cover to the Mill, beyond.”

The Director’s sole visit within the Mill had been seven years past when Governor Grant and another greedy British official visited. It was when they had begun laying the wooden presses to drain the ammoniac bath and milled the first black batch beneath the wetted grinding stones. A silk scarf had hidden faces but not streaming eyes from the reek that day. Krennik had himself come no closer than the upper path afterwards but now he would find the way even in the dark. While he lived he would not stop.

Galen Erso’s son-in law winced as if wrestling with some sharp pain but then spoke with quiet resolve.

“Solo, take Mr. Erso to this Chapel. With any luck Mrs. Andor and this priest and some number of the people are either there or but recently moved toward the ships and Mr. Rook. Find them and tell her that Kay and I will manage here and as many as can must move with speed West and North. Do as she orders you but whatever happens keep moving. If we can find a way we will join you en route but do not wait for us. God willing we will meet in Saint Augustine.”

The witty Dutchman stood by the door and looked to his commander with an uncertain air but after a few seconds hesitation he nodded.

The captain’s hand searched around the rough mantle above the dwindling fire and quickly seemed to find what it sought, a small copper tinderbox.

“She will kill me,” Solo said. “You know that.”

“She will not,” Captain Andor opened the small box, perhaps to assure himself the presence of flint and steel and that the char cloth within was dry and the lid tight, before tucking it within his damp and stolen coat. “She has grown quite fond of Khaeuri and would not cause him grief.”

No.
He tried to explain, “you do not know him...”

“I know his kind, I assure you, and if there is one skill I possess to the point of excellence it is that of hunting down a man in the dark.” If the other soldier had spoken so he would have taken the words for boast or gallows humor but his heart told him his son-in-law spoke only what he believed plain truth. “Our mission is to finish this and we shall. I have well attended both your descriptions and Mr. Rook’s and know the direction to go.”

_No. This was wrong. Leoni, Lara, Saul...how many of the skilled and strong had stood between him and his crime and paid the price?_

“No....you do not understand.” _How could he make them see?_

The captain crouched down beside him then and pressed something… a plain linen handkerchief… into his cold fingers.

“Sir, I have been in this fight one way or another since I was six years old. I became a soldier of the Alliance and am proud to die as one, but until I met your daughter I did not know how dark a room my life had become.” Folded within the cloth was a lock of hair, auburn in the flicker of the lamplight….her hair had been a child’s golden-brown curls when last he saw her....but he recognized it. Her hair was Lara’s hair, the same shade and luster… “and I have nothing to give her for the light she brought me except this heart that her love returned to life and the name assigned an orphan in the Convento de la Merced. Let me give her this. Let me give her back her father. Go with Captain Solo.”

That cool almost alarming discipline was gone again and the man spoke with a desperation different from but the equal to his own. In that poor lamplight, in his torn muddied coat and hair soaked with rain Cassian Andor looked very young once more.

Yes, figliuol mio, that is what is like to love one so bright, is it not? To have felt the difference between night and day and feel it still, even when you know you will never see dawn again.

Mr. Galen Erso pressed his son-in-laws hand and whispered the canto.

“Figliuol mio,
qui può esser tormento, ma non morte.

Ricorditi, ricorditi! E se io

sovresso Gerion ti guidai salvo,
che farò ora presso più a Dio?

_The boy would not understand but that did not matter. God would. Lara would and someday… please Heaven… Jen would._

From outside a sound came, distant and muffled by the rain but unmistakable, a bell. Mr. Erso recognized it as the smaller brass bell from nearest the guards barracks. Soon the bell by the Mansion House would sound and the others would spread the alarm. Someone had found the bodies.
“O verdomme” Solo said and laid his hand upon Mr. Erso’s shoulder, “Come now.”

He stumbled to his feet and allowed himself to be pulled toward the door. Captain Andor hurriedly opened the shutters of the small window and the rain was blown inside as the wind banged it to and fro. The lamp flickered and went out.

The rain will confuse our footprints and disguise matters here.

*He still seeks to baffle pursuers. My God. Where does a man so young learn to think this way?*

There were no words or farewells. He followed Captain Solo out into the dark and rain where his giant companion stood like dark column waiting for them in the poor shelter of the wall. Solo waved to him and they set off following the barely seen path between the empty cottages

“He kino tenei. Kei hea te Kapene?” came what sounded like a question even as they ran.

“He goes to finish the rabbit on his own and light some fires. We’re to get these poor wretches toward the Falcon and save this fellow.”

The mate moaned, “Ka patua koe e taua wahine.”

Solo slipped in the mud more than once. for all his size the giant was a nimble fellow and pulled him to his feet. They had come to the last of the “settlement” cottages and must leave the dimly-seen marker of the last stone wall.

Thunder rolled again and they shrunk back by a rough shed as the lightning flash came hard upon.

The bells were ringing again in the distance. The Mansion and the Wharf bells had joined the alarm.

Galen Erso laid his hand upon what proved to be a wood pile.

“Bastards will secure the waterfront first...that being the only way to the treasure to their mind,” Captain Solo said, standing straight again and peering into the rain, “They’ll set a search from the center outwards likely.” The giant led out for the last dash to the long low hill beyond which lay the Minorcan huts and the Chapel. The Dutchman reached for Mr. Erso’s arm for he faltered as if having difficulty rising. “Come sir, we must hurry...”

“I am sorry.” Galen Erso said and struck the man hard with a one of the smaller logs.....*not too hard he prayed.*

Thunder rumbled even as Solo fell.

If Mr. Erso had any hope that the sound would conceal his action from the giant long enough to make his escape in the dark he was misguided.

The lightning flash a heartbeat later showed the tattooed man to have swiftly and silently moved back. He now stood looming from the shadows but a foot away, his expression made more terrifying by the savage patterns etched on it. Raised above his dark head was a heavy blade....one he had taken from the dead guard at the Malt House...raised to strike.

“I do not mean to hurt him! I am trying to save him!” Galen Erso cried. “Brother please, take your friend and flee this place while there is still time!”
Mr. Erso had not raised his arms over his head even in reflex of defense but only dropped the wet log on the ground and stood still. There was no point in cowering. If a blow came down from such a mighty height it would cleave him in two, of that Mr. Erso had no doubt. But the man must have stopped in mid-strike.

“He wairua ano hoki koe?” came a rumbling voice from out of the returned darkness.

“I do not know what you are saying brother but I must go. Carry your friend away from here. I did not mean to hurt him. He is brave but he is wrong. Save him. Save my daughter. Help these people flee if you can but let me go. Only I can finish this.”

There was a shuffling sound and by the light of another and more distant lightning flash Mr. Erso saw the great man lift the stunned and groaning soldier in his arms as if he were a child and without further word turned away to run on through the rain. The deluge had lessened for the moment and though the wind still blew hard from the North it seemed to Galen Erso that the storm had finally chosen it’s course. Turning back like Virgil from the way his heart most yearned to go he ran for the works, to make his way toward the heart of the Inferno again, one last time.

Chapter End Notes

Figliuol mio,
qui può esser tormento, ma non morte.
Ricorditi, ricorditi! E se io
sovresso Gerion ti guidai salvo,
che farò ora presso più a Dio?

My son, though there may be
suffering here, there is no death. Remember
remember! If I guided you to safety
even upon the back of Geryon,
then now, closer to God, what shall I do?
Purgatorio 27.19-24, The first part of Virgil’s last words to Dante before the Poet must return to Purgatory because he is forbidden to enter Paradise where Beatrice waits.

Yup. More Dante.

He kino tenei. Kei hea te Kapene? = This is bad. Where is the Captain?

Ka patua koe e taua wahine = That woman will kill you.

He wairua ano hoki koe? = Are you also a ghost/spirit person?
(Maori)

My apologies for the shortness of the chapters on the mounting-drama...(argh!) it seems so long on my phone and then I look at it and think. What? I am literally posting bits to keep rolling lest I freeze up in the final innings.
Nine

Chapter Summary

In which Captain Jared Montferrat of the Devastator faces a storm at sea, a mystery aboard his ship and the supernatural wrath of his commander, Lord Vader.

Chapter Notes

Sabé has every intention of making her adversary suffer as much as is in her power before this showdown.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Devastator

off Mosquito inlet and waters adjacent

Coast of British east Florida

late upon January 15 and early in the hours of January 16, 1770
The customary bodily misery of men tossed below decks and battered in the topsails notwithstanding most of those who served aboard that ship suffered but did not fear the storm itself. All were seasoned sailors and thus possessors of that mix of optimism and fatalism necessary and common to veteran seamen but the crew of the Devastator also placed their confidence in a darker charm than mere luck for His Lordship was personally aboard.

While it was true that Lord Vader’s presence on any voyage brought constant if unconsidered anxiety to officers and crew alike… in capricious-seeming wrath he had been known to strike his own officers dead on the spot for inefficiencies of action and was whispered to have once flung a sailor overboard for whistling a snatch of a Spanish tune…. as a company his men all held universally to the superstition that the Dark Commander would not die until the Devil himself came to fetch him.

While his shadowy form walked their decks they feared no earthly storm or human battle.

Captain Jared Montferrat made his way to the storm-swept bridge despite the attendant risks, hand upon the rail to hold himself upright in the wind and moving the hook that held his own line as he walked. Under such conditions it would have been more prudent or at least more within the normal order of command to have relayed instructions and taken report upon the change of watch through messengers yet he went up and across the pitching boards himself. His motive for the action was tripartite, comprised from a wish to gauge his ships course with his own eyes, a desire to present himself as a man of both meticulous care and physical courage in the regard of his commander and lastly because… though he would never have said so aloud…. the danger of crashing wave and heaving deck seemed to him far inferior to that of events unfolding below.

The helmsman, Mr. Barris, took the place of his predecessor Mr. Teatree in the harness and held the mighty ship’s course bravely, keeping her straight yet angled slightly into the wind. The helm’s skill was tested for this Florida storm was a strange one.
The first loads of Governor Tarkin’s indigo cake were brought out the Inlet from the plantation up the Mosquito River yesterday on the morning’s tide on tolerable seas. The cargos were efficiently ordered in the holds and the central lockers and powder magazines carefully re-located to accommodate an anticipated load of explosive to follow at late afternoon.

Yet then something had seemed amiss almost from the start.

In defiance of his regular habit Lord Vader emerged from his stateroom in full daylight to stand upon the decks.

*Captain Montferrat of course studiously avoided the impertinent and dangerous error of anticipating his commander’s thoughts on any matter beyond his set of orders or subscribing “habit” to even the most regular of actions.*

Even as the cargo was handed up and stowed, His Lordship watched the tossing transport boats and seemed to scan the horizon restlessly.

*Perhaps some subtle change in the wind had drawn their dark Commander’s supernatural attention?*

Whatever their trigger His Lordship’s orders to Montferrat after the transport boats returned for their second load came swiftly and the captain relayed them without question: Sails were changed and lowered to be readied for storm blowing out from shore. The anchor was lifted and the ship moved back to slightly deeper waters.

Thus readied the Devastator now rode the gusts of wind raptor-like, rear sails and lower courses down and storm sails up on the tops sails and jib courses. The helmsmen would have hard work to hold position but the winds, though variable and dangerous, at least blew them out from the shore not toward it as was every seaman’s nightmare.

At worst it seemed that “Northwest tossing” as Second Gunnery Officer Bolvan called it might unavoidably occasion a day or two of delay in picking up the cargo.

Wind from this direction being the exception in these waters at this season the cold squall would be expected to pass quickly.

The sound of the bells were near-swallowed by the wind. His inspection done and orders checked Captain Montferrat made his way back, hand to the rail again, with his aides struggling behind him toward and into the central cabin where his first officer waited. Only the safety lights were fixed high. They dimmed with the rolls but stayed lit.
“How stands it, Lt. Corssin?” He requested as the falling boy removed his coats and shook the rain from his hat.

His officer saluted. “All rigged sir. Bolvan says the chains hold.”

_They had damn well better sir_, Monferrat thought but forbore to say.

_He had served aboard the Vengeance in his youth and knew what happened when one of the mighty cannon broke loose in a storm, sliding across decks to smash her own hull or cause a half-ton change in weight that turned a ship wrong way to a wave despite the helmsman care. A crew of 200 and 150 lost. As one of those 50 he did not forget._

“How is his Lordship presently…?” Montferrat began, but one of Lord Vader’s own black-coated guard appeared in the doorway behind him in dripping oilcloth cloak dyed sable to match. Braced against the frame the fellow blocked the wind for a moment.

“Captain Montferrat. Lord Vader is in his stateroom at present,” the man intoned, ”and expects reports on the status of the search before the end of this watch. Any artifacts found are to be brought to him at once.”

_To say he had a ship loaded with cannon armament and a hull half full of indigo to man in storm was not only pointless to point out but suicidal._

“At once,” Captain Montferrat bowed as well as unsteady footing allowed and the fellow vanished out again. The wind returned and with it a wash of water across the boards from the decks.

“Sir,” Corssin, said, sotto voice, “There is no way to keep searching until the sea steadies.”

_Are you ready to take command this very hour Master Corssin? he might have asked, for if I relay such an opinion to His Lordship it is more than likely you will have to._

“You have your orders. Master Corssin, find Master Forth. Take two of your men below with a lantern again and work your way to the holds and back on your knees if you must. Report to me within this two hours”

In the dim light of the tilting room, the lieutenant saluted and Montferrat made his way toward his personal cabin.

They stood at peril of their own lives yet not one of them had the slightest idea who or what they searched for, not even whether it was mortal or spirit.

~

Admiral Tarkin….being _presently styled Governor Tarkin_… had departed for shore three days ago
accompanied by his personal guard of assassins, courtiers and bureaucrats and they were given orders to stand outside the Inlet and make arrangements to take on cargo...some portion of which requiring careful rearrangement of the powder stores within the magazine.

It was that very morning of the 12th that the Master at Arms brought to Lt. Corssin and Lt. Corssin to Captain Montferrat the first of the mysterious “ribbons.”

A sailor had found the tattered scrap of orange-scarlet silk... no larger than a fingers-length... caught upon a nail on one of the gunnery hatches.

Had it been found anywhere else Montferrat might have dismissed it as some mislaid sentimental token or trophy and considered cutting the crew’s rum rations as a reminder of order but the next day two more narrow piecings of the identical cloth and shade were brought to his attention by the now-puzzled Master Forth. One had been found lying between the pewter plates in the officers mess at noonday dinner and another some hours later caught upon hoop of a barrel on the fore-deck.

Such pranks would have rated flogging aboard a mastered vessel of any navy of the world but here spoke of an almost suicidal divergence from discipline.

“I have ordered a search of the men’s lockers sir,” Master-at-Arms Forth charged with the maintenance of order aboard looked fully at a loss, “nothing of the like could be found.”

Upon the 13th another faded-but-still-bright silken rag was found pinned on the ladder to the lowest hold and another hidden a keg of limes by the ships cook.

Lord Vader did not usually attend the meetings of the officers but on this occasion in expectation of the arrival of Governor’s men with the first load of the apprised cargo he appeared in the captains cabin to hear the report of Master Boatswain Vicks and Master Gunner Dorn with regard to the disposition of and rearrangement of the ships stores to accommodate the incoming cargo. The Officers stood at once, and took their seats again only when Lord Vader waved his hand and slowly took the seat at the head of the table that Captain Montferrat had immediatly vacated for his use.

Master Vicks dutifully brought round and opened the ledger-book he kept mapping by diagram the careful packing and accounts of the present stores.

As he did so the torn strip of scarlet orange cloth revealed itself, laid across the page like the ribbon marker in a maidens prayerbook.

Lord Vader stood, knocking the chair backward most abruptly.

In that instant the flame of the glass lamp upon the table went out. Montferrat experiences a sensation like that of a burning blow across...nay within...his chest and found that he could no longer draw breath. Reaching reflexively for his throat he gasped for air that seemed to have vanished, sucked bellows-like from the room. His free hand clawed for the support of the table-top and through his dimming vision he saw the other men similarly suffocating soundlessly like sea creatures pulled from their place of nature.
Jared Montferrat heard something like a thin piercing scream...as of some animal enraged or in terrible pain...but his ears rang so resoundingly he could not tell whether the sound came from within himself or outside.

Then the suffocation ceased and the wick flared again. Captain Montferrat drew a gasping breath and coughed as his vision cleared. *He found himself incongruously proud that he had not fallen.*

Dorn was on his hands and knees and Lt. Corssin and the other officers no better disposed than he. The ledger book had closed of its own accord and Lord Vader stood at the end of the table with the scrap of cloth lying across his gloved hand. Even as Montferrat and the others watched the bright silk curled in open flame and burned to ash on the black-gloved palm.

“Search the ship,” their Commander said, “Find her.”

The first transport boats came with Governor Tarkin’s cargo and it was loaded and stored with care even as teams of men searched the Devastator from prow to stern, down into the very lowest holds and the rearranged magazine beneath the waterline. If the mysterious “her” they were sent to find was flesh and bone they found no sign of a stowaway. The wind came up even as the crew waited in expectation of a second and more volatile shipment.

They held position as long as they could even as the wind shifted hard and the surf drove them back in the expectation that the transport ships would appear before the storm coming from inland could fully engage but if lubberish sailors of the Plantation left their docks they did not clear the Inlet in time.

Master Forth speculated as that as the fellows who had sailed the first transports and handed up the crates from shore looked to be were Provincial brutes, doubtless serving the the cause of His Holiness’s Empire for coin and just as likely had neither the skill or the stomach to take even a small boat out in such seas.

Lord Vader ordered, almost distractedly it seemed or perhaps resignedly…*Captain Montferrat was too well-trained to dwell upon any discernment of his superiors purpose or tone.* …the Devastator’s rigging for storm.

~

As he had known it would, the near-crawling search in the dark and wave-washed warship yielded no more than the one undertaken in calmer daylight had.

Without choice Captain Montferrat drank down the last ration of good brandy that remained in the silver flask held in his personal locker, donned his drier uniform coat, adjusted the cravat and georgette at his throat and went to meet his fate.
Montferrat held to the doorframe of the state room against the pitch of the vessel into the wind but his commander seemed to hold himself upright by the strength of only his one mortal hand against the polished wall. The blank masked visage faced away from the door and it would have seemed he looked out the bolted casements into the dark rain and wash of waves had there been sufficient light to see anything without.

“My Lord,” Montferrat said. He allowed himself only the vanity that his voice did not shake and the hope that the blow would be swift when it came. “The search for an intruder has provided no result so far.”

“Ég sá dauða konur koma inn í herbergið, ríkur klæddur. Í höndum þeirra héldu þeir sverð og í augum þeirra…” Lord Vader intoned without turning. “Very well. Bring me the others when you find them.”

“My Lord..?”

“There will be two more… there were never more than nine,” the masked man said, his voice loud enough to be heard over wind and the creak and rattle of the ship around them but as always save for those times when it snarled in anger, curiously flat, devoid of emotion.

“After the eighth is found she will show herself, likely near dawn or in mornings light and I will face her then, alone.”

Chapter End Notes

An 18th cen sailing ship.....hell, ANY sailing ship is a godawful place to be in a storm.

Ég sá dauða konur koma inn í herbergið, ríkur klæddur. Í höndum þeirra héldu þeir sverð og í augum þeirra… = I saw dead women coming into the room, richly dressed. In their hands they held swords and in their eyes...
(@ Old Norse)

(from a scrap of an Icelandic poem that references an appearance by the scary and mysterious Disir.....kind of like a cross between the Valkyries and the Furies)
The Crossing of Bridges: The First Part

Chapter Summary

In which a number of persons with disparate purposes and fates converge. Captain Andor remembers his training and anticipates the actions of his quarry. Director Krennik considers his options and hurries to attempt a hurried crossing of the bridge over the New Smyrna's canals in order to pursue his goal of securing the plans he believes concealed at the Sugar Mill. Mrs. Andor and Mr. Kay follow both men. Ana Fortuna, a woman of New Smyrna, holds onto hope for the escape of others but ill and weak reserves none for herself. Lord Vader's men begin to doubt Governor Tarkin's control of the situation.

Chapter Notes

More people running around in the dark. Also more Cassian internal dialogue

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

just past midnight in the early hours of January 16, 1770

The path West beyond the Overseers Quarters on the North bank of the Great Canal
Cassian Andor’s initiation into the skills and mysteries of the assassins craft had begun at the same stage of life most boys begin apprenticeship. As near as he could reckon his own age he must have been near eleven.

