

Chapter Four

Jonathan breathed in the cold air with relief as he exited his estate for the last time. All the preparations were finished; his labors had finally come to fruition. Wind gusted along the streets of Beacon as he brought his case to the waiting carriage, forcing him to clamp his hat to his head. Passers-by leaned drunkenly to keep their balance, while the burly men loading heavy boxes into the cart attached to the carriage staggered like newborns. Discarded newspapers and scraps of wrapping were whipped into the air, out of the reach of the streetlights, never to be seen again. Agnes flinched as the front page of the *Beacon Times* slapped into the post at the base of the stairwell, cracking and rippling in the gale.

“You be safe now, sir.” She told Jonathan, half-shouting and clutching her skirts. The wind eased for a moment, and Agnes darted out to take one of his hands with both of hers. “You come back soon, you hear?”

“I intend to,” Jonathan lied, reassuring his housekeeper with a smile. “But just in case, I’ve made sure you and Johann are properly taken care of.” Most of his collection had been quietly liquidated to ensure there was sufficient cushion against future contingencies and there was very little left inside the walls of his estate. He hadn’t been certain at first there would be enough for his servants, but he had found it was not an issue. Relative to the enormous expense of refitting an airship, ensuring his two servants had a sufficient nest egg and the legal protection that required was practically a rounding error.

“All packed, sir,” the head porter said, a broad man with no neck and a lumpen face. He spoke exactly how he looked, but the efficacy and efficiency with which he tied Jonathan’s cargo into the cart showed that he was keener than he seemed.

“Excellent,” Jonathan said, handing over the payment with a tip besides, and carefully disengaged himself from Agnes with a few more reassurances. Finally he climbed into the carriage and Johann started off toward the Port Quarter. Even at a distance Jonathan could pick out the shape of the *Endeavor* shining in the port’s spotlights, long and sleek.

Eleanor had frustrated several more sabotage attempts over the previous months, none leading to anyone of any particular import. A few jealous types, at least one person with a grudge against Crowley, Stanford, and Moore rather than Jonathan himself, and no second appearance from whoever had left the little glass devices in the zint tanks. Despite Eleanor’s assurances, he still worried there was something they hadn’t caught.

He brooded on it as the carriage bumped and rattled its way up the switchbacks to the Port Quarter, Johann guiding it to a halt by the paternoster. Antomine was already there, a pale figure flanked by two tall Lux Guards and chatting with a number of airmen. They were also dressed in white, and each wore the flat, blank mask every Lux Guard did, which rendered them faceless and made them look disturbingly identical.

“Mister Heights!” Antomine was back to his youthful demeanor, cheerful and exuberant. In that light, the pair of soldiers seemed like chaperones rather than enforcers, though Jonathan knew better. “I am eager to be off. Where is your female companion?”

“I am sure she will be on time, Mister Antomine,” Jonathan said, suppressing irritation that Antomine hadn’t even waited for him to fully exit the carriage. He nodded to Johann, pushing a

palm down to ask him to wait for a moment, and then beckoned to the group of blue-uniformed airmen waiting to take his cargo. Some were big and brawny, others short and wiry, but they wrestled the packed crates off the trailer and onto handcarts with the ease of long practice.

In fact, Jonathan had already spotted Eleanor and her companions, and pretended to be surprised when their carriage came to a halt by the dock, pulling a trailer cart and an even larger set of crates than Jonathan had brought along. In the space of busy confusion where Eleanor got out and started the process of transferring her luggage to the paternoster, Jonathan had a few quiet words with Johann. His chauffeur was more stoic than Agnes had been, but it was plain that he, too, worried about Jonathan's return.

"Don't go getting yourself killed," Johann said gruffly. "I've read all those adventure novels. It's not safe out there."

"Don't worry," Jonathan said, ignoring the fact that the novels had only passing resemblance to reality. "I'll be fine." He shook hands with the man as the last of the crates were hauled off the cart, then watched until Johann vanished into the bright lights of the city.

He walked over to the paternoster, cane tapping on the stone streets than thumping on the lift's myceliplank, watching as Eleanor and her attendants supervised the transfer of her cargo. Her attendants looked like maids rather than guards, one tall and fair, one short and dark, but otherwise completely forgettable and practically as faceless as Antomine's men. They were impeccably groomed as a noblewoman's servants ought to be, but there was a telltale aura of danger about them. Perhaps they didn't have Eleanor's talents, but there were many ways to be lethal.

In times past, there would have been a gathered crowd. Not a large one, but still people to wish him and the others well as they departed out into the unknown. This time there was nobody. Only the Crown and the Reflected Council cared at all, and their agents had no more friends than he did. The failure of his last expedition, and the deaths of all those involved save himself, had burned all his social connections.