Had Señora Tano marked him out as possessing some natural skill earlier, he sometimes wondered. Had it been in Madrid or even earlier when Mr. David Draven first brought him to her tutelage along with several of the half-grown children who ran as the Alliances couriers and “pequeñas aves” on the docks and crowded streets of Europe and her provinces.

If so what was the nature of the choosing? Was it merely a matter of noticing one child’s good vision and another’s steady hand or was there some more arcane sign or birthmark that allowed a practiced eye to glance upon a particular boy or girl and say, “This one a sailor. This one a thief. This one a killer?”

She was gone now, he could not ask her.

Your training exercises were famously devilish, Señora but even you would have appreciated this one.

Rain, darkness, open and unfamiliar ground, the possibility of pursuit, a constraint of time and most vexing, a quarry unknown to him.

She had trained them at first with pictures. He remembered one of a bearded santo sitting at a high desk writing in a book while a lion lay on a rug below his feet like a sleeping dog with a tail between its front feet. The old man was bald and looked somewhat cross, as if his head hurt, though the lion seemed almost comically content. Five of them sat in the sunny upstairs room that had served as her classroom and were each in turn given a few moments to look at the small printed page, a woodblock on thin white paper. Rue Melshi, ever the choirboy, had known the name of the saint at once, Jerome, and one of the girls, Laurel James wondered aloud whether the lion was a pet or had simply grown tired while waiting for the peevish old man to finish writing his godly sermon so he could eat him, which made them all laugh. The Señora then put the picture away.

“How many blades were visible?” she asked. The little schoolroom fell silent.

Melshi recalled a swagged curtain in an upper corner while Laurel remembered that there had been bottles on shelves on the wall behind the saint and Derek Zeverain protested that the question must be a trick. Señora Tano only waited with arms crossed until Cassian answered, “Three.”

“¿Dónde?”

A long blade like a machete perhaps, he told her, though the handle was not visible behind the curtain. A pair of shears hung on a hook attached to the wall to the right of the santo and a smaller pair of shears were tucked in place behind a ribbon tacked before the front of the desk.

It was quite impossible from her expression to tell if she were pleased or displeased with his answer but the lady, regal in her violet gown with black hair swept high and capped with lace in the Spanish style, nodded and laid the portfolio away.
"Cassian, quédate detrás después de las lecciones. Tengo trabajo extra para ti.”

“You do not know him!” Mr. Erso had cried as if in pain.

Do I not Sir? Perhaps, but I know his kind and what matters now is not the full measure. I need map him only well enough to find him.

Think now niño tonto, you were taught better than this. What did you see?

The man you are tracking was behind and to your left for most of two grueling hours while your attention was on Tarkin, the viper before you. You kept one eye to Solo as well, for fear that some stumble of his would spoil all before you could make the catch and the measure and movement of the guards had to be accounted for. Through it all Mr. Galen Erso, Jyn’s father and your original target, the secret key to all that unfolded here stood with his back to the wall directly between you. This Krennik, standing to the right of Mr. Erso and sweating at the end of one of Tarkin’s many strings had been the least object of your interest then.... what do you remember now?

Spotless white silk waistcoat and snowy neckerchief, ivory coat.

Though I daresay no longer so spotless Director.

A taste for luxury in clothes perhaps but little else. None of the flush of corpulence.

Tall, near to six feet though in the habit of seeming shorter....obsequiously so when need required.

He would likely use the full length of his stride now.

Active but not athletic. No novice to violence by his own hand but more frequently the choreographer ….that gun had been primed and made ready without Tarkin's men taking notice… than it’s direct practitioner. The plantation’s Director was clearly capable of reining strong impulse, evidenced by what must have been a wait of two nerve-wracking hours before luck finally presented the opportunity of taking two younger and more conventionally trained killers by surprise...yet the improvident energy of a cornered animal had also been expended in cutting a muscular soldiers throat near to the bone.

That is the trouble with crimes of passion, sir, they exhaust one’s reserves.

By appearance and Rook’s account some years past forty

Director Krennik would likely be hard-pressed to run miles of rough distance at the same pace he set in his first flight from the house. He will need to catch his breath soon.

The sound of bells echoed through several parts of the darkened plantation now. If he could hear it so could this Krennik.

So…please God…could Kay.
So could she.

*He had given her his word that he would not send her away and he had not. Fate had done so. To have said to himself, “This is farewell. I will not ever touch your hand again” or see in her eyes even the shadow of a belief that he could willingly have parted from her would have broken him but this at least he could bear. She would have her father. Mr. Rook would get them to safety and with that hope he could go on.*

Captain Andor was able to make out the path before him only by the change in the feel of the footing and the faint lightness of the shell-stone lip of the canal it paralleled.

*Was it purposeful, after the fashion of the Camino Real in the mountains, edged with white stones so travelers in the pitch-dark roads did not step over the line and tumble into the ravines.*

This place was in its way as terrifyingly designed as any fortress of Empire he had ever been in.

*“The house that was allotted to me is a little way further up this path on this side...and some quarter north of the crossing with the south canal. He may try there, for the sake of thoroughness......he is a methodical man in pursuit of a goal.”*

This hellish place was packed full of methodical men tonight.

Tarkin would be expanding the search even now and if he did not already know “Captain Fuller” and his whole party to have been a ruse he soon would. 

Already suspicious of this Krennik, his Honor would send to those securing him at once. Men were likely at the Directors house already and taking in the grisly tableaux set there. Others had been or would be sent to unquote after Mr. Erso and find him missing as well. This intelligence would be carried back to the Governor himself who, habituated to treachery and murder as the standard means of advancement in rank in his dark army would assume this Krennik to be in league with the intruders and possibly even other forces yet unseen...the new Acting Governor...the French. In his experienced malice he might conjecture the Director to be the author of some meticulously planned usurpation…. a blackly comedic error indeed.

Whatever his shortcomings as a strategist Solo had read this true at least, the waterfront...storage place of the largest portion of the explosive compound and only direct means of escape...would be secured first

Some diversion would likely also be arranged for Lord Vader’s men there for the Governor would be keen to conceal this fatal misprision of his underling from the eyes of his Master’s agent as long as possible.

There was a chance in this confusion for two men...Where are you Kay?....or God forbid even one to reach the courses of this Sugar Mill and set the fuse to Galen Erso’s cleansing fire. He needed to reach this place and get into position as quickly and securely as possible. It was hard to tell the time
in such clouded darkness but his heart told him midnight was near or past.

*Dawn of the sixteenth he had told Melshi. Among the other things he must strain his heart to believe was that the Rogues Venture was out there somewhere.*

He pressed back against the last of the empty darkened cottages and narrowed his thoughts to the most immediate parts of his task.

In their morning march they had been led along well-worn paths that paralleled these marvelous waterways and across a cart bridge over the intersecting canal that ran from North to South, some mile or more before reaching the “town” as those flat yards and household works that surrounded the Mansion house and guards houses.

*“Then he must move up the South Canal, past the tank works … “ Jen’s father had said.*

The “tank works” Mr. Erso described must surely be those barns and buildings they had skirted on the Eastern bank. One as big as any tithe barn with foundations of stone and storied wooden lofts above. Through the open slats had glimpsed shirtless and ragged men stacking rough bundles of sorted green indigo and others tossing it with rakes up into rough wooden ricks. A waterwheel turned by ragged blue-stained men harnessed to spokes had been visible lifting buckets from a sluice of the feeder canal to splash somewhere out of sight behind tall pine-stick fences.

These “tanks” themselves must have been several and linked in lowering sets for they required gravity’s aid to drain…*Kay had been most insistent that Captain Andor understand the basics of the engineering…*and were doubtless arranged under the roofed awnings visible beyond.

Entering an unfamiliar compound in the dark might prove risky diversion but it seemed the best of his poor choices in this moment, possessing the potential for concealment and on this flat ground those upper stories and roofs offered best vantages for sight and sound.

*“…skirt the guardposts and move from that cover to the Mill beyond.. “* had been the rest.

The guards had kept them on the main track parallel the waterway but he had marked small roofed and open shacks paced at regular intervals. These likely passed as “guardhouses,” providing shade and vantage for the plantation guards in daytime. Those considered strategic, like that one at the cart bridge were likely manned even at night, especially given the “Indian alarm” raised earlier in the day.

One way or another both himself and this Director must shift to cross over these canals. Tracking long dark miles back inland to come around through the further fields was a task for which neither of them had the time. The sound bell of bells ringing came again, joined this time by others across and ahead. That post by the cart bridge was manned by guards now alert to some emergency and almost certainly armed.

*He would have given a great deal for a dry windless vantage, good light, a stack of primed French muskets of his own alteration and Kay by his side but such was not the hand fate dealt him here.*
The rain having spent itself in a last burst seemed to slacken now. The clouds which had previously been thick and heavy now seemed to thin in places.

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**Upon the Path South between the Quarters of the Greeks and the Overseers Quarter toward the House of the Engineer**

Taidu Sefla led them up by a narrow way even the preternaturally skilled Mr. Kay would not have found in the dark.

As they moved a sound echoed through the rain, coming from the direction of that weighty pile of Devil’s palace by the docks. A brass bell. Someone was ringing an alarm.

*All hands to stations,* Mrs Andor heard her Olori’s voice. *Je setan, awọn ọmọ ti Okun. Now the race begins.*

They passed behind a few small dark cabins, seemingly unoccupied. In the shelter of one their guide grasped her shoulder and hissed, “Tsaya!” pressing her back prompting Mr. Kay to follow suit.

“There is a person in your father’s house, and it is not himself.”

Ahead perhaps a dozen yards was another small dark building, this one back, facing away from the others. A faint square light shone as in the outline of a window. The dimmed glow flickered and moved as if someone within paced about with a lantern kept low or partly covered.

There were sounds as of furniture being moved. Mrs. Andor felt for the blade in her waistband and would have slipped forward to action despite the strong gnarled hand that held her…*Only one person was within, she was sure of it....* But the echo of the bell rang wetly again through the dark and the dim light vanished there was a sound like breaking glass and the slamming of a door.

It seemed to her rain-stung eyes that she glimpsed a smudge of white moving ghostlike…. behind the dark shape of the cabin, up on the edge of another path.

This time it was Mr. Kay whose arm held her back with the strength of a cold bar of iron.
It later occurred to her that he had not directly touched her person since that long ago day on the streets of London when after lifting her bodily by the back of her cheap checked gown as lightly as a man would grasp fleeing kitten he then flung her to the floor of the waiting wagon, saying in a most workmanlike tone. “You have the good fortune of being rescued Miss. Please cooperate to the greatest degree possible.” At the time she had been too stunned and breathless to perceive whether or not he bowed but knowing him well now felt sure that he must have.

“Fire,” he said firmly and dispassionately and she saw that the flickering light had not in fact entirely vanished but spread an now flickered even more erratically. By action or accident the fleeing stranger had set fire loose within the cabin.

A burning room on cliffs above the Tagus....

“Yar! Yar! He is not here…nothing is here and never was…we must go!” Taidu Sefla cried.

They ran from the burning house and up another path that Sefla knew. Her heart was pounding

Mo $e$ adehun...abami....by my heart and my hand you will take no more from me. Not my father again.....Not my husband.

The rain had faltered again and though the damp ground would slow the flames from spreading far and might even preserve portions of the structure for now the wind through the door only fed the fire. The cabin’s interior and the palm-thatched roof would surely burn.

The black clouds had even begun to break a little in the wind as they ran, here and there tearing open a gap to reveal a scrap of sunlight, or a gleaming corner of the full moon.

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The Stone Wharf

The wet wind blew from inland carrying the smell of smoke to the stone wharf and the riverside
dock. The cause soon became evident. As the rain slackened a fire became visible to Lord Vader’s men as an orange glow, small but unmistakable just inland beyond the Mansion House bounds. Notwithstanding Governor Tarkin’s cool demeanor and practiced authority events had clearly slipped from his command. Practiced shore-seamen as they were they made preparations to depart as quickly as possible despite storm and rough water, with such of the cargo as could be secured from the store on the docks.

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The Sorting Barn, adjacent to the Grinding Works and Lower Indigo Tanks.

“Arribarà l’ajuda, Mama,” her daughter had whispered on the husk mattress they shared.

Some days before Sera tiptoed back from the chapel in dark of night and related Holy Father Campo’s instructions to the heads of the all the families. Of all the desperate souls who had sought escape over these years one had survived and returned with help. A message had been sent by powers that would answer the pleas of the people. Ana Fortuna respected the kind old priest and would not never speak a word that might take this new bright light of hope from her last living child’s eyes, but she had long since ceased to believe that any such power existed on Earth.

…the plantation would come under attack so the priest had told them.

This she could at least believe. The wicked always had enemies. Bandits greedy for the Governor’s wealth? Perhaps the English fought Spain again?

Those who could walk must be ready upon receipt of the sign to run quickly….her daughter whispered.

Run where my Sera? Into forest full of snakes or the rivers of the crocodiles? It is all that I can do to walk to the barn now.

“Hem de fer aquesta mamà. Hem d'intentar-ho.” The little Father had told the people that when the hour came wherever they were must slip away to the chapel as quick as secrecy would permit by the most direct way. The strong must not wait for the weak but must go with such of the little ones, their own or those of others, as were nearby and could be carried. Everyone else would come after with Father Campo he….at this part her daughter’s voice shook...he would not leave anyone behind and
would come afterward with the lame.

*He was a good man, old Yodan Campo, for all that God never seemed to hear his prayers. Perhaps the story was true. Sera believed and that was enough.*

“Sí, Sera. És clar! És clar!” Ana assured her child and made her swear by the Blessed Mother, on her heart and on her father’s grave that to do just as the priest said.

Ana promised to keep her crutches with her and hide them just outside the fence. Her legs had been better lately, she assured Sera, and she could come steadily behind.

She lied of course, but God would surely forgive her.

One day passed and then another.

Juan Cera who had been her husband’s friend came just at sunset on the third night. “El governador ha tornat. Ha de ser aviat.” He told them.

“Tinguéu cura de ella, pel bé del seu pare..” she spoke quietly lest Sera hear.

“Amb tanta cura com si fos la meva pròpia filla,” he whispered in answer.

Sera set out to the fields before dawn in the morning and Ana with the help of the other women slowly made her way to the tanks. The morning passed, they were ordered to fill and mix the upper tanks at double time. This was not usual way of things. The rain of the day before last had freshened the water too much. They should have waited for the it to seep through the stone basins and for the rotting weed in the lower tanks below curdle in a day of sun before laying on more.

Then there came a commotion on the path to the Great Canal. The guards and overseers departed one after the other. A boy came from the barn and whispered to them that the Indes of the forest had appeared again and attacked some of the English and now strangers were passing down the road by the Canal with a great chained savage in clear view.

The guard did not return, but Mr. Denton the overseer reappeared and gave orders that the water wheel be stopped and the men sent to the wharf. The women and boys were harshly commanded to labor on with the raking. Shortly after that man departed as well.

More time passed and finally the women put down their rakes. Lydia Tekla came and helped Ana down from her ladder and but still none of them spoke. Only when Dolores Pellicer appeared on the path that up from the lower tanks did any of them dare to move further. Delores strong woman pulled the rag from her neck and threw it to the ground. Then pointing in the direction of the workers houses, the river bank and the chapel beyond said only, “Ara” before turning to run back behind the fences and between the buildings. One by one each of the other woman imitated her action and flung down the tattered coverings worn to cover their faces in the fumes of the tank and slipped wordlessly away. Lydia Tekla paused and took her arm but Ana only kissed the younger woman’s hand and shook her head.

After Lydia left her all was eerily quiet for a time. The sounds of the rakes and grinding stone, the voices of people, carts on the path and the scrape of the barges on the stone sides of the canal had all
stopped, not even the birds cried out. The clouds covered the sky and the wind blew harder.

Ana Fortuna, widow of Bartolomeo Fortuna the woodcarver, half-limped, half-crawled to where her crutches were hidden by the fence and considered the best place to settle herself to wait for what would come.

She would believe that Sera and the others had escaped and were all free. Perhaps if spared long enough she would make her way to the chapel, or perhaps not. Either way she would not trouble the old priest for the Rites. She would go to God willingly with all her sins still on her for she had a bone to pick with Almighty and Devil alike.

Beneath the awning of the sorting barn was a stack of coarse mats used to drag the bundled indigo leaf from one side of the floor to the other so Ana crawled between leaf-strewn rugs and lay down to rest. Strength of Will alone had held the trembling of fever at bay this last day and now at last she needed to be strong no more.

Thunder woke her and the wind that lifted the palm leaves lashed to the beams carried rain again. it was dry under the awning and the mats so she remained where she was.

It seemed to her that she heard bells as well and thought she must be dreaming.

*Strong and fair and just eighteen she had carried bread from her father’s taverna to the workers in the yard of work set up by the basilica, food ordered by the masters for the men rebuilding the chapels. Eleven times the bells rang as she laid out the covered baskets in a row and when she looked up to see a young man in a worker’s smock with arms as strong as any hero smiling down at her.*

How much more time passed before she realized that someone or something else moving through the barn?

Aching, weary but still alive and because alive curious, Ana tried to peer out.

A shadowed figure of a tall man moved around the empty floor. It was hard to see but it seemed to her that she did not know him.

“L’home ets real? Què fas aquí?” she whispered. That startled him and he turned. There was something in his hand but she could not make it out and he seemed to put it away inside his coat as he came toward her, peering through the dark as if to see where the voice came from.

“Qui…hi ha?” His Catalan was awkward and had a French accent, like the traders in Ciutadella when she was a little girl.

“Ana Fortuna” she answered. *Why should the dead have secrets from each other?*

He knelt down and found her hand in the dark. To her surprise his fingers were wet but not cold.

More light came through the slats of the walls than had before and it seemed to her that he was young and handsome, but thin, not so broad in the shoulder as her Bartemeo. “Coneixes al meu marit?” She asked him
“No. Ho sento,” he said sadly in his accent.

He asked her if the Director had come here but this seemed wrong to her and she told him so. “No arribarà aquí. Estarà a l'infern.”

“No arribarà aquí. Estarà a l'infern.”

“Sí.” He nodded but told her again that he was sorry and that she must hide.

He covered her back up then with leaves and the corner of the mat and so she saw nothing of what came after, only heard it as a jumble of voices.

There was the voice of the wicked Director and the young man. It seemed to her too that she heard other men and a woman, but they all spoke in English and she was confused and too weary to even be afraid.....

When those voices were gone, or at least faded away, and Taidu Sefla of all people came and found her. “Sortiu Ana,” the old African whispered urgently, tugging at her foot and drawing her out of her hiding place “vingui amb mi.”

She tried to protest that she could not walk but that good man did not listen. The African only picked her up and in spite of his bent leg carried her out of the barn as Bartemeo used to carry Sera up the stone steps of the Basilica.

He should not waste his strength on her, Ana tried to tell him but in the end they managed only a little way up and beyond the fence before Sefla stumbled and almost fell. Poor brave soul, he too was so weary as to be almost done, she could see that. Strengthened by sorrow for his distress Ana managed to gather herself to her knees first and held out her hand. “Vine el meu amic. Només hem de ser valents una mica més.” So each helping the other they walked through the dark, unseen and away from the sound of Englishmen running and shouting by the dark Canal. The sound of the gunshots rang out. He began praying quietly in his own language until the fearful sounds continued.They made their way slowly, steadily toward the Chapel where the old priest still waited with his little lamp lit.
What had set off the alarm? How far behind him were they?

The fire in Galen’s house might detour them. He ought have set one in his own but had not thought of it until too late.

Why had the bloody Provincial fallen into the door instead of backwards out of it like a Christian?

The minute’s delay cost in clambering over his groaning corpse was dearly bought.

Where was Erso? There had been no sign of him in the house....did Tarkin’s courtiers have him at the docks? No remedy.

Well, men are fragile creatures. Galen might not last long in Tarkin’s tender care.

His only chance lay in that blue common-place book the Engineer was always scribbling in...it hadn’t been at the house and was never on his clothes when he dressed for the Manor House. Krennik had him watched most carefully. There was only one place it could be. A place the cowardly plantation guards avoided despite all threats or bribes.

To get there he must cross the canals. The risk was high but he had not come so far to be bagged and tossed in that wretched river like an unwanted kitten.

Stop Oren. You’ve slipped the sons of bitches but it’s a narrow rope and a wrong step now will be your last. Invest a moment. Think. Compose yourself and set the plan.

Mr. Krennik moved into the shadowed half-shelter of the nearer barn. The wind still howled but at least the damnable rain had finally slowed. He surveyed his appearance as best he could. Clothes soaked to the skin but the deluge seemed to have washed most of the blood away and the coat he had had the presence of mind to lay aside before the unpleasantness began would cover the rest enough to keep the fools in the bridge post at bay.

He peered through the slatted wall at the guard post down by the gloomy Canal path. A faint light could be seen. Someone had lit a lantern. There was a chance if the men placed at the bridge house there were still his, Tarkin’s people had been set thinly at the wharf and the warehouses. How quickly could they have fanned out in number?

Mr. Krennik shook the water from his brow. Wig and hat gone he felt ill at ease but he had the knife and all he needed was a few minutes to get past....if he moved quickly and brazened it out....

But even as he turned a hand shadows pulled him hard by the shoulder and slid to hold his throat with some strength. In the same instant he felt the point of a knife press firmly to the back of his neck at the very base of his skull.

“Move and I will sever your spine, sir,” an English-accented voice spoke quietly and calmly in his ear. “Your living cooperation will simplify matters for me somewhat but be assured that I can also make use of you dead with only slight inconvenience.”

It took him a moment to recognize the voice.
It was one of the English officers “waylaid” by savages....the dark-haired and noble Captain Fuller….

Damn. Damn. He should have known. Such tragic self-sacrifice…

“Who do you work for? I can pay you....”

“Shhhh..place your hands in your breeches pockets sir and keep them there. You shall help me get across this bridge and past your men and we shall discuss terms of contract on the other side.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, I'm wrapped up in this like the worst knots they ever gave me in Girls Scouts. Oh gosh I’m sorry! It’s a terrible place to end but more will follow I've just got a project due this weeks at work so it's going out in interlocking sections. Forgive me.

If curious about the Senora’s picture:
https://images.app.goo.gl/cqvTaL927oJbmpnu8

pequeñas aves = small birds

niño tonto = foolish child

Dónde? = Where?

Cassian, quédate detrás después de las lecciones. Tengo trabajo extra para ti = Cassian, stay behind after the lessons. I have extra work for you (all Spanish)
Jẹ setan, awọn ọmọ ti Okun = Be/Make ready, children of the Sea/Strength. (Yoruba)

Yar = daughter/female relative (Hausa)

Mo ṣe adehun, abami = I promise, monster. (Yoruba)

Arribarà l’ajuda = Help will come.

Hem de fer aquesta mamà. Hem d’intentar-ho. = We must do this Mama. We must try.

Tingueu cura de ella, pel bé del seu pare.= Take care of her, for the sake of her father.

Amb tanta cura com si fos la meva pròpia filla = With such care as if she were my own daughter.

Sí, Sera. És clar! És clar! = Yes Sera, of course, of course.

El governador ha tornat. Ha de ser aviat. = The governor has returned. It must be soon.

L’home ets real? Què fas aquí?= Man, are you real? What are you doing here?

Qui hi ha? = Who is there.

No arribarà aquí. Estarà a l’infern = He will not come here. He is in Hell.

Coneixes al meu marit = Do you know my husband?

Ho sento. = I am sorry

Vine el meu amic. Només hem de ser valents una mica més = Come my friend We just have to be brave a little more.

(all Catalan)
The Crossing of Bridges: The Second Part

Chapter Summary

In which Mr. Kay, Taidu Sefla and Mrs. Andor also reach the outbuildings of the "tank works" and survey the necessity of crossing over the canals as the plantation rises in alarm.
They are reunited with Captain Andor under circumstances that leave little time for sentiment.
Oren Krennik escapes, for the moment.
Mr. Kay sets in motion a prepared sequence of events that will require of him a noble sacrifice.
Captain and Mrs. Andor, grieving, move toward the Sugar Mill.

Chapter Notes

Ok. Here comes some hard parts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

past midnight in the early hours of January 16, 1770
For the greater share of her life Mrs. Andor had shied from memories of her mother as if from a sharp edge or a heated brand.

*Was this why she treasured her little charm so, she sometimes wondered, Perhaps by making her mothers love into a tactile thing, her childish heart sought to keep it untainted by grief.*

Other fragments of recollection had remained hidden as if behind a canvas painted with images of a dark well with earthen walls and the unfading picture of a pale defiant woman falling lifeless into wet grass. To lift that canvas and look had been beyond her courage until she signed aboard the Rogue’s Venture. Strengthened in these last weeks and months by love and comradeship she found recollections returning like flotsam surfacing from a long-ago wreck.

A memory of her mother brushing and braiding her hair brought tears to her eyes as Captain Andor carefully combed out her tresses to be trimmed with the sharp edge of one of Solo’s pocket-knives.

“Wait,” her husband said, laying his hand upon her shoulder when she had finished tying the cord of her “sailors” queue and made to turn away. “This is too neatly done.”

*Ah, he was right of course… “John” was to have been shot and dragged through the forest for the better part of two days.*

Gently he loosened the waxed string and pulled a few strand askew with his fingers.

The soft almost careless kiss that brushed her neck, just below her left ear had been so quick and yet she felt it still.

Now, here, she understood her young mother’s actions at last, fatal as they had been.

*If Fate sought to make her choose between Captain Andor and her father then Fate could be damned.*

The storm it seemed had finally begun to spend itself, on land at least. Gusts from North and West still blew and inky clouds shredded before them showing bright stars between the scraps of black. A full moon gleamed in a gap that briefly opened and closed again. As Mrs. Andor followed the brave old warrior away from the burning house, keeping back and low against the brush that lined the path between the huts and houses another memory came to her.

There had been a narrow staircase and she was held safe on her mother’s lap. They looked together out a window at the white crescent moon rising in a deepening sky. Momma’s oval, perfect hands held Jen’s tiny ones and showed her how to turn her palms outward and hold the gleaming shape in the curve between finger and thumb. A right hand held the waxing moon and the left it’s waning. A little song was part of the lesson, “Girls and boys come out to play the moon doth shine as bright as day.”

*“Papa says I am a star because I always find the way,” her infant voice said in recollection.*

*“And so you are, my sweet girl., both Papa’s Star and Mama’s Moon. The stars are high and*
constant forever and Lady Moon changes as she must when times demand but she always comes back again to her own path just as strong as ever she was. Together they travel the night and they are never...never either of them...” here had come a squeeze and a kiss, “afraid of the dark.”

Mr. Kay had been most sure that her husband would send Mr. Galen Erso with Captain Solo toward the chapel and the waiting ship beyond and she trusted his judgement.

Get my father to safety Dutchman, and I will take back every curse I ever called down on your boastful head.

Brave Mr. Rook would care for her Papa until she and her husband could reach them at the river or in St. Augustine beyond.

Jane Beatrix Erso Andor knew herself more than the daughter of a woman of intelligence and courage and a man of skill and endurance. She was also a pirate, a soldier, a wife and last survivor of the Onderean.

She would find a way.

She would find a way to find a way.

The Sorting Barn, adjacent to the Grinding Works and Lower Indigo Tanks.

and the Cart-Bridge at the crossing of the Great and South Canal

The cessation of rain brought comfort if no warmth and a gleam of moonlight at last enabled sight beyond a few streaming yards ahead. Unfortunately it also returned fear that their little party’s movements might be exposed.

The alarm rang again. Echoing now from several places the peal begun from the riverbank and shore now sounded nearerby.

Where are you mi esposo?

Sefla led them toward some structures not far from the Greater Canal to seek concealment in the shadowed doorway of an open barn.

Still the bells rang.
“Uncle, advise us. Where is this ọmọ Èṣù going?” Mrs. Andor asked in quiet urgency.

The Hausa man shook his head, “The Governor treats him like a dog. If the plantation is indeed to be closed he must know his time is done but there is no escape that way. It may be that he seeks some last revenge against your Father.”

“The bridge just ahead crosses an intersection of the two canals,” Mr. Kay pointed out. “His choice of direction does not seem random. For whatever reason it seems that he also is attempting to reach this Sugar Mill. Perhaps this Director seeks to make use of the remaining unfixed explosive for some desperate scheme of his own…”

Her fellow soldier tilted his pale head somewhat awkwardly and she felt a surge of something much akin to pity.

Poor Mr Kay. He did not like to speculate. He liked to know.

“If so then his cruelty has driven him mad at last,” Sefla said. “There is nothing but death at the Sugar Mill.”

The same Sugar Mill her Cassian went toward.

Mrs. Andor moved across the dark, empty floor of the place, shuffling through dried bundles of what must be cut indigo leaf to peer through an opening on the other side.

Faint light like that of a fixed lantern could be seen flickering in a small square a distance away….not quite fifty yards perhaps…and must surely mark this “guard post.”

“Two men usually,” she heard Taidu Sefla whispering in answer to some question Mr. Kay had asked.

Across the dark ground she was able now to make out a faint white line of the canal’s stone edge and it’s interruption by the shadow of what must be the dark boards of a simple bridge.

Her eye caught movement as well.

“Kay,” Mrs. Andor hissed, “Someone is down there. Come see…”

The light of the lantern-box moved as if lifted and carried forward.

A voice called out, “Who goes there?

An English voice called back in answer and the sound of it was one she recognized from a thousand nightmares.

The clouds pulled back veil-like from the face of the moon again and the scene brightened to her dark-accustomed eyes almost like daylight.

Two men close together walked toward a small square hut by the stone curb of the channel’s edge. A man in a dark coat...red?…came from within this posthouse and held up his illumination to better see the approachers he hailed.
The one she would know anywhere now, by shape and movement, in the dark or any of his disguises. The other figure, over whose back he seemed to hold loose mat or cloth of tied rags as if he were a servant supporting or shielding his master’s coat from rain, she also knew. Hatless now he still wore a pale coat and scarf….easy to see in the windy moonlight…. Just as he had on the morning he killed her mother.

No.

She did not scream but must have moved for Mr. Kay seized her firmly again, this time by the waist.

“It is a subterfuge. He has a weapon,” the tall man said in her ear, his astonishing calmness altered only by the effort required to hold her back from running, “he is using the villain to get across the bridge.”

No Cassian. No. A knife will not be enough. He is not like other men.

“Damn you are you deaf? It is Director Krennik and one of the Governor’s officers, stand down Mr. Quint,” the devil was saying.

“Sir?” The redcoat sounded confused, “The alarm..our orders…until the all clear.”

“What is that to me?” Captain Andor snapped…he was using his “English” voice, “I have been sent to get the Director to safety.” She made out some other words….something about “escaped prisoners” and “secure…”

He was moving the devil steadily forward, doubtless with a blade at his back and intending to knife him in the darkness once safely on the other side.

The agitated guard lowered the lamp but something gleamed in his other hand, a pistol as her husband surely saw.

From where they stood she could see another figure within the rustic guardhouse, then in what must be a window facing them….invisible to the men on the bridge?….something caught a gleam of moonlight.

There was a third man within and he had a musket pointed.

Mr. Kay must have seen it at the same instant for she heard his sharp intake of breath. He released her with one hand but held her wrist still with the other in a strange bracelet-like grip that held her without quite touching her skin and pointed ahead. The barn cast shadow even in the moonlight, the men’s eyes, accustomed to the lantern nearby might not see them if they moved steadily and in that shade. A series of small carts were standing beyond and with care might allow them to move even closer.

Mrs. Andor nodded and assured that she was now sufficiently in control of herself the pale man let go his grip at last and slipped forward with astonishing silence. She followed him.

They edged their way carefully down toward the small bridge.

“But sir….” the soldier argued still, almost stubbornly confused. “Chief Engineer Erso passed this way but only a short time ago and said that you had sent him to secure the Mill.”
Sefla had been right. The actions of the mad are unpredictable even by the keenest of planners.

The man in white did a thing none of them could have expected.

He let out a bellowing cry and dove sideways at the guard as if he would kill him with his own hands.

Captain Andor lost his grip upon his prisoner.

The redcoat’s pistol fired wild but his fellow in the rushed doorway fired the musket. Her husband dove to safety as the man in white grappled on the ground with the first redcoat, Quint. The second guard tossed raised up a sword. Captain Andor dodged aside again and rolling to draw his own but she was on the fellow already and struck him across the back with the the heavy cook’s blade she had taken from the Governor’s kitchen….as good as many a short cutlass she had handled. When the man fell forward Cassian took him through the chest neatly and brought the blade out clean.

The third man in the guard house had no opportunity to take aim again at either of them for Kay had already pulled him bodily out through the small window and dispatched him by hand.

Along the canal and along shore the bells rang wildly.

Her husband turned, sword still in hand but the man in white was gone and the guard named Quint was dead on the ground.

“¡El hijo de puta se ha ido!” he snarled.

She climbed swiftly to her feet tucking the stained blade back into the soldiers belt she still wore.

“Come, Cassian,” she urged. "They will be on us soon. We must go. We must find him.”

"Maldita sea Kay!” Please sir. There will be time for your anger later.

“You gave her secondary command,” the giant said calmly, “and she ordered me to find you.” He stepped over the bodies carefully and picked up the fallen lantern to peer inside the square shelter.

Taidu Sefla though slower to run than they had followed and now spoke desperately, “He has gone to the Sugar Mill, God forgive him. He must mean to set the fuse there himself. The men carried what was packed away to the Stone Wharf but the rest of the black indigo is still in the vats there.”

Her father. There would be no end to it. She would have shed tears but there was no time

Captain Andor swiftly picked up the fallen pistols.

“Lọ, Uncle, ọwọ ti ọlọrun Ọjọhun: eyi ni ogun wa bayi.” She spoke without thinking and it seemed that Sefla understood for he bowed his head.

“There is a woman in the barn,” her husband told the elder, knowing as she had that this alone would move a man of such noble spirit, “Sick or hurt. Ana, she said her name is, hidden beneath the indigo leaf. Take her and get as far as you can. Save her at least from what will come here.”

Mrs. Andor grasped the man’s gnarled hand and kissed it as Taidu Sefla turned away and vanished back up into the barn with no further word.

“They are coming. Move out!” Captain Andor said, his feet already on the bridge. It was but a flat
wooden cart-track twenty feet or so in span over the canal’s dark water and half as much in width. Mrs. Andor moved quickly into place behind him.

“There are guns stacked in here. Muskets. I see six primed and loaded. No doubt armament against the “Indian” alert… and considerable cartridges…” Kay spoke most conversationally. He had not moved from the guardhouses too-low doorway but had righted and set the fallen lantern at his feet. Stopping to look back she saw that he had hefted a black leather case found within and now opened it to survey the contents. “Yes. Excellent. More than sufficient to distract them here.”

Mr. Kay lifted pale eyes to look at both herself and the Captain. His words made no sense to her but her husband knew his friend’s manner of speech and thought far better than she ever could.

“No, Kay.” He took several steps back toward the guard house.

“Go now,” the giant said firmly. “With the wind blowing hard from this direction the blast from the wharves will be directed mostly out to sea but you must cover ground as quickly as you can. The sluice-gates up stream are closed thus cutting off any fire I might set from reaching Galen Erso’s oil fuse above this level but gravity of flow will have carried it down as far as the wharf and the stores piled there even if ignition cannot reach the Sugar Mill up stream. You will need to set a fuse directly there to ignite the remaining matter and works but pursuit from this side should no longer be of any concern if I am successful.”

“Mr. Kay please come with us,” she begged for the man had not moved.

The tall man only shook his head and reached inside his ragged and muddy waistcoat and drew out something. It looked to be a small twist of cloth.

“I reserved less than a half teaspoons-worth,” he said, “and had hoped to put it to more final strategic use but this cannot be helped now. I am sorry. The time needed for the fire to travel the length of fuse to the waters edge is likely less than eight minutes. When you hear the initial explosion seek shelter or lie flat within that time. You will need to proceed on to finish your portion afterwards and trust the Rogue to complete what remains of the mission at dawn.

“Tim…Tim, no.”

Ah God, his face.

It tore her heart for now she understood fully what Mr. Kay proposed and saw in her love’s eyes not a captain or a soldier in battle but a boy facing the loss of his first and dearest friend.

“Run. You and Mrs. Andor must hurry.”

Voices were audible. Men must be running from the “town” and the waterfront.

“Go, Cassian.” Timothy Kay said and extinguished the lantern.

She pulled at her husband’s arm as for an instant he seemed rooted in place but then he turned and ran with her, stumbling only once. She helped him up and they went on along the path beside the south canal.

The moon hid her face again behind wind-blown cloud though the stars still shone.

A thud of musket fire began behind them.

Careful shots. Well-timed. Deadly but conservative of powder.
She flinched at every crack and knew that he did also but together they kept going.

Then the sound of other guns firing, in different pitch. Less ordered but with greater frequency. How many guns there were she could not tell.

Sefla's measure had made her understand that the distance on to the dreadful Mill was two miles by means of the path. A fall on the dark uneven ground might have undone them but whether by luck, desperate skill or the grace of God they did not fall.

Though the wind was against their faces the sound of Kay's battle still reached them.

Then it ceased.

They both staggered as a sound like cannon roared and the sky was lit behind them in a blaze of a mighty fire....half a teaspoon...she heard him coughing as if choked by pain but he took her hand and they kept forward as their friend had instructed.

Jen Erso Andor counted as she ran.

An Anglican Hymn that the old gunner on the Onderean had used to teach his monkeys how to measure the count between loads despite the fact that half the crew could not understand any of the words,

"Every island, sea, and mountain,
Heaven and earth shall flee away!
All who hate him must, ashamed,
Hear the trump proclaim the day:
Come to judgment,
Stand before the Son of man."

An awful bloody thing oh God how she had hated it and now she could not rid her mind of the wretched verses.

All his people, once rejected,
Now shall meet him in the air:
Hallelujah!
Now the promised kingdom's come!

On the conclusion of last verse she pulled Captain Andor down into the damp grass beside the worn track and laid her arm over his head as if she could shelter him from what would come. A short burst of the gale-like wind blew hard over as if it too sought to protect them.

Portugal. How many alive besides themselves knew enough of such a cataclysm to anticipate its effects? Truly they were part of an elite fraternity.

Now the sandy ground lifted as they lay on and the sky lit up as if with the glow of a fiery dawn. A heartbeat passed before the sound of the explosion came just as it had at Nassau only greater. Her husband turned his face against her shoulder as sand and bits of cinder struck them like pellets of hail.
Chapter End Notes

Scotland the freakin' Brave.

ọmọ Èṣù = son of the Devil (Yoruba)

¡El hijo de puta se ha ido! = The son of a bitch is gone!"
Maldita sea Kay = Damn it Kay! (Spanish)

"Lọ, Uncle, iwo ti bu ọ̀la fun Òlọhun. eyi ni ogun wa bayi. = Go, Uncle, you have praised God. This is our battle now. (Yoruba)
Thunder

Chapter Summary

Following Luc Ceil-Marchuer's optimistic guess that the rising stream would reach the Mosquito at the very Northern border of the plantation. Mr. Bodi Rook attempts to move as many of the escaping captive persons of New Smyrna to safer ground as time, fortune and Providence will enable.

Captain Romodi of the dread ship Devastator realizes that Governor Tarkin has lost control of the situation and falls back up standing orders.

Mr. Rook learns with despair of the failure of their cadre's best-laid plans. Captain Solo is carried to safer ground whether he wishes it or not. The destruction of the dreadful experiment of New Smyrna continues.

Chapter Notes

More bits as we keep rolling. I don't know enough about sailing and describing a bunch of small craft in shallow fast-moving water and....need I mention...darkness here is something I hope is at least vaguely intelligible. I've got some 18th cen Florida maps I'm going to link in at some point.

Our Mr. Rook is working hard.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Smyrna Plantation

British East Florida

evening near to and after sundown

January 15, 1770
On the Pine Creek

and some distance North of the Plantation on the West bank of the Mosquito River

He remembered a desperate young man, the one who had swum out in the moonlight of an outgoing tide with a rope of stolen hemp tied to his waist, pushing a raft of pine…. just as clearly as he could the guilt-stricken and bitter youth who signed the smiling Englishman’s contract in Limasol and the clean-hearted little boy of Izmir who gazed with longing at the white sails of ships and dreamed of adventure even as he hurried on errand for his mother delivering armfuls of blue cloth.

They were distant as people on a receding shore now yet their thoughts and deeds were still as clear before him as a written page.

He felt pity and affection for the boy, despised the youth and with all his heart wished that he could reach back to offer the man encouragement in the trials that lay before him.

Help me now brother, he said to the despairing pilot of the Estella. I am a soldier who seeks to save what he loves even as he stands to strike at what he hates. I need your skill one last time.

Batar Farouk had been a sailor of the Ottoman Ege, the Ara Deniz and pilot of rocky coasts and windy harbors…Marmaris, Datça and Izmir…. but it was the stories of a fabled port he had never seen that that served him in this dark place. The half-deaf old Egyptian would fill trays and platters with gravel and sand, pour in handfuls of sea water and shake them, sometimes one way or another. “Ne olacak evlat?! Ve şimdi ne?!” He would roar. “Bu İskenderiye idi!” The elderly sailor’s ranting of the shifting sands and floods of the Nile while they stood on the sun-baked docks of Rhodes had been a source of much disrespectful laughter among the crew but young Farouk, taught to listen to the stories of elders, knelt and at least feigned attention.

When ordered ashore in this dark place, as far from Alexandria as from Heaven, he saw bars of sand and the eyes of crocodiles in the shadows beyond and remembered.

The few kept alive to man and maintain the Plantation’s boats were seldom allowed to sail out further than the Point, or along the Atlantic coast some few miles from the mouth of the Inlet to taxi the Director in the Estrella to the settlements of the greedy English that lived North and South. They slept aboard on such errands and were watched keenly. Otherwise they worked the barges on the canals and the cargo boats transporting the bailed indigo and infrequent supplies in and out to the waiting English ships. These he was sometimes even sent to board and pilot in through the treacherous Inlet, though under strict order to speak no English when he did do.

The work required more skill than the murderers had originally credited in their plans. Fierce day-long storms swept past or struck outright from the South and East in late summer and autumn bringing tides that violently altered the opening and depth of the Inlet and shape of the barrier islands. Heavy rains in some years brought man-high floods of fresh water down through the inland swamps
to re-write every map of the greater Rivers in the course of hours.

Rook, as the Englishmen called him, seemed to divine the main channels and sluggish waterways for some two or three winding miles, and the shifting unmappable sands of the Inlets mouth to the sea after such storms with a prophetic skill that gave him value so they kept him alive, one season to the next and the next beyond.

*God forgive him.*

This little boat he had christened the Rogues Heir on impulse moved swiftly ahead on the pushing current, through the narrow channel scraping the trees and brush. With water rising at such a rate the Falcon herself might not be far behind. He had shouted instruction to the French boy to not follow him directly but keep to the deeper center way that opened before him. The wind was rising and at this season the clouded sky would bring dark very soon. If the Falcon could press through to the main course of the Mosquito River while there was still light Luc could endeavor to hold her there. Mr. Rook determined boldly now to bring the shallow keel of this craft in to the very Plantations edge on this new-risen smaller rivulet. By means of this small maneuverable sail, he could then turn to rejoin her with….God willing….passengers and point a way for those who must follow, lest the rising waters trap them before…..

From his right, amidst the shadow of trees on the Southern bank came a sound so unexpected it froze his hand on the line.

A voice was singing loud and cheerfully above the wind…

Qīng qīng zǐ pèi, yōu yōu wǒ sī.

Zònɡ wǒ bù wǎnɡ , zǐ zhù bù lái?

*Burada neler dönüyor??*
“The people will come soon!”

Mr. Imway called out to him from the edge of the swelling stream. “I spoke with some children I think... but they seemed to have found my appearance alarming and ran away.” “I cannot think why, sir” nearly came to Bodi Rook’s lips but he managed to restrain the comment. “All is well though. They will carry word back and any wise elders with them will know from their report to bring the people this way.” He reached out his hands and Mr. Rook threw a rope which the blind man caught nimbly and began to pull some distance back to strongly secure to a deep-rooted oak well up the shrinking bank. “Throw me another,” he said, when this was done, “the water is rising and we must hold here for them.”

The time in which he might have wondered at unhesitatingly tossing anchor lines to a blind man had long since passed.

Dark weeping clouds smothered the sky and the showers of rain, intermittent before, now came down in great earnest. Still the blind man stood patiently with head bowed, leaning a little on the peeled branch he used as a staff while Mr. Bodi Rook remained on the Heir.

After some time figure came toward them, hard to make out in the storm but not from the direction of the Plantation.

On the deck Mr. Rook reached under the rail for the cutlass, though what he would have done with it God alone knew.

Mr. Imway only laughed and called out through the rain “Are you wet my dear?”

“Blind and a fool! You know damn well I am soaked to my bones!” Came Papaz Malbus hoarse shout. “I might as well have swum here and if the shiny boy cannot keep that little sloop near to the bank by all those hooks he tossed we will all have to swim.”

“Did you bring my pack?”

“I did.”

The line was pulled taut. Mr. Bodi Rook feared to fully disembark lest it break and the shallop be lost, but he could see the two men some yards away from him in the gloom by the white of their shirts. Baze Malbus wore a pale scarf over his black hair and passed something over his shoulder to his fellow. It seemed to Mr. Rook that he carried something else as well...his crossbow. Together they three pulled the Rogue’s Heir up against what had been a shallow rise but three hours before and was now the bank of a rushing stream.

Papaz Imway’s head turned as if searching for some sound. “If you have a lamp that will hold in this wind, light it my son,” he called out, “It is time.”
The tinderbox he had taken from the Falcon was inside the small covered hatch, hung beside it was a plugged horn filled with punk and ash. He laid his hand against it… the ember within from their last fire was still warm, praise God. Blocking the wind as best he could with his body and arranging the covered lanterns he opened the horn and held a match to the coal within. He managed one lantern, fixed it and then tried another. A second match guttered in the wind but he tried a third and succeeded.

*If the men of the Plantation saw them they would all die surely but the time for such fear was also past.*

“Here, here!” Malbus grabbed at the side of the boat and reached for one tin-sided lantern.

The light showed out through the pierced holes like flickering stars. The other glass-sided lantern Mr. Rook held up.

*Was that the sound of a crying child or the wind?*

Lightning flared and dimmed their little lesser light for an instant and he saw the people in it’s flash. Women, bare-headed and ragged, grey heads and small ones. How many he could not tell from so brief a revelation.

“Come!” Mr. Imway was calling, as he moved forward reaching for hands in the darkness. “Ela apó edó! This way!”

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**The Officers Barracks**

*midnight and just after January 16, 1770*

His watch finished Captain Hurst Romodi of the Devastator followed his guide through the gusting dark toward the shelter of a whitewashed barracks, this no doubt being the nearest of those allotted for the rough comfort of the plantations guards.

After removing his black oilcloth coat and shaking the rain from it just within the door, the captain hung the garment on a peg just within the unpainted pine door among dripping coats of a half dozen of the Governors’s men.
“Where is the rest of the damned food?” the officer he had accompanied, one Captain Versey, called out as they entered the dimly lit room. A half dozen of the Governors men sat drying their boots before a low hearth.

“Calm yourself Signore,” from a fireside chair one of his fellows answered in the drawl of Carolina, “and show some consideration for your fellows sleeping above. There is bread and cheese and rum on the table. Sufficient for a very late supper on such a vile night. No doubt the Greek women have been washed away in the storm with the rest of what was sent for. Mr. Teak, pour Versey and this noble officer rations.”

He caught Corporal Cass’s eye. The twitch of an eyebrow was the only commiseration Cass exhibited.

Aboard Lord Vader’s flagship even so much comment as that would have been marked as fault but in this circumstance it could be overlooked as shared and general description.

The bloody Provincials had grated on Captain Romodi’s nerves since the now-distant-seeming dry light of late morning but Corporal Cass having disembarked with the Governor’s main escort before dawn had doubtless already suffered several more hours of American wit wrapped in Continental velvet.

Stern discipline of body and mind was the mark of the men chosen to wear the black of his Holiness’ fleet and it’s display expected of them in all matters and conditions. Commander Morlok had taken occasion to lecture the six of them particularly with regard to this mission at the drop of anchor three days previous.

The authority of the Governor and his officers was to be yielded to in all dealings with the Plantation Guard and any Provincal English they might encounter as well as in the use and disposition of the various Greek and African slaves. Good order was to be maintained despite any provocation.

“I served under Governor William Tarkin when he held the rank of Admiral in the Tripoli campaigns and while I will not presume to boast of particular knowledge I assure you any presentation of carelessness or over-affectation of manner that you may observe on the part of himself or his personal guard is but that, presentation. They keep silver daggers up those lace sleeves and lack neither the training nor the discretion to use them. You shall, of course, make note of and report upon your return of any treasonous behavior, speech or importunement to yourselves among his men but otherwise leave them to their peculiar business.”

Captain Romodi had experience with the grey coats of His Holiness Army, or their twin brothers-in-arms at any rate.

In Venice they wore yellow and served under the command of Admiral Thuran, the cool foreign tactician said to be Russian by the few who would venture an opinion. The landsmen’s capabilities with musket were renowned on the field as was their skill with pistol, sword and dagger in other action. Romodi knew them to be well-ordered when under the eyes of strict commanders, but off leash their officers preened and jockeyed for rank and favor as if for the prize in a cockfight.

Admiral Thuran had allowed and affected to take perverse enjoyment in such sniping, stating often in company that he found it a useful winnowing to sort out the weak. Romodi’s never-to-be-shared impression was that Admiral-now-Governor Tarkin, though of a more admirable military bent, espoused similar tools of management.

Thus when Commander Morlok paused in his first instruction Captain Romodi waited, displaying no
ouward sign of expectation, for the “unless” that would surely follow.

“Unless, “ Cmdr. Moluk continued, “…direct signs of disorder should be evidenced and are judged by your own ranking officers…” in this case himself and Captain Tagg, “…to be beyond your ability to contain or to imperil either secrecy of the mission with regards to non-aligned forces or the security of this ship. The Lord Vader makes particular point that should such be discerned you yourselves shall take action to secure as much or as little of the cargo of experimental black powder as can be conveniently handled and return to this ship at speed for report and further order.”

His corporal rose with the two junior provincials when he entered, as befitted his rank, and Romodi lifted his hand in a gesture such as would construe as acknowledgement of the salute and signal to his inferiors to retake their seats. Among the crew of the Devastator though the lifted two fingers conveyed an additional message. We must speak.

“I see these good officers have seen well to your disposition Corporal. Are Bast and Ulwren berthed above?”

“No sir, I believe they have sought shelter nearer the wharf.”

“Our men from the docks have commandeered the sailors barracks,” Versey informed him smoothly. “There are a half dozen of the Plantations boatmen still breathing but they can bundle in with the Directors motley guard for a night or two or else sleep in the rain with their Greek wenches. Your men will have dry shelter there until dawn or the weather clears and your other officer will no doubt will be treated well in the Mansion House guardroom.”

The Devastator’s men were being kept separated, likely to keep them out of sight of some action.

Do you think us blind landsmen? Even if we were, do you think your walnut shells will hide anything from Lord Vader?

They had been dispersed on Governor Tarkin’s order when the wounded English soldiers appeared with their Indian prisoner. In twos among the Governors men, to guard the House and His Honor’s person and the shipments being loaded on the docks. Captain Tagg though had in passing given him a hand signal in the private code of the Devastator, Keep an eye open. Something is amiss.

“Così è, Caporale,” he said now, taking his seat in one of the armed chairs near the grated fire and taking the cup of rum Versey offered him, “L’amico è come’ ‘o ‘mbrello: quannno chiove nun o truove maje.”

Be ready to assemble.

He sought through his mind for means to obtain some discourse with Tagg but before he could draw more than the rough outline of a plan, fate intervened to provide impetus and opportunity most forcefully.

A bell, rang stoutly through the water-soaked night and all the men leaped to their feet.
Five seconds, then a pause, another sharp peal, single, stilled after.

“The Manor House!” Versey shouted. Above in the loft the handful of sleeping men could be heard scrambling into boots and toward the ladder. One of the other greys bellowed commands, ordering his men out by name and thus called they swiftly passed back weapons from the wall and exited with admirable order, claiming coats from the door as they did....some to the Manor House perimeter, others to the wharf and yet others to an armory beneath the mansion. Romadi stood and Captain Versey’s eye fell upon him with a flicker almost of dread, though the officer swiftly recovered. “You and your man, to the wharf with Lt. Deihl,” he indicated one of the greys already buckling sword and in motion. “You must guard the cargo at all costs.”

*Oh aye. That we shall, Captain Versey,* he thought and moved out the door into the rain again with Corporal Cass at his heel.

*Tagg must make his own way, for he knew their orders. Bast and Ulwren would surely now be sent toward the wharf as well and four of them should be enough if it came to that.*

*They would take the smaller and more surf-worthy boat with as many of these crates that had been designated their priority as could be lashed in securely.*

*This storm would spend itself by dawn or before or he was no sailor.*

*The Inlet was treacherous but once away they could shelter within the nearer mangle rafts until the storm lessened and or enough light returned to let them clear the bars. Outside and on the open sea they would likely be running with the wind. Ulwren was from the Faroes and had doubtless sailed round-bellied boats in worse waves. One way or another they would head to the Devastator.*

*If leaving a few of the Governor’s men with holes in the back those fine brocaded coats was necessitated in order to follow Lord Vader’s orders so be it.*

The bells of the Plantation continued to ring and Captain Hurst Romodi of the Devastator marked the wind-whipped torches at intervals along the path way the and lights now lit in Governor’s Mansion House as he ran.

______________________

**On the Pine Creek**

*and some distance North of the Plantation on the West bank of the Mosquito River*
Late upon January 15

and near to midnight and past into the early hours of January 16, 1770

The crossbow fired a bolt tied to a strong rope across in the dark and by some miracle it fixed firm enough to some unseen tree to old. A second line was fired and then a third.

Mr. Rook and one of the New Smyrna people, a strong-armed Minorican woman and several blue-stained youths, managed by means of pulling and pushing with the pole to work the small boat ferry-like across the current to the further shore with some ten persons aboard. Once safe those ten began to aid others. The stronger did not wait for the boat but waded into the rising current holding the ropes and pulled themselves or were pulled across to safety by means of the ropes. The wilderness path beyond was dangerous but distance from the plantation for the greatest number with whatever speed could be managed was now his desperate goal. To those who climbed off he threw several of the bundles of hides, ordering them to wrap feet and move forward on their own toward the higher drier ground North, trying not to become separated in the dark.

Baze Malbus lifted children and the less agile up and Mr. Rook helped them over the rail to stand or huddle on the open deck of the shallop boat. No more than ten at a time, could be risked and took more over that way. Then he went back for more of those numbers who continued to gather. Ten trips he managed. One hundred souls. That many again or please God more made it through the dark water by means of the ropes.

Malbus led yet others down to the place on River’s near bank not far away where Luc Ceil-Marchuer managed to hold the Falcon. The sloop was packed with nearly thirty. too small or battered to risk the current or standing on the open shallop. The boy threw the lines and made shift to work the baggy sails and straining rudder against the action of the water and set his passengers on the solid bank of shore some distance North before racing back. They worked tirelessly in the rain. He did not measure his weariness and he did not count the mostly silent people.

The sound of a man cursing loudly in Dutch could be heard in the wind even before another lightning flash showed him the remainder of the crowd parting like water from a towering figure running toward.

“Zet me neer, jij heidense klootzak!”

Rook held the light high and saw that Khaeuri’s burden was Captain Han Solo. The heathen Mate
dropped his protesting former commander down as if he were a sack on the sodden stream bank.

“Na te Wairua i korero ki a au kia ora koe, e tamaiti, a ka mahi ano ahau. Whakarongoa!”

Solo’s face was bruised and bleeding and his clothes.....no longer the British uniform Rook had last seen him wear but some other suit, all was torn and mud-soaked despite the glint of silver brocade at one battered sleeve.

“Where are the others?” Mr. Rook cried, his heart shaken. “Where is Mrs. Andor? Where is the Captain?”

“The woman’s damned father hit me....” the Dutchman shouted, holding a hand to his battered head, “This vervloekt bal van haar dragged me here,” Solo staggered to his feet and looked up at Rook, his expression one of great distress, “We thought she was here...with these wretches...there was a priest who carried her off when they frog-marched us to that bloody mansion-house.”

One of the Minorican women stepped forward, a half-grown girl he had seen lifting the younger children onto the boat, and spoke in ragged English.

*It seemed to him he knew her face but could not call forth a name. Likely he had never known it.*

“She wore mans clothes? That woman went back...back with Oncle Sefla and the Archangel ....she went to find her husband.”

*No. No.*

“Where is Captain Andor?” But the girl did not know.

“They go toward the fire,” Chirut Imway said sadly, “as he would not leave her, she will not leave him.”

Solo struggled to get past his mighty companion but Khaeuri held him back as if he were a child. “Damn these virtuous cats! The Captain went off to set a fire. The old man has packed a Sugar Mill with this hellish stuff and means to light it off.”

A sound like a moan came from the people gathered in the dark. Few knew much English beyond the orders and pronouncements of the guards but that name was known to most of them.

*The black indigo was ground and finished there, some few miles inland and up the South way. Mr. Rook had never gone further back than the bridge over the joining of the two main canals but the Sugar Mill was a dreadful place, even the guards would not go near it.*

Mr. Malbus voice roared through the dark and rain. “The boy has gotten some of these souls to the far side. One more load perhaps we can manage but those sails are more than we can manage alone in this wind even with ropes.”

Solo’s head snapped back, “The Falcon? He’ll swamp her trying to go against this current by rudder alone. What the bloody hell is he doing to the sails?”

“Silence!” Mr. Imway shouted and for a moment everyone, even Solo and his growling Mate, the
terrified people obeyed. Even the wind seemed to die back. A sound carried from with and Bodi Rook strained to hear it. He could not be sure…

“Vrycházo,” one of the Greek boys said.

The bells of the Plantation...rung to call in for the loading of the ships, to assemble the people for some announcement or public punishment, to warn the guards of an unidentified ship seen on the River, the sighting of a lion or bear near the farms or Indians in the forest....now a distant echo in the storm. Repeating.

*They know we are here.*

*There is no more time.*

He stood at the mast of the restless little boat as if struck to stone in one of the stories the long-lost boy’s Aya had told until a voice beside brought him to awareness that Chirrut Imway had climbed aboard and stood beside him.

“You have kept your promises Messenger. It is not in our hands to help them now. Take this last company,” The man gestured toward those gathered on the bank, “Young woman, tell the people, those who are strongest, and tallest must cross this stream as best they can, that we go with God and God goes with us. Captain Solo! This battle is not over and your path lies ahead not behind. We will lead you to where your ship lies.”

“By “we” he means me, Dutchman,” growled Baze Malbus. “Come. We have our orders it seems.”

Despite the gruffness of his tone it seemed to Mr. Rook that the scarred hand laid on the captain’s shoulder was not ungentle. As he turned, urging on more who had found their way to the bank, mostly the men of New Smyrna now, sent quickly hither by their Minorcan priest they said, when the transports were halted by the storm. He could not be sure in the gloom how many of them there were.

The monk seemed to wipe his eyes, perhaps from rain. Khaeuri pushed Solo toward the Riverbank and the waiting Falcon.

The storm was passing. A gap of moonlight shone through the clouds above.

Ten of those women who still stood on the bank up made their way now up into the small boat. One reached to the girl who had spoken, who seemed to pull away, as if still looking back.

“Vine Sera, no pots esperar més. La vostra mare us diria que aneu..”

The girl nodded, as if numbed with grief and allowed herself to be lifted.

The sound of bells, faint but still repeating came on the wind.
Mr. Rook made better use of his sails now, seeking to get nearer to the main channel of the River. Storm, tide and wind were at cross purposes and the wider water, though choppy, gave him less battle now than it would have an hour before. There was a place he headed for, a hillock that might now still be firm ground near the River’s edge, all the while praying the lessening of the rain and lightening sky would help him find it.

If he could leave these women there there was still a chance….some plan half-formed in his mind of heading back, of finding them.

Then there cam a booming sound….cannon? ...and for a piercing moment something like hope came to him in the thought that it was the Rogue’s Venture, that by some miracle of God Lt. Melshi and the crew were come.

But of course that could not be.

The women in the boat cried out and the tall one called out “Foc!” and pointed back toward the Plantation.

Cowardly boy, he chided himself. Do not lie to yourself.

There had been explosions at the plantation though the crewmen and the larger share of the workers had always been kept well away from “trials.”

Survival demanded ignorance, this was a lesson each and every soul of New Smyrna knew to their bones, but sometimes the smaller less valuable barges were taken up the small streams into the windless forest and not brought back. Always these requisitions came after heavy rain to lessen the risk of wildfire in the forest. The people would sometimes hear a rumble, like summer thunder from across the wasteland or from the rafts of mangle in the swamps. Even the Directors guards would flinch and the cattle and fowl would bellow and squawk.

They made their clandestine meeting place in the furthest shed where Sefla and the old carpenter Juan would come to labor in secret to manufacture the pieces of the raft boat and he, in stolen hours or dark of night, would slip away trembling with fear to check their work or pore over the charts that Erso Bey would leave in a hiding place within a hollowed log, always to be replaced before dawn. Sometimes the Engineer himself would find means to come to speak with him. Mr. Erso’s face, always grim save when he spoke of his child, had taken on a stillness like to death itself in that last week. “He demands more practical demonstrations. Some pressure must come from his masters. My time is running out.”
You knew that sound well enough to recognize it in the port of Nassau, did you not boy?

There on that good ship you were as a man among friends and equals and talked to the Corsican youth. Miss Erso wore an English gown of Cathay silk and sat smiling in fond delight at some joke of Captain Andor’s while he looking every inch the handsome young gallant had eyes on no horizon but her beauty. Mr. Antilles sang a song…and then the air shook.

In that dark cell in Portugal you felt the the rumble beneath your hands and thought yourself for a feverish moment back on the plantation until a large gruff foreigner pulled you to your feet and dragged you out though the storm while half the cliffside fell.

This single retort was not the whole but it was the beginning.

He could make the white sails of the Falcon, heavily loaded with passengers but again under her master’s command. Solo’s impressive rigging had brought the sloop to the main channel perpendicular to the wind, a little ahead of him already, but near enough that Khaeuri’s roar of alarm or defiance was audible.

“Move! Go!” Mr. Rook shouted as loudly as he could and waved them forward, sure that whatever distance they gained in the next few minutes was the most they could hope for.

Mr. Kay had laid the charred rags of his “message”….the shirt drawn with words in script and numbers, all in blue ink of fixed unfading indigo. The pirates had ripped it from his back but Miss Erso had brought them, clutched in her hands aboard the little rescue boat and snarled at Captain Andor like a wounded and dangerous creature when he tried to take them from her….out on the table and read what remained of the beautiful script.

“I have set a trap…..Fire upon the outward canals……destroy everything.”

The second blast lit the sky behind them.

The women on the boat screamed as a rippling wake threw them forward, the little rudder was useless in his hand and he let go by instinct lest it wrench apart and merely held the rail. The Rogue’ Heir struck the sandy bank sideways.
Two of the workers packed aboard fell over the side.

Sparks fell sizzling into the water and fire burned behind them.

*It is the Wharf*, some instinct told him. *The docks and warehouses surely.*

His passengers were scrambling out on the bank. The water was dark but near to what passed for shore now. The people clung to bushes and small trees half-submerged and by that means pulled themselves and each other up.

"*Vés amb compte*" he called to them, gasping, trying to stay upright against the mast in the tilting leaking boat. These were some few words Mr. Rook had confidence in for he had never managed to learn much of the Minorcan tongue and none here with him spoke Greek. "*Vés… Vés.*"

The girl who had spoken English before, grabbed his shirt. Her thin rags were soaked and her basket coverings in tatters so he would not shame her by looking at her directly now but lowered his head to hear her.

"Where?" she said, "Where are...other…the other people? Where do we go?"

He pointed as best he could. "Up the stream. Up the River toward St. Augustine."

"English," she said, "The English are there."

"We have friends among the people there. They will come as they can. Keep walking, there will be more fire. It may take days but keep going." *With the rains they stood some chance. They would at least find fresh water in stumps and leaf bowls.* "Stay near the water and go North. Try to find the others."

"Come with us," she said.

"I cannot." He was already bailing water as best he could. There were small tears here and there in the sail but the tilting mast still stood. The stout pegged posts that bound the two halves of the little boat together had come dislodged but most were still there. She would leak a little but kept light in weight she might still sail. "I have to go back. At least to find the Falcon."

The girl pointed now in her turn, the way they had come, around some bend in the wind of the River perhaps three miles from the stream-break where they had begun. Mr. Rook could see the flames behind the inky shadow of trees.

Small tongues of fire rose in the air between black and white clouds of smoke twisted and blown by the wind. Sparks in billows were almost indistinguishable from the stars, but all of this was near the shore. Further inland it was still dark.

"They will all burn," she told him, "The Engineer said so."
“I know, praise God.”

The smell the black powder was faint on the wind. His eyes stung with smoke, tears of exhaustion, and grief but that seemed of little importance. He could not find words to explain. He was a pilot. His duty was to bring people to safety not to abandon them. “I believe you are right but I must try. Vés… go…please.”

The other women were calling out to her so she climbed over the cracked rail then and slipped into the water, wading over to where their hands could pull her out.

One pole was lost but he found the other still attached and pushed himself back out into the dark water of the Mosquito.

Chapter End Notes

Next up, somebody is gong to have to deal with those black-glad Imperials attesting to escape, a man with a crossbow has an idea. Mrs. And Captain Andor run the last mile to the dreaded Sugar Mill with one more match to light. Dawn breaks and with it the Rogue's Venture's attack...and excuse me Lord Vader this lady would like to talk with you. Young Luc's keen eye and steady hand with a musket will come in handy.

L’amico è comme’ ‘o ‘mbrello: quannno chiove nun o truove maje = literally: The friend is like an umbrella, he is never at hand when it rains. (Neapolitan) Roughly translates to “You can’t find a friend when you need one.”

(Language notes: If you were going to try to slip something past a bunch of people who spoke Italian you could do worse than to speak Neapolitan....Italian is not so much a language as a bundle if dialects lightly bound by political string.)

Ege = Agean

Ara Deniz = Mediterranean

Ne olacak evlat? Ve şimdi ne? = What will happen boy?! And now what?!

Bu İskenderiye idi! = This was Alexandria!
Qīng qīng zǐ pèi, yǒu yǒu wǒ sī.
Zòng wǒ bù wǎng, zǐ zhù bù lái? = Blue-belted lad, you’re in my loving thoughts.
Although I cannot go to you, couldn’t you come here to me? (Chinese - an old traditional love song)

burada neler dönüyor? = what the hell is going on? (Turkish)
Ela apó edó! (Ελα από εδώ!) = Come this way! (Greek)
Zet me neer, jij heidense klootzak! = Put me down you pagan bastard! (Dutch)
Na te wairua i korero ki a au kia ora koe, e tamaiti, a ka mahi ano ahau. Whakarongoa! = The ghost spoke to me so that you might live, child, and I will work for it. Keep silent! (Maori)

vervloekt bal van haar = damned ball of hair (Dutch)
Vrycházo = bells (Greek)
Vine Sera, no pots esperar més. La vostra mare us diria que aneu. = Come Sera, you can not wait any longer. Your mother would tell you to go.
foc = fire
Ves amb compte = Be careful/Go with care
Vés = Go
(Catalan)
Chapter Summary

The first load of the explosive being destroyed by Mr. Kay’s heroic action Mrs and Captain Andor recover and continue toward their objective. Captain Solo remembers an episode from his youth and assuming his companion officers lost attempts to get his passengers to safety and the Falcon to the quicker route of the open sea. Governor Tarkin and his men meet their just end.

Chapter Notes

Whew! Closing fast. Throwing it all in there now. Heartbreak, Jen loves her guilt-stricken soldier with the fire of a thousand suns, flashbacks, bad physics, Italian dialect, one last throwback to the Galen/Lyra romance, Han Solo's insecurities, more Dante, Tobias Beckett, truly obscure jokes about 17th cen. printing,

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Handwritten note found within a volume of La Comedia di Dante Alleghieri. print. Johann Numeister and Evangelista Angelini da Trevi. 1472., purchased by the Bodleian Library from the estate of Sir Robert Wexley-Naybar, Seventh Lord Arien:

.....though lost to us it seems most likely that ancients named individually the three heads of the monster that guarded the gates of Hades and ascribed to them various symbolic duties and powers. the poet however distills them into a nameless grotesque, a potent incarnation of avarice and blind greed not merely for luxury but for all things men grasp for and hoard, power, wealth, possessions, control, the very stuff of life and earth itself.

another hand added at margin of the sheet:

...a well-written assessment for the Poet makes such firm departure from the imagery of Orpheus, whom one might think him to admire, in his usurpation and alteration of Cerberus, here rendered untamable, to be Guardian of the third circle. Commentarii de Orpheo by Quintus Jinnan Printed by Pierre Marteau, Cologne 1667 contains in its commentaries an interesting translation naming the
three heads of the beast as Past, Present, and Future, indicative of those sins and earthly aspirations which the souls of men must yield up in order to pass the River and be purified for what comes after.

Have you read it, friend? I should be most interested in your comment.

New Smyrna Plantation

and near to three miles distance up the Mosquito River

British East Florida

Some hours after midnight and before dawn

January 16, 1770

Some half mile from the Bridge at the Crossing of the South and Main Canals

The crew of the Onderean would mass at the rail and hold, no matter the press or tumult.

Her Olhori’s order to board could ride over all other sound.

Allies and enemies alike named Saul Gerrere the Lion but old sailors said it was not his fierceness in combat that first gave rise to the honorific but his voice. Across five seas, over the thunder of cannon or storm through cries and clash of combat that roar was recognizable. None who heard it in its full power of command forgot the sound...Jen knew of a certainty that she could not.

A memory came to her clear as an image of her own hand, small even for a girl of fourteen, as it released the rope she swung on to drop with the boarding party over the rail of the Portuguese ship. Her last thought before letting go was that her boots would never reach the deck so thick was the forest of men and swords below her.

It was Marie who had taught her to fall from the line. “When men fear lions and swing high Cher, a little cat may reach the ground uncut.”
Pitched combat must have followed for she remembered that galleon had been well-manned and well-defended, but she retained nothing of that only a great boom that shook the boards beneath her feet. The Onderean’s cannon fire had snapped the mainmast of the enemy ship and her shattered spars and canvas came down in fragments. Jen wondered as splinters fell before her eyes in silence like snow.

She lay stunned among the bodies on that deck and might not have found the strength to rise had not a hand reached out to her through clouded vision and the voice of Commander Saul Gerrere pierced the deafness wrought by the blow. “Jen! Get up! Death will find us all but not on the ground! Get up, asadi!”

Mrs. Andor rolled to her side on the wet turf.

The night was dark but a bright moon appeared and disappeared through wind-whipped clouds. In the distance a red light of could be seen flickering behind the low line of trees.

Her fingers held the shirt of the man beside her and his arm at her waist drew toward him. When she felt him move relief filled her heart. Her husband was still alive.

She crawled first to her knees and then to stand and he did the same. Supporting each other they looked back toward a line of flames that ran along what must be the shoreline.

Mr. Rook. Please God that he is safe and the people gone with him.

The wharves and warehouses the little priest had led her past and that piled house of stone as well must be burning as well.

Cold moonlight and glow of fire lit Cassian Andor’s face in profile.

I am so sorry, she yearned to say. He loved you and you measured him truly. He was the very best of men.

But her love turned away from that false dawn and by the stillness of his face, and the changed set of his shoulders she knew that he had put away sorrow the way a soldier drops his pack on the last match, because weight will only encumber him now and all that matters is the goal.

He looked down at her and even in shadow those beautiful eyes of his missed nothing.

Another sort of man would likely have used words then, rebuked her for following him or given way to some minted show of manly honor and expressed regret at bringing her here, even urged her to seek safety or make some change in her action forward.

She might fight beside such a man but she could not have loved him as she loved Captain Cassian Andor.

He did not speak but bent his head to kiss her mouth.

They stood so for a few seconds, a few heartbeats only, then parted and she took his hand and they went on.
To their dark-accustomed eyes the path that edged the canal now seemed almost well-lit and they followed it running.

_____________________

Three miles from New Smyrna on the North Mosquito River, nearly two North of the Pine Creek

God!

He had heard cannon and thunder and the shriek of Hell’s own storms at sea but never such a sound until Nassau.

It rolled over the water and the ground like a bar of iron. Leaves of the mangle forest lay flat in the cross wind of it, and the men and women crowded onto the deck flung themselves to the boards. If they cried out he could not hear them. Luc gave a yell and dropped beneath the rail. The monk, Imway crouched by the hatch and Malbus flung himself beside as if to shield his partner with his body.

Even as the sound echoed over them something like a ships wake lifted the Falcon, pushing her sideways in the rushing current. Captain Solo stumbled against the mast. Khaeuri alone stood upright, With hands over his ears he shouted some battle cry back toward the blast as if in defiance of an enemy even as Solo tried to pull him down.

Memory is a wretched thing and in that moment a dozen years vanished and he had no more courage than the raw-boned boy he had been when the Rampart burned off Ambon.

The raiders called their men off and pulled away to save their own ships when they saw the flames leap from the falling sails and lick at the hatch roof. The Rampart’s crew man by man began to dive panicked into the sea, all save the captain, his common-law-wife and a rigging monkey who clung to the rail too frightened to move until a hand lifted him by the collar and shook him like a rabbit.

Amidst this action Old Tobias called over his shoulder, “Valarie! Tara loatra! Mandehana!” And
from the burning quarter deck his missus shouted back, “…and see you hang? That I’ll not, Ry malala! Show some spirit! One more can save us!” The woman threw a spice crate down at his feet and dashed into the smoke for another…

Han’s feet still dangled above the tilting deck when Englishman finally looked at him and demanded half-curious, half-annoyed, “How old are you?”

“Dertien” he had stammered, too shaken to remember the English and too terrified to lie.

The old scoundrel swore and shook his head, “Are you afraid of sharks boy?”

“Ja, yes,” was the gasped answer, for so he was, then. He knew better now.

“Then don’t splash and don’t bleed but get the hell away from here.” With that he flung him over the side.

Han Solo struck the sea backside first. He went under first then scrambled above the wave choking and strove to swim away from that smoking ship with the vigor only a green youth in mortal fear of his own splashing can muster. He looked back once to see fire rolling over the decks like water and heard…he thought…old Toby cry, “Valarie! No sweetheart! Come back!”

Some instinct told him to dive beneath the water then and he did, which likely saved him both a scorching and the better part of his hearing for the fire in that moment reached the Rampart’s powder magazine.

But even that had been nothing to this.

The prow scraped over something unseen in the dark and danger to his ship brought him back to himself of an instant.

As echo of the percussion failed sounds at least more normal, more comprehensible, returned. The wind gusted uninterrupted and muffled in that wind a was crackling and a hiss.

That Northwest wind turned them one way, the shove of the wake another. Turned, unmastered, the Falcon would ground on this wretched sand and the tide…Jesus what was the hour? How stood the tide?

“Khaeuri!” he shouted loud enough to hear himself through the ringing in his head and pushed the great raging heathen toward the stern, “Stop! Stop brother! Take the wheel!”

He shoved away the people huddled near him and reached up the mast for the ropes swinging wild, “Luc! Damn you boy! The sails!”

As he climbed Captain Han Solo lifted his eyes South back toward a hellish light of fire that marked the line of the horizon where the docks of New Smyrna had been. The people on the decks lifted their faces too. A few crossed themselves like Catholics, most only stared back in silence.

He had kept his promise to Captain Syndalla of the Espiritu, he thought hollowly, for all that he had tried his best to break it.
I would have gotten her away, Andor, I swear, for all that she’d have stabbed me as soon as she bit through the ropes.

They were surely dead by now, the dangerous and honorable Spanish captain and his warrior angel.

I hope she found you at least.

Luc climbed over and past him and someone’s hands below…Jesus! It was the blind man…caught the ropes that still whipped loose. Together they trimmed her to the wind and wrestled the sloop to what he prayed was the center channel. The water was high enough in places for the Devil to stand on horseback in places but the rainwater flood had rearranged the bottom. The wind labored harder than ever to press them back toward the the East bank and worse South again toward the plantation and the fire.

His nimble Falcon struggled in this river as she never had at sea, too heavy by the shifting weight of thirty-three men, a half dozen women and some eight or nine older boys.

There was no bloody way in Creation that he could get these people up and safely through to the Mantazas in such conditions. He must put in but in such dark and tumult where and how?

Even as such thoughts came to him and his feet found the deck again a hand tapped his back.

“Another blow will come. At least one more. You must put these people ashore on one bank or the other. If you are spared you can come back for them and otherwise those who are strongest must walk toward the English fort and seek aid there.”

It was the blind foreign monk that spoke.

“Damn you sir! I do not take your orders!”

A shout came from the stern, “He tika ia. Ko te hau me te wai e whawhai ana ki a tatou i tenei wahanga.”

“Nor yours either!”

He could not leave these poor wretches. God alone knew if any of them could swim. He could not even speak to them.

Then something struck the side, great rafts of mangle, some of them scorched by fire were floating in the water.

“Captain!” Luc cried, “there is a way!”

They must if they could anchor in…not for long this bottom was nothing shifting mud…and with hooks and poles they could yank these mats of brush and make a kind of floating dock. Luc had done the same before he said, using tree-trunks to get people to shore.

Damn. His Greek consisted mainly of curses and flirting, he knew better than to try Spanish. Where was damn Rook when he needed him?
“Qualcuno di voi parla italiano?” Captain Solo called.

A grey-bearded fellow with arms stained so dark a blue they looked black in the shivering moonlight stood near the hatch and spoke haltingly.

“Sì…forse…Se, n’anticchia…S’afida a parrari sicilianu?”

They managed. The man had been a stone mason in Palermo.

The mason spoke to a woman who spoke to a boy who translated for the others. He expected panic but the light of the fire flickered over the faces of people far past simple fear.

When the fellow, Pacetti, spoke he gripped Solo’s arm as Italians in the South did to signify a bargain, and the captain realized with some horror that the man could not be more than thirty.

*His only comfort was that that thin and chilly flesh-merchant bastard of a Governor and his thugs were burning in Hell.*

Luc gave the people Rook’s canvas and leather, all sorted out in sodden bundles pulled from the hold, and Solo pressed a spare tin kit with flint and steel into the mason’s stained hand.

Useless likely, there was no dry tinder between here and Cuba but it was all that he could do and he found he could not bear to do nothing.

Then slowly, in a dialect he was more used to gambling in than anything else, he tried to tell the man that his the people must get across the basket-like raft onto firmer ground. Captain Solo had his bearings again despite the River’s tumult and remembered this strip of land they held near beside. It was one long barrier island of dunes, covered with brush and lightly forested in places with shrubs of low trees. No mere sand bar this one but stout enough to slope well above the River on one side and the Ocean on the other.

They must move up to the top and go North. From there, once the sun rose….*God, what time was it?…..they could see him if….what the hell did the blind man mean “If you are spared?” Cheerful bastard….when* he came round on the seaward side. The mass of the women and children that Rook had brought away and maybe even Rook himself, would still be on the River side but he would come back for them as well or send help.

If that smooth Doctor/Governor/Agent of Heaven at Saint Augustine was as good as his word they could find a way.

The ragged man repeated back what he had told him and as the others translated. Khaeuri and Malbus pulled in and held the long poles and hooks. The people began to cross the rickety bridge of a dock they had peiced together. Their expressions should have been terrified but they seemed not in the main. Weariness he saw, and resignation but each who crossed glanced back toward the flames southward behind the dark tree line with something like relief. Whatever happened to them now must seen better that what had come before. Pacetti embraced him before following over. “Mi curaggiusu amicu.”

*If Andor is dead I am in command here,* he thought half-sick. *God have mercy on all you people, do you know what a bad idea that is?*
At least every damn alligator for a hundred miles was either dead from shock or hiding fathoms deep in the mud chattering it’s sharp teeth.

They shoved off and headed for the Inlet or what was left of it.

If Captain Han Solo could but get to the sea he feared nothing….even if it meant going back through the fire.

The Mansion House

His Excellency had ordered that lamps and candles be lit and as was his habit when perturbed by events set up at his desk and to pursue his reports. His undersecretary unwrapped several maps at his instruction….Mr. Thaddeus Durmin could not help but notice that the Louisiana atlas was specifically requested… and after a period in reading and review of written reports Governor Tarkin set himself to personally compose a series of letters. The Governor was known to work through the night On and his aides and staff were expected to arrange themselves so as to be to be at his immediate disposal.

The storm outside raged on and though the stone walls of the Governor’s provincial palace gave the impression of solidity there was a dampness and press in the air, palpable even to those inside. The shutters, though tight, did not keep the few candles set in the wall sconces of the hallways from flickering.

It was some hours past midnight when the Governor, without looking up from his papers waved a hand and called for fresh candles, several having burned lower than his working preference and some refreshment in the form of biscuit and chocolate. Chocolate being His Excellency’s infrequent…nay to Mr.Durmin’s understanding his sole….indulgence.

The attending secretary Mr. Niles Gavla, in turn glanced at Mr. Durmin and thus signaled him to send the boy servants to fetch the necessary items and he stepped outside to do so. Standing order was that at least one of the African children should stay in the hallway or adjoining space when Governor Tarkin was thus occupied in residence, in part this distance was allowable as security and
in part because the drooping of exhausted servants annoyed his Excellency. Thus, expecting to find a boy asleep sitting in the chair or at least on the small divan in the antechamber and fully prepared to wake such laziness with a cuff, Mr. Durmin was most vexed to see no sign of either footman.

*Where the devil were they?*

He could not re-enter the room and report failure without inviting his masters wrath.

The other house servants slept in the attics in winter and shouting or wasting time to fetch them would not do.

Candles he knew to be stored in the press in the cupboard of the near ante room but to be forced to descend into the pantries himself quite riled his temper. Passage through the main stairwell with it’s certainty of questioning by the Devastator’s proud men was a route he would rather avoid and Durmin found he had even less desire to traverse the lower rooms where the weaselly Director’s men were gathered on such an menial errand. It even occurred to him that some species of prank was being played on him.

Though less familiar with the layout of the mansion than some of his fellows, having entered Governor Tarkin’s service only eight months previous in London he recalled that a servants stairwell to the buttery could be reached through the nearby visiting parlor and laying the box of candles by the door for later retrieval he determined to take that shortcut. If African brats were not down there one of the Greek wenches could be set to it. They knew the word “chocolate” surely and blows combined with gestures had served in place of translation before.

Something seemed amiss in the darkened parlor the moment he entered it. His feet touched bare boards.

*Where was the carpet?* He had seen the second-best India rug unrolled in here only yesterday.

He felt around and found the panelling door.

On opening it he found the stairwell to the pantries as unlit. A dim square of light at the bottom outlined the opening to the pantry, where at least the brazier were surely lit. “Fredrick! Finis!” he called down. A crack of thunder startled him but he was too firm of nerve for that to have been the cause of his fall. Leaning forward Mr. Durmin’s boot slipped on some dampness spilled on the first of the ladder-like steps. As he pitched head-forward Durmin knocked against the rolled carpet propped on the first landing and brought that tumbling down as well.

When the Director’s men, alerted by the shout and noise came running into the pantry they found it empty but for the body of Mr. Thaddeus Durmin bruised and unconscious on the tabby stone floor underneath a much battered and bloodied corpse still half-wrapped in an Asian carpet. The body was identified with some difficulty as that of their comrade Mr. Vale, last seen sent out to dispatch the English soldier and unaccounted for since. Of the Plantation’s servants and the Governor’s boy attendants no sign could be found.

An alarm was raised at once.
Even as a man was sent running to ring the plantation’s bell two of the Directors red-coated guards entered the Malthouse to relieve the watch on the Indian prisoner held there.

They called out through the now dwindling rain to their fellow, whom they had watched for the last few hours from their barracks window sitting by the lanternlit door of the makeshift prison with such great patience. Laughing at his lack of reply, they taunted him for falling asleep in the rain. Such jocularity vanished in when they slapped him in hail and he fell lifeless to the wet ground.

Inside the Malthouse their other two comrades were found to have been dispatched with some savagery.

Governor William Tarkin leaped to his feet on being apprised by Mr. Gavla of events that presaged the ringing of the bells.

His first and sharpest command was that the order to keep Lord Vader’s men at the waterfront be held to and that any of the Devestator’s men presently sheltered at the Mansion house be right quickly dispatched to the wharf to supplement the main squadron and secure the readied shipments under cover. His Excellency stressed that these Naval officers were to be kept at that location by any means devisable. He further ordered that a portion of his own guards be instantly moved to secure Director Krennik and that three men be sent to the English Captain Fuller, held upstairs.

The solitary sleeping guard found on the Mansion House’s upper floor bedroom was wakened and reported all well until the room was inspected by lantern light and the undressed body in the bed proved to be the corpse of the Governors escort, garroted by a wire.

Whatever had been accomplished there by the missing “Captain Fuller” must have been quickly and silently accomplished for the Governor’s physician and clerk housed in the room opposite insisted they had heard nothing untoward.

The clerk did not think it wise to volunteer after the fact his passing notice of a sound like the muffled crack of glass, attributed by him at the time to a lightning flash adjacent to the faint sound thereafter swallowed in thunder.

A broken mirror, sole evidence of a fierce and deadly struggle that had passed within the closed room but hours before, remained undiscovered under the bed.
What do you mean gone?”

Mott snapped back at the corporal. “They have likely taken fright at the sound of the alarm and gathered in their allotments. The arsenals are secure. No sign of insurrection is…”

“The women in the kitchens are all gone sir, the town is deserted …we did not go so far as the camps, but…” Dorton stubbornly continued.

“They have no weapons!” Captain Mott reprimanded the guard furiously. “If some have taken advantage to attempt escape the storm will likely finish them or we will tend to them once we have secured this incursion.”

Governor Tarkin ordered the windows un-shuttered. The storm was passing and though the wind still roared swift action must be taken and losses must be cut. Mott was right. The laborers must be disposed of but it would have to wait.

“Make sure the waterfront is secure. Every boat must be accounted for.” Was it possible that Krennik had made overtures to other forces than Vader? The treasonous fool! “The bridges over the canals must be secured and the guard posts at the borders manned.”

Mott hesitated, “Sir. They are already manned. We have no one else to…”

“Go yourself then Captain! Take every man not on the waterfront. I will have no excuses!”

“Sir!” Mott saluted and he and the trembling Dorton turned heel and departed.

Governor Tarkin paced to the window and looked out.

The moon shone now through gaps in the clouds.

The pistol with cartridge was, as always, in his writing box on the side table.

He opened it and himself loaded and primed the weapon then placed it in his pocket.
If Krennik was brought to him alive he wanted the full satisfaction of shooting the man with his own hand.

His secretary, Gavla came and spoke to him with some attempt at discretion, “Sir, should I have one of the transports made ready if it should seem prudent for you …?”

Tarkin looked at him sharply.

Escape? Escape to where precisely?

William Tarkin knew Frieherr Vader far too well for that.

Shouts from outside could be heard even through the persistent gusts of the fading storm. Governor Tarkin moved quickly over to the East window which gave him view of the larger Canal and the Stone wharf.

A thin line of green fire could be seen darting and moving like a thing alive, racing unimpeded on the very surface of the dark canal’s choppy water. William Tarkin watched this impossibility uncomprehending of it’s meaning until the last second as it raced it’s course toward the greater waterway.

It was only as it passed beneath and around the posts, then leaped between the boards of the dock and onto a crate of black indigo that he understood what was happening.

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The stone called coquina by the Spanish was prized by the provincial masons of New Spain who learned it’s uses from the natives and found new ones peculiar to their own styles of warfare. The walls of St. Marco, of the Castillo de los Tres Reyes Magos del Morro, and San Juan all proved, somewhat to their builder’s surprise able to stand unbroken through fire and blows of cannon that would have shattered the granite walls of Europe.

Against the fire of the “polis negre” that Mr. Galen Erso devised at New Smyrna however nothing stood.

God’s rain and wind saved those few who survived the first blast. A gale-strength gust pushed the hammer of fire toward the sea and back from the sodden forest and fields beyond the South Canal but within a circle of nearly a mile, which encompassed the docks, main town, works and the
Governors great waterfront mansion house, all buildings were leveled to their very foundations.

The small island of brave orange groves near the mouth of the inlet took the brunt of that wind-blown force and this islet along with the last nearly empty quarry and the little cemetery that held the bones of so many sufferers vanished as if it had never been.

Father Campo comforted those who grieved later saying, “None are ever truly lost, nor forgotten. Stones and written names matter not to God.”

For by some miracle, whether of topography, weather or the force of the prayers of that holy man the tiny wood and stone chapel behind the slope survived.

The aged priest huddled there as he had promised to with some two dozen of his flock, those too sick, weak or frightened to flee and within the shaking walls he led them in song, even as flames lit the sky around them.

Chapter End Notes

Praeteritum = the Past (Latin)

Tara loatra! Mandehana! = It is too late! Go!

Ry malala = Beloved (Malagasy)

Dertien = thirteen (Dutch)

He tika ia. Ko te hau me te wai e whawhai ana ki a tatou i tenei wahanga = He is right. The wind and the water are fighting against us in this place (Maori)

Qualcuno di voi parla italiano = Do any of you speak Italian? (Italian)
Si…forse = Yes…maybe (Italian)

Se, n’anticchia…..S’afida a parrari sicilianu? = Yes a little….do you speak Sicilian? (Sicilian)

…….and THIS was the whole story of Italy.

Note: Pierre Marteau of Cologne was a real-but-not-real publishing marker that dissidents, intellectuals and celebrities wanting/needng to hide their identities printed under all over Europe from the 1660's to 1790's.......clearly I need help.
Praesentialis: the First part

Chapter Summary

In which a soldier of the plantation realizes his commanders do not have his best interests at heart and reviews certain aspects of his dismal career. Mr. Galen Erso sees the beginning of the springing of the traps that he has set and awaits his fate at the Sugar Mill only to be overtaken again by his nemesis. Captain and Mrs. Andor reach the Mill at last and combine their skills to in an effort to control of ground thus enable the completion of complete their dreadful mission.

Chapter Notes

Tried to get this all in one go but will have to split it in two because writing this stuff on my phone in the rest areas of Vermont is HARD. Still need to reel in the drama on the river and the battle of the Rogue and the Devastator. Ahhh!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

midnight January 15 and in the early hours approaching dawn January 16, 1770

The Watchpost at the South Canal
Matthew Adema had taken the King’s shilling at seventeen in Dublin. At twenty some keen workmanship by him at the Battle of Valencia de Alcántara made an impression upon a recruiter for he was sent by his sargent along with a few other fellows to report to an unnamed officer in the allied Portuguese unit to be spoken to for “special” duty. Entering an unmarked tent he was taken somewhat aback to see not only the Portuguese spoken of but also a British officer previously unknown to him and a thin, ginger-haired Roman priest. To his yet greater surprise the Iberian proceeded to address them in perfect highborn Cambridge English.

“Do you take joy in battle soldiers?” The man asked.

Adema, who had some inkling what was afoot from whispers overheard in the camp answered boldly “I take joy in winning sir.”

Plain truth that was. He had his fill of losing on the docks of Youghal back in Cork, enough to last him ten thousand lifetimes. The only safety was to be the hammer...or else he who forged it, or he who wielded it...and not the nail. On the top was the only side worth being on. In the experience of then-Corporal Matthew Adema of the Kings Fourth Regiment of Foot so far the hammer had been English but he was willing to entertain other offers and saw no reason not to seek to better his lot when presented with a handsome bonus and other enticements to serve in what was presented as “the great army of the One True Empire.”

For a time things had gone well enough....better than well in many ways. Action was a heady thing especially when seasoned by the satisfaction of privy knowledge of yourself and your mates as the hammers and most mortals before and around you merely nails.

In India he fought in English red against armies of foreign Princes in the field and in high mountain passes against beasts who spoke with the voices of men and cursed them as they fell. Fall they did and their curses rolled off like water. How many men could say that? In Saxony the looting had been rich and he had worn Prussian blue before being packed to the West Indes. The white and blue of Spain had been fitted for him in Cuba and then it was off to Jamaica and a redcoat once again. Now though, scarred and weary at 37, with five years in the stink of New Smyrna eating Indian corn and flogging Greeks behind him, Matthew Adema had begun to privately doubt, not that his masters would triumph utterly in time but that he himself might not live long enough to reap his just reward of service to them.

Wrapping his oilcloth cloak over hat and shoulders against both wind and rain Sargent Adema set out from the barracks again, this time accompanied by Corporal Edward Ford. At midnight he and Ford were to relieve the Evening Watch in the small stockade at the farthest end of the Southern Canal.

It should not have been so. Having manned the Eastern Path but yesterday he should have stood his stations back in town until at least the day after next but the arrival of the Governor meant his men
had commandeered and altered the order of the Town watches. When alarm was raised by the apprehension of that battered-bloody trio of Englishman and their savage, the alarm contingent on their report of Indian hostility had increased the number required on each. So back out he had to go.

Ford seemed much set off at the taxing duty but the sargent sharply bid him hold his tongue.

Adema feared the Indians of the forest right well but even if a party of them were still slaughtering lobsterbacks on the farther shores of the St. Johns this storm seemed likely to keep them there.

Under present conditions even rough quarters far distant from the town and Mansion-house until tomorrow’s light might have advantages.

Governor William Tarkin having been absent from New Smyrna for near to a year signs pointed to his present residency being far more in the character of a final housecleaning than a renewal of residency.

Adema was willing to wager in fact that the grey coats and their dark naval comrades were here to roll this plantation up like one of His Excellency’s fine carpets. Well and good. Release from the vile fever-ridden swamp of New Smyrna was the sweetest thing the sergeant could presently imagine but none of the veterans and overseers here anticipated a smooth evacuation, quite the contrary. The Director was not a fellow to bear demotion quietly for all his boot-polishing ways and Adema had watched Krennik for too long not to have seen the bastard survive, cat-like, any number of transitions.

Some wench in Cornwall had shot him once before Petrel had put a knife in her and Krennik survived more angry over the damage to his fine coat than anything else, the sergeant recalled.

No, no... uncomfortable as trudging nearly three miles out in wind and wet to relieve the men at the furthest post might be in fact the safest of limited options.

Sergeant Matthew Adema vowed to himself that he would offer his duty near and dear to whoever he must in order to ensure his own survival and by dawn it should be clear enough who’d come out on top, the icy Governor or his venomous Director.

The "stockade" at the Southern boarder was little more than a stoutly-roofed and roughly walled wooden hut.

Raised up upon a platform and reached by a ladder, its purpose was as much to watch for fires in the
forests and brush-choked land beyond the indigo fields as it was for defense or warning of some threat from the South West.

Just past midnight Corporal Ford hallooed the signal and the two bedraggled men of the Evening Watch lowered the ladder and passed their duty over to trudge the three miles back through dark rain toward the bridge over the canals and the barracks beyond.

Six muskets leaned against the wall wrapped in waxed canvas and a sealed bag of cartridges stood ready in the driest corner. New Smyrna lacked much.... *beer better than piss, decent beef, horses, the clean scent of a winter frost, company who were not ragged Greeks with eyes like stones,....* but powder they had in plenty. Good French flints still had to be hoarded like treasure and reground but the Engineer’s stinking Mill at least kept them as well supplied as any regiment alive.

Raised not quite eight feet up on stout logs the shed had hard wind leaking through every seam in the rough walls.

The glassed lamp continued to gutter wildly but after a close hour or two the driving rain ceased. In time the clouds parted and let in enough moonlight see out the narrow windows.

The wind however continued its rattling moan. So fiercely in fact that they did not at hear the first alarm bells.

Corporal Ford raised his head at what past for a pause in the bluster to ask “Sir? That sound.. what is it?”

“I don’t hear anything,” came Adema’s answer.

The youth unwrapped himself and moved a few steps from the bench to stand near the narrow window that faced North.

“Sargent? Can you not hear?” the boy’s face was pale. “Does it not sound like bells?”

Years at the back of a musket had rendered Adema the deaf right ear common to his trade but now he also made out a sound between the wail and rattle.

*Son of blind cur bitch!*

“Is it Indians?” Ford gasped.

“Shut up, Corporal! What’s the pattern?”

Adema could make out no more than random peals but the dough-faced Canadian furrowed his brow and held a hand to his ear.

“...three...four....Four, then,” the corporal looked at him confused, “ ....one. Four, then one rung again.”

*Hell. That one had not been used in three years.....not since a pirate ship had.....*
Defense on the Mansion House and Secure the Waterfront.

**Incursion? By whom....From where?**

Young Ford gathered up the bag and moved toward the bundled muskets.

“Stop.” Adema grasped the man’s shoulder without thinking.

“Sir?”

One bell signified assembly at the center to defend the Mansion house and the Governor’s person within. Four meant defense of the Wharf.

That self-same wharf that was presently filled with boxes of the explosive black indigo.

*Jesus bloody Christ.*

Ford was a green fellow when he came down from Cows Ford only last winter but he wasn’t a fool. A single year in New Smryna was enough to teach one all that was necessary about the disposability of men.

“Do you think it is a trick?”

“I don’t think anything and neither do you. In a squall like this there’s no saying well enough to be sure if or how many bells we”think“ we hear. Hold fast til’ the weather clears or we hear word. That’s an order.”

The corporal nodded. Sargent Adema considered his options.

The shaking of the walls and sensation of being pressed hard between the Devil and the cliffs edge did not make for clarity of mind. The faint echo of the plantations bells echoed in and out.

*None deserted the army of the unseen Empire but it was sometimes possible to to be forgotten. One heard rumors of troopers lost or left behind on maneuver...gone to ground and left untroubled so long as they stayed quiet. The trick was not to be left quieter by a blade or a musket ball.*

“Sir, oughtn’t we go down and see what’s about at least?” Ford asked nervously after some hour had passed.

Adema peered out the window at the clearing night.

*St. Augustine to the North was out of the question. By boat up the coast with lucky wind it was a bare day’s brisk sail but on foot, skirting the canal bridges and town to cut through the fields....Eight? More? King George’s English held it, the mighty Empire’s indigo-bought allies. South East took one through the wilderness to the dry Timicun Creek bed then down the shores of Canaveral Island. If one could get across the channel a long-abandoned Spanish and Indian settlement on the Cape sometimes still proved a useful landing place for passing smugglers...though with the pirates in retreat who knew how often now? A bad place to die that storm-swept beach would be. Due West through the wild forest would bring one to the River of Lakes but that was three brisk full days march with a machete even when the streams weren’t flooded and a boat was needed at the end. Perhaps the floods themselves provided an answer?*

*There was a narrow canoe always kept beside the traces of the distant Sugar Mill for quick transport*
back and forth when such was needed for between reek and menace of the place no bull would pull the cart further than the joining with the canal.

“Alright. We’ll patrol out as far as the Canal’s edge, but no further than the Mill path….You down the ladder first, Corporal.”

Adema checked the sword at his side, knife in his belt and placed loaded a pistol there besides, dry under his coat.

Ford selected a musket, wrapped it well and with flintlock and cartridge box slung over his shoulder descended toward the dark ground. The odds of being able to load and fire in such weather was small but neither man wanted to leave even so poor a shelter as this unarmed.

Upon reaching the sodden earth beneath the platform Adema, sword now in hand, blew out the lantern and laid it by the ladder. *Loth as he was to leave the light it would do no good now and he had no desire to make himself a target.* Moving forward slowly he waved Ford to parallel his right flank at some short distance off. The dark oilcloth made it hard to see him but the fellow knew how to keep line.

The moonlight came and went as they tracked the edges of the path. The muddled sound of bells had stopped…replaced by another sound, nearer and more familiar …of musket fire.

Rooted to the spot he crouched low by instinct and tried to gauge the distance.

*The tank barns? Maybe even as near as the crossing of the two canals?*

*Bloody hell…was it Krenniks men against the Governors or the black coats against all? Or had some other enemy truly come?*

The Corporal called out something indistinct but a gust carried it away and stung Adema’s eyes as he turned.

“Ford?” The sergeant hissed.

There was no answer. Had the bastard run?

A scrap of cloud covered the moon again then passed but he could no longer make out the other man’s form.

Adema drew his pistol and fell back toward the path fighting the impulse to flee to the illusory safety of the watch post. Cornered like a fox he’d be if he went that way, whoever the hounds were.

The Sugar Mill dugout was the only chance now, if he could but find it in the dark.

Tracking along the brim-full canal’s edge toward the dreaded spot he spied a solitary figure by the light stones of the edge. Moonlight caught the edges of rain-slick oilcloth and a still-wrapped musket in the figure’s hand. Back turned to Adema the fellow seemed to be looking West toward the trees edge and the Sugar Mill beyond.

“Damn you Corporal…” the sargent began.
The man turned toward him at the same moment an explosion shook the air and lit the tree line behind. Sargent Adema dove to the ground, stunned with shock. When he lifted his eyes from the wet grass to look the fire’s light revealed not Corporal Edward Ford but Director Oren Krennik standing before him wrapped in Ford’s cloak and carrying that soldier’s gun.

“Galen Erso has betrayed me,” the man said seeming uncharacteristically disheveled but otherwise utterly unmoved by the blast that had just sounded.

“Get up Sargent!” he ordered and tossing the canvas-bound bundle at Adema’s feet. “We will secure him and what remains of my work.”

The Sugar Mill

Mr. Galen Erso stood beneath the archway becoming aware gradually that the rain had ceased.

Physical comfort held no value for him any longer but clear sky and the moon’s light would make it easier to see the Devil when he drew near.

Well-soaked ground and the swollen banks of these streams and canals might even impede the spread of the fire and so diminish the loss of life among the innocent but that was beyond his hands now.

Rain and damp could not impede his purpose. The igniting fluid would remain stable suspended in the water of the canal and upon reaching fuel…twigs in the water, the wood of dock posts and gate, the bundles indigo, would climb to seek air…and as for a trigger…

He tapped his vest pocket. Within he could still feel the bundle of small sticks taken from the box concealed in the Mill.

*These were his own adaptation of Mr. Baldwin’s formula, a paste of sulfur, red and white phosphate along with a friction agent...in this case a powder of finely ground sand, held in a binding of clay, rolled around the end of a wooden twig. A thin wash of pine varnish rendered the volatile mixture...Baldwin had made use of a vegetable wax to the same purpose... impervious to damp. The merest scratch would expose the white phosphorus to air and it would promptly ignite to burn for several seconds under nearly any conditions.*
Galen Erso had prayed as he ran toward this gate, addressing Heaven one final time, for all it might be delusion.

The condemned of the upper circles had begged the poet to remember their names and carry their words back up to the ears of God and men, but those of the lowest depths were silent for they knew themselves to have forfeited all right to identity or supplication.

He petitioned that the valiant and faithful Mr. Rook might live, that he and the old priest would save some of the people, that the mighty East Indian warrior would save the Dutch soldier and please….please….for Lara’s sake….keep his Jen at safe distance.

*I cannot pray for her forgiveness, for I will make her a widow as well as an orphan before dawn.*

He had seen no sign of the brave and uncomprehending Captain Andor but it was too much to hope that he had retreated. Such men did not. Likely he was already dead.

*qui vive la pietà quand’è ben morta*

*I can do no more than end it now, here at the fulcro, the point from which all weights turned.*

The wind continued in great gusts blown from the bat-like wings of the fiend and Galen Erso waited like a figure frozen in ice.

When the first retort came he knew at once that it was neither thunder, nor cannon. No man could fail to recognize the work of his own hand.

*A small charge? How had that come about?*

None of the finished matter had ever been unaccounted for save for the single cartridge that one of Krennik’s men, one Mr. Alexander Kale, had run away into the forest with when sent out to set up one of Krennik’s “tests” in the past summer. Sefla overheard comments to the effect that the fellow had gone mad though whether this was attributed to misery, fever or guilt was unclear…whatever the cause he was hardly the first. A party of trackers was sent out and Mr. Kale was shot trying to swim the river.

The small charge was never recovered and the redcoats feared to shoot at the crocodiles for months so worried were they that one of the beasts had swallowed it.

He fixed his eye on the dark line of water in the canal and the narrow sluice that ran from the mill wheel down to it.

But no rope of liquid fire came up against the flood to take his last task from him.

*The tin-covered gate above the crossing must have been lowered to redirect the flow and no one had raised it. On such variable surface ignition had not been able to jump it and with the water level so high the fuse had sunk too low.*
So it must be. He had not expected mercy.

Time passed, how much he did not measure.

The sky cleared and he saw stars glimmer between the black ribbons of cloud.

*She came here, Lara, our little Star, here to the very gates of Hell. I stood but yards away from her and did not know.*

A sudden uncanny increase in the force of the wind from the North West all but bent the trees and as if in terrible opposition a second greater blast sounded.

*Part of his fuse at least had held.*

A pillar of fire rise from the direction of the Inlet shore and for the first time felt the full tremor of his work.

*Saul, Galen Erso thought, is this what you saw?*

*Death become fire become death again. The ultimate alchemical circle.*

Samson-like he braced his hands against the stone of the archway hoping against hope that it would fall on him.

*The docks. Someone had managed to ignite the store they placed along the shore. Rook? Captain Andor? Jen?*

Even here, it was Mr. Galen Erso’s curse to be what he was, a measurer and calculator even of his own despair. The voice of his skill said to him, *that is not all of it.*

*The fire of all 247 would have scorched back to these very stones and laid a pit bare in the earth for the sea to rush in. Somewhat more than half? If the force of the blast had been concentrated over water and the wind…?*

*He could not escape the damning assessment. Some has already been removed.*

He bowed his head and waited.

Something moved in the brush at the swollen canals edge.

Galen Erso stepped cautiously from the doorway.

*Not yet not yet.*
He could not strike the match until he was sure.

The wind had dropped again and a sound like gasping could be heard. A pale form lay in the shadows.

Was it Krennik? Had he been injured in the blast?

Mr. Erso took a few steps forward.

The moon brightened again and the pale form of an injured animal became visible, a deer, scrambling upon an injured leg, left flank cruelly scorched and bleeding.

The doe painfully twisted it’s head to look up at Galen Erso with wide terrified eyes.

*I am sorry,* he thought. *Poor speechless creature. I cannot help you now but your sufferings will be over soon.*

The click of a musket cocked somewhere in the dark by the slope.

From behind a hand grasped his neck and the sharp point of a blade pierced through his borrowed waistcoat, pressing firm enough to draw blood at his side.

“Where are they Galen?” Oren Krennik snarled in his ear, “your notes and the bastards you have sold them to?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

They followed the path until Captain Andor stopped, ordering the map of his friend’s last directions in his mind.

A heaviness and a stinging reek seemed to cling like shreds of an unseen fog, even in the wind. He breathed through his mouth so as not to be distracted. Barren branches bent and tossed against the clearing sky. Stripped bare of leaves more like the naked limbs of Northern trees in winter not like the still-leafed laurel, pine and live oak that was common here.

A silhouette could just be made out dim against the shadow ahead, a rounded building of the self-same coquina stone as every other brick in the place. Between the gusts of wind he could make out a lower sound like water rushing through narrow courses and a creak like beams of a ships deck in a rolling sea.
The paler sand or a worn path crossed here.

Wordlessly his wife held up her free hand to point. Her sharp eyes had made out another line of the pale stone branching up from the narrow canal they paralleled up toward the tangled shadow of lifeless trees.

He racked his brain for whatever little he knew of the layout of grinding mills. It was not much.

*The Sisters of the Convento de la Merced kept a small grist mill for their own use but it was not like the European ones he saw later. The children carried their own little bags of corn to it once for some saints day or other. The wooden wheel lay sideways in a round pool with a drain in the bottom, set on the floor of the cool mill building and the mill stones turned above it. The old flour-covered Inde showed them how it worked to their delight but he sang a song as he lowered the wooden pipe down to drip water in and turn the wheel. “Ahuia xiyanoitia, nahuia xiyamotecayia ay poyauhtla, ayauh chicauaztica, ayauicalo tlallocanayia,” and the Sister became angry at him and told him to stop or he would be beaten.*

The incident had stuck in his infant mind oddly and years later on another side of the ocean he had asked Senhora Tano who “tlallocanayia” was.

*She had arched an eyebrow at this but answered, “The priests of the old kings claimed he was a heathen god who demanded the hearts of second-born children in sacrifice so as to be appeased and not bring storms, flood, and water-born sicknesses” she said, “But more humble people said he was a beautiful mountain covered with clouds that brought rain to water the fields of the hungry, fill the streams with fish and soak through the ground to fill the wells of the thirsty.”

“Who was right?”

“Both and neither, the law of Balance teaches us those kind of tales are only metaphors for the dark and the light as evidenced in the minds of Men. Which do you think Cassian?”

“Just about every kind of priest I ever met was full of shit,” he had answered tartly as a boy of nine. “What would a mountain care for people or poor babies hearts anyway? Trees would do it more good. I think anybody who tells you a story like that is up to something.” She had laughed.

Mr. Corr had agreed with Kay that it would likely be patterned after an English or Italian mill. This shallow arms-span of narrow trench would be the outflow traces of the mill to carry water away from under the wheel down to the wider canal below. Some other channel must feed it from a pond or dammed stream behind.

*Rook had been utterly ignorant of the layout of this area but one of the old Spanish maps aboard the Rogue had shown streams on a well-watered plain and connected it to the tidal river. The vast irrigation canals had doubtless tamed and redirected the spiderweb.*

Wherever the water came from the unearthly rhythmic creak must be the upright wheel spinning free as the pond behind spilled over with rain.

“A liquid fuse suspended in the traces,” Galen Erso had said, “Fire set anywhere near.. “ It sounded mad but Kay had believed it possible, been sure in fact.
Then another sound became audible….men’s voices.

Mrs. Andor dropped low pulling his sleeve even as he also by instinct crouched, just as she had
drawn her short blade in the instant he had his own.

Reaching down she took a handful of mud and rubbed it along the dull back edge of the cutlass to
disguise the gleam of it from any watching eyes.

To smile seemed wrong to the point of wickedness but he found he could not help himself.

*Te amo más allá de la medida, mi reina pirata.*

He copied her action and they crept forward low together.

The moon was past high now and the light to the North the fire still gave a ruddy glow. Fed by the
wind even the sodden palm roof and wood of the plantation’s barns and outbuildings must be
burning.

The voices seemed very near the shadowy building, just inside it perhaps. He had thought he
perceived two speakers but now it seemed he heard only one, shouting…. but he could not be certain
of words.

Then another, nearer nearer voice, swearing softly in English. A figure of a man, rendered visible by
white neckerchief and tan breeches as the wind lifted some dark cloak he was wrapped in, was
walking by the trench.

He and his wife pressed themselves all but flat. The person observed had a musket under his arm.
The barrel glinted in the light. His motion was hard to make discern but it seemed to Captain Andor
that he was looking for something.

Mrs. Andor tapped his shoulder to gain his attention without voice and when he turned toward her
she pointed first to herself and then toward Western shadow of the low building. The captain
understood at once that she proposed to go around and try to gain access to the Mill from the farther
side. His heart dreaded separation now as keenly as it had yearned to believe her safe and away but
hours before but she was braver than he was, as he had always known, and she was right.

It was essential before taking any final action that they know who these people were and whether
this Krennik was indeed within.

He tapped his own breast and pointed forward, toward the searcher by the trenches edge and then on
toward the Mill on this side. They would divide their approach. In that poor odd light of distant fire
and cold moon she looked to him with eyes darker than the green he knew them to be. She nodded
then and raising herself on an elbow drew near his ear to whisper, “Find me.”

Then she was up and gone.

*Though hell should bar the way, he would have said.*
Sergeant Adema followed the Director toward the Mill as ordered but had gone only a little way when another fiercer blast ignited.

For all that he had seen and done in his life Matthew Francis Adema had never heard such sound or felt such a blow. The sky behind, back by the water’s edge…The town? The barracks?…..lit for a moment like a small sunrise. Thrown forward onto hands and knees he was fairly sure he cried out for the aid of saints he had not importuned since childhood so great was his shock

Director Oren Krennik still wrapped in Ford’s oilcloth had bent as even a madman must in a high wind but he shown no emotion at the hellish sight behind them save, perhaps, something like satisfaction.

“Perhaps one of the Governor’s men was careless,” he said. Then. “Get up! Follow me.”

Upon reaching the path up to the Sugar Mill the remained still for a time in shadows. Krennik ordered him to uncover his musket and hold.

When a pale man walked forward from the dark doorway of Mill Adema did not at first recognize Mr. Galen Erso so changed did the man look.

“If he tries to run, shoot him in the leg,” the Director ordered in a whisper against the wind, “I need him alive for a little while longer.”

“You will lose,” was all the Engineer said with remarkable calm, even as Krennik clutched his throat and put a knife to his side.
Had Adema not known the Director mad already he would have understood the state of things upon hearing the mans laugh, more appropriate to playing winning cards in a sunny drawing room, “How delightfully familiar, Galen. Now where have I heard that before?”

He tied Mr. Erso’s hands behind his back using a strip of oilcloth torn from his own covering upon the Director’s order and marched the man back toward the dark Mill.

“You have hidden your notes here Galen, I know full well you have. Make matters easier on yourself and tell me where.”

“Light a lantern and search inside for them,” the man answered, “I am sure you will find them quickly enough.”

The Director struck him a hard blow across the face. Mr. Erso fell to his knees but remained upright.

“Galen, I admit that I am hurt by your betrayal. I thought we put all resentments behind us years ago. Whatever Tarkin, his Carolina whore Mrs. Pickney or whomever else you have played Judas for promised you I assure you they will give you less consideration than I have, being still softened by memory of our boyhood friendship. In the name of those better days I am even willing to let this painful episode pass....within justice. Much will need be repaired of course and new sites for the work surveyed, etc. You are still a brilliant and useful scientist but not each and every limb habitual to man is essential to your work, as I think we can both agree…”

The Director shouted back over his shoulder to Adema, “Cover the path! If any of them live they will come this way! And find that transport boat they keep nearby!”

The Sargent worked his way back slowly, he slung the musket carefully for he carried it loaded and primed now and so burdened every step he took away from the Mill building loosened the knot in his stomach.

*Director Krennik had taken possession of his pistol and carried it even now in his belt. Whether the frizzen had kept the powder dry enough for the damned thing to still fire seemed an even wager but the low damp stink of sulfur, saltpeter and rot stuck to this place even in wind and washed by rain. If even a corner were dry in there and the madman fired a shot.....*

He must find the canoe and get inside it. The water all but topped the trenches now. The Main Canal might be a road back into the fire but Timican Creek that marked the Southern border to the “Duncan” fields, began less than half a mile from here. Though usually bone dry or a trickle scarcely ankle deep it had been known to swell in the heavy rains of Summer and was surely full to the banks at present and running South. If he could somehow drag the dugout so far while the lunatic’s back was turned and slip inside it he might be able to get quick downstream to the to Lower Mosquito they had lately taken to calling the Hillsborough Perhaps even as far as the Canaveral Island. It was a gamblers risk but a man had to try.

*Even if he had still believed in such boyhood phantoms as death with honor Matthew Adema was sure that there was none to be found in burning like a rabbit in the grass.*
He followed the path with eyes down and away from the horizon afire to keep them from being too dazzled to see what was on the dark ground before him.

Steady now Matthew. Walk too fast and the maniac might notice you before he finishes beating the Engineer to death.

The canoe had to be pulled back from the bank on one side or the other but where?

Bleeding Eyes of Jesus let it not have been dragged elsewhere or washed away.

The unrelenting wind and soft ground must have covered the sound of footsteps behind but how he failed to see the muddied but still pale coat of the person who suddenly appeared behind him he would never account for. Yet there he was. When Adema glanced back toward the Mill anxious at hearing gale-muffled snatches of the Director’s curses, a tall hatless man had appeared at his elbow as swift and soundless as the angel Gabriel.

The black-haired fellow laid a sword to the side of the sargent’s neck quicker than he and said, hoarsely and low. “Are you merely out walking sir, or perhaps looking for that canoe pulled up yonder in the shadow of that fallen tree?”

Adema could not turn and at such close quarters the musket was of no use to him. “Come,” the man said in a provincial Spanish accent, “Let me help you with it.” Holding tight to the back of his coast and with the blade resting light on his shoulder and flush enough across his throat the unseen stranger pushed the soldier around into the wind and marched him dead-on in front if him toward a dark shape Adema had previously walked past unawares, taking it for a windfall perhaps a dozen yards closer to the Mill.

Damn.

“Listen,” he desperately told his captor, “I don’t know if the Governor is dead or alive but we’ve got to get out of here. The Director has taken leave of his mind and is in there with a pistol. What’s left of this place will burn. This is the only way out.”

Nudged forward he bent as urged to lift the end of the hidden boat. It was indeed but a hollowed out log canoe such as the local natives had been wont to use. He had seen the conveyance before, downstream, carting tools and such. Narrow enough to carry one man and a light load or maybe even two men down the narrow canal.

“I’m sure you’re right,” the man said softly, “lay the gun inside.”

Adema did so but as he crouched down he turned and got a clear look up the man that held him for the first time.

He knew him. Dark-haired and unshaven...it was the Englishman. Captain Fuller, the ragged captain who had carried in the wounded boy and the painted Indian. Christ! He had spoken with the
fellow at length, but now he stood here in a grey’s bloody uniform waistcoat and spoke in a different voice.

_The Hell. The Hell._

Whether it was a sudden fear of a ghost, a devil, or the sense of a trap unseen closing on him, Sargent Adema, panicked pulled the short blade from his belt and slashed back clumsilad.

_Stupid_, Matthew Adema almost had time to berate himself, for he had had some skill as a killer in his day and knew from such poor angle that he had slashed his opponent only, not stabbed any vital place and signed his own death warrant in the motion.

For so he had. The man pulled the blade swiftly across the Irishman’s throat dispatching him near instantly.

Unfortunately the weight of Adema’s desperate lunge back continued even as it’s originator died.

Had another hard gust of wind not acted against his motion, the ground been dry or wet leaves of palm not caught the slick heel of a now-dead officer’s boot, Captain Andor would have righted himself quickly by rolling away as the redcoats body fell forward. Instead he was pushed backward into the water of the narrow trench, more commonly only a foot or two deep but now swollen to three times that, to strike his head and shoulder hard against a stone as he did.

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She moved wide, around the building. On this side there was less cover for the ground was bare. The only vegetation being lifeless and bare shrubs but running quickly and low she made for the stone wall of the mill.

The voices within had stilled or else been lost as the wind blew against her. While walls of the small building reached up only two low stories on this side and it area modest she sensed as soon as her hand touched the shell stone that the slabs that formed it were thick.

She thought of Fort Mantazas, but the stone here was golden, less white than there. In Cuba she remembered the walls as having a rose-gold hue hue. “It is everywhere a little different,” she remembered the three-fingered gunner saying, “but it swallows cannonball like it were a featherbed. They swallowed sound oddly too she had noticed.

She climbed a low wall. Cut off from the wind for a moment the smell of rotting matter nearly choked her. Stacks of matter were contained in round bins of stone and she skirted these. A dark pond of water swelled behind the mill though in the moons light she could not make out the streams that fed it. A wooden dam with some sort of flood-gate stretched behind the building and she walked rope-like across it for a few feet praying a gust would not rise to knock her off. Water poured over
the gate though and the wheel turned freely, presumably un-hooked from the gears within. Could not have been a large wheel powder was not corn, Mr. Baldwin Corr had explained. Likely there were several small wheels run at different times. There were windows evenly spaced but all were too narrow, slits meant to hold out weather and let in daylight and air in a space too dangerous for the light of a wick to ever be admitted. Slim as she was Mrs. Andor knew she would not fit and she decided her goal might be better served by going across the roof.

These speakers within must be identified..

*If the man in white were here she would kill him and avenge her mother.*

*If her father were here she should find him and tell him that for all his sins Saul Gerrerre had paid his debt, that the little child trapped in the dark had at last found her way to the light.*

*Then…? Then he would take her husband’s hand and they would set this hell afire, trusting in God and the Truth as her mother had instructed.*

Jen Erso Andor thought no further ahead but only climbed.

As soldier’s boots impeded her climbing she took them off and went on barefoot.

The roof was steeply pitched and pegged with overlapping pine shingles. Hatch-like openings were cut in two places on each sloping side. Three were closed, latched from within against the rain likely, but one was open, forgotten or torn free by the winds.

She worked her way across to it, lay flat, and listened.

The wind rushed over her back but within the air was still, leaden with a smell like death and rotted ash. Nothing could be seen below the opening but shadow and the tops of barrels but a man’s voice could be heard clearly within….coming from somewhere toward the front, just inside the arched doorway.

“*That is your limited mind. Believe what you will…there is no buyer, no outside commander…only myself alone, Krennik,*” a man’s voice said hoarsely. There was a cough as if the speaker’s breath were obstructed then he went on louder. “*Ten years it took, a long and bitter course of study, I assure you, begun the day my Lara died…many suffered and died while I learned my new trade…*”

*Papa.*

There was a thud. A hard blow struck against a man’s body, unblocked. She knew the sound too well to mistake it.

“*Brave men gave me aid and carried my message but I am author of all.*” Coughing again or perhaps a short laugh. “*Your master Tarkin is dead. This pocket Hell you built will burn to the last leaf of indigo and those you tormented will at least suffer no more in it. The Devil you serve may find another way to level armies and tear Creation asunder but not by hand of mine. Today I have cheated him and you.*”
Mrs. Andor knew she could not fit through the window and what lay beneath the opening was uncertain, dark.

No panic. No rashness.

_Breathe, you are not a little girl in the dark anymore, you are a hunting falcon of the Onderean, a sword in your belt and your Enemy below._

She worked her way to the edge of the roof above the entrance, clinging with toes and fingers to the damp shingles of pine.

The wide door to the vile place was open and man speaking now surely just inside.

“I see what you are doing, Galen,”

_Him._

The devil sounded breathless, as if after some exertion, “You are trying to make me kill you. I shall be more than glad to oblige if you but … give … me … the … bloody … notes. Those, a few samples in a bag, some bits of plants, a handful of the material, well-padded of course, are all I ask. Once the process is authenticated and reproduced you can join the blessed shades of your wife and child by whatever means you request.”

_How far down? Twenty feet or near so much. You must make a cat’s landing again asadi and you must come up at once, hurt or not, ready to strike or move and though it is night out here it is darker in there._

Backing up to the very edge of the roof, crouched to keep her body as straight as possible on the angled slope she placed hands between her feet to hold and swing her down lessening the force of the drop by her own height.

Jen Erso Andor jumped.

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Chapter End Notes

Praesentialis = Present/now/existing (Latin)
A qui vive la pietà quand’è ben mort = here pity lives when it is truly dead (Medieval Italian [Dantes Inferno 20.28])

sì che tre venti si movean da ello: / quindi Cocito tutto s’aggelava” (three winds made their way out from him— / and all Cocytus froze before those winds [Inferno. 34.51-52]

Te amo más allá de la medida, mi reina pirata = I love you beyond measure my pirate queen (Spanish)

Ahuia xiyanoia, nahuia xiyamotecay a poyauhtla, ayauh chicauaztica, ayauicalo tlallocanaya = Go forth, go forth to where the clouds are spread abundantly, where the thick mist makes the cloudy house of Tlaloc. (Nahuatl)

Would like to point out for those chewing their nails at the gathering dark (and we now have Inferno, ESB, and RO stuffed in here...so dark) that a small canoe has been introduced to this equation.
Praesentialis: the Second Part

Chapter Summary

In which Captain and Mrs. Cassian Andor, Mr. Galen Erso and Director Oren Krennik meet, all four at last inside the dreadful Sugar Mill of the plantation.

Chapter Notes

Short. Melodramatic and filled with musings about multi-cultural concepts of nature of evil, revenge, redemption, higher powers, (yet more) Dante. Jen is reunited with her father, however briefly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Though the profits from Indigo have begun to recoup costs plans have been proposed to expand the arrangement of Mills with some eye toward producing both Sugar from the colony’s Southern property and salable quantities of saltpeter.....at present only small amounts of powder are manufactured here primarily, as I was informed by his Excellency, for the use of the Plantation’s guard, shipments from Jamaica and Charleston proving impractical....as well-engineered as all else here ...precautions traditional to such works are scrupulously observed. All ground and surfaces within the interior structure, the roofs and exterior wall of the mill and a further compass of ten feet beyond any opening are well cleared and swept daily with wooden rakes and palm fiber brooms lest the heat of rotting matter collected in some forgotten corner compost from the habitual damp or mere neglect into something warm enough to flame. Save for proscribed use by the supervisor of a “safety” lamp with candle sealed in copper and glass all direct or open spark of fire be it in the form of other lamp or candle, flint or light-strikes is most strictly banned. Further, All steel is prohibited whether in the form of gun or knife blade, shoe buckles, button, or other ornament lest even the most unlikely impact strike a spark. These immutables are supervised by the Chief Engineer as a matter of normal course for no other of the staff or overseer routinely enter the Mill but when any such do the restrictions are strictly observed. Those workers conscripted to labor in that place wear little clothing save rough trousers and not any shoes or boots save those scraps of sodden cloth wrapped around their feet and dampened panels of curtain hang inside the doorway during production to prevent both accidental or purposeful collection of the substance or any contamination of the black powder with dust from the outside. It was pointed out to me by my host that the usual insurance of misting of clothing with water to prevent the slightest incitement of vital charge or spark is often rendered superfluous by the often sweltering humidity ............”

REPORT—Most Privy to His Excellency Governor James Grant—dated May, 1764.

[Contained: a torn fragment relating to the New Smyrna Plantation. Discovered among the papers of that late Gentleman by Mr. Davits Draven, and forwarded here under sealed cover to Lady Mary Monmouth, August, 1772 w copy to Commodore Aaron Cracken, both London, w/ additional notes.]
New Smyrna Colony

British East Florida

near dawn January 16, 1770

The Sugar Mill

The modest-appearing but well-designed water wheel and wooden gears powered the movement of the large stones for the first grinding.

Crushed matter was thereafter shoveled most carefully to three smaller quern-like stones within the lower level. These were turned by men, nearly all released by merciful death now, whose wrapped feet over the course of years had pressed and worn the sand and tabby floor of that mill smooth and firm.

It lay covered now as if groomed with a varnish of vile blue-black clay.

Mr. Galen Erso lay upon the foul beaten ground within the center of the Mill.

His injuries were considerable. Difficulty breathing coupled with the volume of pain in his right side he ascribed to broken ribs but he accounted this of no importance save to the degree to which it might impede movement.

Plan carefully Galen there is not far to go now.

Bruises and the obstruction of blood dripping into his eyes limited his vision but this also signified little. He knew well where he was, knew in fact each foot of this wretched circle blindfolded.

All that mattered was time.
Krennik seemed to have recovered enough of the semblance of sanity to have put the pistol back in his belt.

Mr. Erso had hoped to goad him into firing but he would not let that failure bring despair, not yet.

A great share of the crated powder had been carried off by Tarkin’s order but this wretched place was still but a grenade shaped as a building.

The querns, wheels and tanks themselves were fashioned of the shellstone. Once golden-white all were now stained clear through with blue-black and would flame like pitchwood if touched with spark. Drying racks from the last aborted pressing still lay stacked against the western wall.

The flammable oil he had made as a trigger was likely pooled low by now or scattered in the storm but some surely lingered in the water courses here.

The flammable oil he had made as a trigger was likely pooled low by now or scattered in the storm but some surely lingered in the water courses here.

The phosphorus strikes lay safe within his waistcoat pocket.

John Baldwin had died in an explosion it was said and all his notes and papers burned with him.

If he could but reach one without Krennik noticing and touch it to the stone of the tank some yards beyond…it would likely be enough.

“You have cheated me of time, Galen, nothing more.”

He was back again, his shadow blocking the little light the moon let in the door frame and the vent above.

Again that need to boast. Silence makes you nervous. It always has.

The Director paced back and forth between the door and the tanks, ranting like some cornered beast would if granted political office and the power of speech.

In the name of God, Oren, shut up.

Thirty years ago at a raucous gathering in some crowded lodgings at the far edge of the Fjärdingen he had been introduced to another new student.

“Ni två bör komma överens!” Verrs had said laughing, “Vi stackars killar ska hålla ihop!”

When drunk Verrs often moaned about being kept on short leash by his wealthy father and made smirking comparison between his own situation and that of those who, like Galen Erso, were known to be attending by patronage or charity prize.

The newcomer, his fine quality coat buttoned strategically to cover the somewhat threadbare
waistcoat beneath had laughed along as if too good-humored to take offense at the boorish joke and held out his hand companionably. Quick-witted and ingratiating Oren Krennik described himself as the third son of a Fresian ship owner by his British wife. Caring more for learning than apprenticeship as a clerk he had been packed off to University on a miserly cash settlement of his inheritance and the help of an old friend of his father’s. Though embarrassed by his accent and struggling with Latin he professed himself eager for friends who sought some higher goal than a corner of trade in North Sea blubber and though skating thin in some areas of study was a great admirer of the Classics and proved to have worked his way through every volume of Vitruvius’ De architectura. They spoke English together and were soon good friends.

Had even a single word of it been true?

Mr. Erso struggled for the space of a ragged breath to remember the face of the young student whose hand he had shaken and found he could not.

What was it she called you Oren? “A masterpiece of the mimic’s art. A breathing apparition approximating a man.”

If there was ever a real boy, a living soul, behind that pantomime it must have perished long ago, likely before I ever met you.

He found that shallow inhalation allowed him to move so long as he did so with deliberation and struggled with wrists still bound before him to manage onto his knees with one elbow as support.

Let him think me broken, crippled, for just a little longer.

How many hours until dawn? What was it the young English...no, Spanish... soldier... the one who loved his child... had said? Tarkin’s masters had bargemen offshore who might come to investigate at first light.

If he could knock Krennik sideways and marshal strength enough after to reach the wall....

Something lightly touched his hand and in the midst of Hell he marveled. It was a wisp of dried grass, pushed by an eddy of breeze.

The wind was changing. He could feel it even here in the dark center for the arched doors stood wide open.

The fierce North West gusts of the previous night had grown more variable in direction if no tamer. It was as if several powers now contended for dominance.

A promise lay with that moaning. Should the fire from the burning docks and town jump the Main Canal some ember might in time be blown this way despite the dampness of the fields between. A single spark might be enough….but Galen Erso could not trust to chance.
Krennik stopped short and stepped back as if startled by some sight or sound.

“Sargent?” he barked. “Have you secured the boat?”

There was no answer.

Something or someone moved within the Mill now, along the wall. Mr. Erso sensed this but could not be sure it was not some flotsam blown in by the wind.

“Adema?! ” The Director’s voice seemed to edge nearer the open door even as he spoke… cautiously, “Are you here? Report damn you!”

A figure stepped from the dark beneath the wheel platform, as if it detached from the very stuff of that shadow.

“Apaniyan,” a light voice said. “Kiniun ti Ogun n pe fun eje re.”

“Boy...? ” astonishment, “What the bloody hell...? ”

So little imagination Oren, was that the worst of the poverties that made you a parasite? Do you still not know where you are?

Angel or devil, the voice went on.

”A child in the dark calls for your blood.”

“Stay back!”  Fear...at last.

There was a glint of silver above and ahead, on the edge of his narrowed sight. A blade was drawn and caught some gleam of moonlight along its edge.

“My mother calls for your blood.”

“Who are you?”  Krennik cried, uncomprehending.

Galen Erso heedless of pain struggled onto his knees now and raised bound hands to clear his eyes. It seemed to him that he must have taken merciful leave of his senses here at the very bottom of the pit.

Of all the impossible things in that hopeless place a woman’s laugh rang out, bright, silvery.

Looking back for Lara, fearful she might have stumbled on the narrow path up Aetna’s slope he was put in place by that triumphant laughter from above. Gaze following the lovely sound he saw her standing bathed in the sunlight, already on the high ledge far ahead of their party. In her boys breeches and boots, pinned and braided chestnut hair half-undone beneath her hat and petticoats tucked at her waist, no nymph wreathed in flowers could have been more lovely. “Oh tardy man!” She called down to him, “ Forse ,che di sedere in pria avrai distretta!”
“I am Jane Erso, daughter of Lara and Galen, of Commander Saul Gerrere and a soldier of the Alliance. Did the Devil you serve not tell you the name of your death?”

He saw her then, with back mostly to him, her cheek outlined in the pale light of moon and distant fire beyond the doorway in some pale and muddied waistcoat, straight-backed and tensed as a bowstring and beyond her he saw Krennik….pistol drawn.

Galen Erso heard the cock of the trigger.

Not again.

Without thought he gained his feet and launched himself forward.

“Papa!” He heard her cry.

Mrs. Andor dropped near blindly from the windswept overhang and on striking ground less soft than calculated for felt one knee give beneath her. Having been schooled well in her craft and in hard circumstances she neither fell nor cried out. Those who could not master themselves quickly endangered all on a silent boarding.

Instead she rolled sideways and into the dark doorway seeking cover.

The rush of wind outside covered small sounds within but she moved carefully, barefoot and with her back to some stone wall first and then wood fencing. She could hear the rush of water beneath a wooden floor off to her right.

The other voice… her father’s voice… she had heard her father’s voice from above… was silent now.

Not dead surely, for the man had spoken loudly of not killing him….but struck dumb or bound within
and she could not search for him yet.

Her Cassian would find his way through any dark to her. She wrapped the thought of him in that absolute faith and laid it aside.

Sight would take a moment to alter itself to change. The now-moonlight night was as day compared to the dark within this foul-smelling place. The Man alone was clearly visible within striding back and forth like some powder-faced actor on a dark stage.

Her enemy stopped his monologue abruptly then and jerked his head toward the door.

Had he seen some glimpse of out the corner of an eye? Heard her shoulder brush the rough wall inside the frame?

The pale figure moved a few steps toward the doorway as if he would peer out, then looked around.

“Sargent?” he called out. “Have you secured the boat? ” Suspicious.

“Adema?! Are you in here? Report damn you!”

Look at him little child. A vicious white-muzzled dog…still dangerous but without his pack what is he?

She saw him clearly, a pale European….the accent had been English oddly trimmed…tall, but no warrior. Those shirtsleeves and coat were still white but tattered and much stained with blood. Likely not a drop of it his own. His cropped hair was grey.

Have you grown old waiting for me to come and kill you?

Mrs. Andor drew her cutlass and stepped slowly into the light, calling down on him as she did the curse she had practiced since the first night off Gibraltar, since she had first known that somehow, some way she would stand before him with a blade in her hand.

The dog barked between her words but she paid no mind until he shouted “Who are you?”

That he would not recognize her had never in all Creation occurred to her and so she laughed.

“I am Jane Erso,” she told him and spoke her mother’s name aloud for the first time that she could recall, “I am the daughter of Lara and Galen, ọmọ of Commander Saul Gerrere and a soldier of the Alliance. Did the Devil you serve not tell you the name of your death?”

No more bonus for your soul’s trade than a white silk suit, stupid monster? You should have bargained better.

He drew a pistol from that self-same bloodstained coat and pointed it at her, snarling.

Mrs. Andor crouched to the side by instinct but she felt no fear. The first time a man pointed a pistol at her she had been twelve, in an alley in Marseilles. He missed and Marie had stabbed him in the back. The second time she had been fourteen on the deck of a galley out of Salé and she had taken his hand off and the pistol with it, still cocked.

Done hard once done easy again, adiye.
But before she could spring a man she had not seen in the dark, or if seen had taken for a fallen rack or pile of cloth on the black ground at the rear of the platform leaped forward without a sound flinging himself at the apaniyan.

Shame drew voice from her as much as recognition or even alarm, shame that he had lain there hurt and she been so fixed upon her adversary that she had not known.

“Papa!”

He would certainly not have fired .......that would have been madness so near to the....., not until well outside, no, no....he was not mad.

Damn them all this was HIS.

He alone had seen the possibilities and the path forward. Twenty patient years, every step, every plan, every hardship.....sabotage and stupidity triumphed over again and again, fools dispensed with, weaklings managed, backstabbing snuff-taking jackals out-witted, all to have his moment... to stand at the only true seat of power and say “THIS will change the world!” and be understood.

Oren Krennik had drawn his pistol on impulse when he saw the person who spoke....even a stern man could be excused agitation of mind after such trials.

Lara? A memory of his own words in some oddly mirror-like scene struck him. “Dear Lara... defying God and Nature.”

But superstition being utterly foreign to his nature this thought could not take hold.

Even the self-righteous dead do not come back and Mrs. Galen Erso nee the Honorable Miss Laurel Elizabeth Jane Laham daughter of Henry Laham Fifth Lord Arian was most well and certainly dead. He himself had seen her body tossed off the cliff into the crashing surf below.
The appearance of this pale English boy transformed to an assassin speaking in heathen tongues was unsettling in the extreme, yet in the instant he heard the name ….Jane? …his shock began to take form and coalesce around a memory.

Could this truly be the brat they’d never found at the house despite waste of the better part of two days looking for it? Fools! Incompetents! The child had run off through the rain and surely fallen off one of the cliff paths. One of the men had reported so…. Petrel it had been…reported the house maid to have said so before they . ….and what was this madness about Gerrere?

Krennik needed only to hold her back, whatever she was....ghost, maiden Fury, cursedly forgotten detail...... for from the corner of his eye he had caught sight of a figure moving up the canal path, Sargent Adema, wrapped in his black oilcloth, kerchief pulled up over his face as was all but uniform here. Krennik need only stall… draw her out….

That a section of the black dirt floor of the stinking place would rise up and fling itself upon him he could not fathom even as it happened.

Galen Erso in his distraction having also been forgotten.

The pistol he had meant to do no more than half-cock went off even as the Engineer struck him full weight grappling for it.

As he was driven backwards onto the damp muck and sand at the doors entrance Oren Krennik felt the burn of the powder scorch through his waistcoat.

"Christ!"...tore from his throat as he fell.

It was curse not prayer though, even in what he thought might be his last instant he would not abandon what he was.

No more than would a long-forgotten boy breaking out the tiny window of a Shoreditch house. Even as he climbed out through the sharp splinters of the narrow pane, that boy had known to his bones that no one out there heard prayers or would be bothered to answer them if they did.

But the fire did not come.

Galen Erso’s body had smothered the spark and taken the aborted shot.

In rage as much as panic Oren Krennik shoved the dead weight of the man off of him and scrambled to his feet.

The woman screamed.
The cloaked soldier was past the gate and nearing even the soft gravel of the path crushed-shell path gave back the sound of boots running now,

Krennik spared no more than a glance back, enough to make out the bundled musket on the soldiers back, and short saber in hand as he approached. Eyes on the Mill door he shouted orders over his shoulder, “No guns you bloody fool! Dispose of her quickly! Those notes are in there….I will find them and…”

In looking up he saw the approaching Fury though still armed had stopped abruptly some few yards away, but the moonlight showed her expression not to be, as he had expected, composed of rage either cold or hot. Nor was it one of fear.

Instead she smiled, a smile formed of incongruously pure delight like that of a sailors sweetheart on the sighting of a longed-for sail or acampaign-weary young soldier glimpsing home at the end of the road.

Pain caught Oren Krennik in the back like a quick hard blow. One hand shoved him forward to enable the other to skillfully withdraw the blade even as he turned gasping.

The Director recognized that the man who killed him was not Sargent Matthew Adema only as he fell.

_____________________________________________

“Papa…Papa….It’s me…Papa, it’s Jen.”

Her face was stained with soot and tears, close to his own.

A grown woman. So beautiful.

“Jen…” he whispered…the pain boiled in his lungs and almost choked his words but she heard him and she smiled.
“My star…”

He and Sefla had kissed young Rook and sent him out upon a hopeless sea. "God is good," the scribe had promised the youth and Rook had answered back, struggling to believe. Galen Erso had not believed, but he did now.

Arms held him, hers and others….he tried to reach her… to touch her face and though he was weak his arm was supported and his fingers brushed her cheek.

“So big…”

She laughed, a miracle.

None of the words mattered. Forgiveness did not matter. But…but...

“It must be destroyed…” he whispered. “Please…”

“Yes, Papa. It will be.”

No. No.

“Go. Go…run away…”

“I will not leave you. We will not leave you.”


“A lamp….the post…my coat...lights..."

"Papa hush.."

No. No. My love my child....listen..

"..the fuse….any spark…Jen…go…live...please”

He had expected darkness to grow around him but it was light.

“Path….please….” He had no breath.

“Say…say you understand… Jen.”

“I understand, Papa.”
The light grew and he wept expecting her to chide him as Beatrice had the poet for sins and lack of understanding.

Lara…Lara…where are you? Why did you wait?

“Vegno del loco ove tornar disio; amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare,” she said.

No. That was the wrong verse… wrong Canto.. It was not right.

"It is perfectly right. Do you not remember how we read from the middle of the first book outward to both ends, my love. It is hardly to be wondered that we disordered all. I have so much to tell you."

I cannot.

"You can. Leave it. Let it go."

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who did not know, though most of you probably did, Ben Mendellson aside from being a kick-ass character actor who ups the game of just about everything he's in and being quite the handsome fellow, was a heartbreakingly cute teen heartthrob.

Coming up. Dawn, and the crew of the Rogues Venture face the Devastator. Two old adversaries meet and capes are tossed. Bodhi Rook and Luc Ciel-Marchuer attempt a desperate plan, Captain Solo tries to do the right thing which for him is like cutting with lefty scissors and Captain and Mrs. Andor face the decisions that lie ahead like the soulmate battle-couple newlyweds they are.

Ni två bör komma överens! = You two should agree/get along!

Vi stackars killar ska hålla ihop! = We poor boys should stick together. (Swedish)
Apaniyan = Murderer

Kiniun ti Ogun n pe fun ọjọ rẹ. = The Lion of War calls for your blood. (Yoruba)

Forse / che di sedere in pria avrai distretta! = Perhaps you will / have need to sit before you reach the top! [Purgatorio. 4.98-99]

vegno del loco ove tornar disio;

amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare. = I come from where I most long to return; Love prompted me, that Love which makes me speak

( Inferno. 2.70-72)

End Notes

All comments are like water in the desert.

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