"I have never been on a long-haul airship," Antomine remarked, joining Jonathan while airmen portaged the last of Eleanor's cargo.

"Neither have I," Eleanor agreed as she joined them. Neither she nor Antomine introduced their respective guards. Seeing that all the people and cargo were on board, the operator threw a lever and the paternoster jerked into motion.

"It will wear thin quickly," Jonathan assured them. "Though we should be making stops often enough."

"Well sure, I can't imagine how lost we'd get—" Eleanor stopped abruptly as the wind gusting past them turned suddenly warm, carrying with it the sweet scent of strange and exotic fruits, of tantalizing spices. "Greenwind," she said, squinting into the breeze. "That seems auspicious."

Puffy white seedheads the size of carriages drifted into the light, bearing seeds the size of children. The wind from the Verdant Expanse, that enormous volcano-wracked forest, announced spring and broke the chill of winter. Half of the cloth in the city was woven from the fine fluff bestowed by that great spring inundation, and already he could see people hurrying onto roofs with hooks and nets to bring them down.

“Auspicious, perhaps, but it does mean we will face an inopportune headwind,” Jonathan remarked, as one of the puffballs impacted the tower and slid across it with the sound of silk on stone. “Captain Montgomery will be most put out.”

“Oh, don’t be so dour,” Antomine said, shrugging off his heavy outer coat and taking a deep breath of the air, which carried the scents of far-off lands. “If nothing else this means we can actually enjoy some time above-deck.” Jonathan frowned, and forewent pointing out that it would be far too windy most of the time for them to enjoy anything.

The paternoster jostled to a stop and the airmen wheeled their cargo out, along the spar where the *Endeavor* was docked, and to the ramp leading to the bottom deck. Jonathan directed them to the mid-deck, the seven of them trooping along the metal gangplank. Montgomery was there waiting for them in his best captain’s uniform, pipe in hand and watching the final preparations with a gimlet eye.

“Permission to come aboard, Captain,” Jonathan said formally, even though he was the majority owner of the *Endeavor* after the refit.

“Permission granted,” Montgomery said, and beckoned them inside. “Welcome to the *Endeavor*.”

Jonathan had been on many other airships before, from big cargo freighters to small tramp skiffs that could barely keep the envelope intact. The rebuilt *Endeavor* was by far the cleanest and neatest, the newness showing through in the brightly-painted walls and dirt-free grating underneath their feet. Zint-light tubes ran through the corridor ceiling, the indirect light soft and shadowless.

Montgomery gave them a brief tour as he led them up the decks; the lower deck was for cargo, the mid-deck for the crew, and the upper for passengers. The topmost deck held an even dozen rooms, six on a side, accommodations and mess at the rear while the front was given over to a large – for a ship – observation room, with broad panes of glass so they could look out over the landscape.

The entire deck was covered in pale blue carpet, save for where the furniture was bolted to the floor. That was a precaution that would be rendered somewhat moot by the sheer volume of items they were taking, but nobody wanted to be crushed by a poorly-secured bed when the weather hit. If either Eleanor or Antomine were disappointed by the close confines of the rooms, they didn’t show it.

“We’ll be leaving within the hour, barring any unforeseen circumstances,” Montgomery told them in the observation room, while airmen unloaded crates into rooms. Unpacking them was up to the passengers. “There’s been a lot of minor annoyances from people so I’d rather not delay now that you’re all aboard. Until then, feel free to settle in.”

“Aye, captain,” Antomine said, which seemed impolitic as Antomine wasn’t an airman, and Montgomery looked around to see if any of the others had something to had before left to supervise the final preparations.

“Are you going to introduce me to your handlers?” Jonathan asked bluntly, once Montgomery was away. He doubted Antomine was oblivious to Eleanor’s true masters, and if he was it was better to have it out here and now, rather than during an inevitable crisis.

“John and James,” Antomine said, though there was no visible difference between the two guards.

“Marie and Sarah,” Eleanor said, indicating the tall, pale one and the small, dark one in series. Antomine and Eleanor looked at each other with matching smiles and Jonathan suddenly felt like he was sharing a vessel with children. He was rather forcibly reminded of his own first expedition, headed to the far south with his father.

“Pleased to meet you,” he said, not entirely meaning it, and returned his gaze to the principal two. “You should try to unpack and secure as much as you can before we leave. It may seem steady now, but that’s because we’re tied to the towers. Once we begin moving you’re likely to have difficulty keeping your feet.”

Jonathan left them to deal with their luggage and retrieved only a single item from a crate in his cabin, then followed the stairs down. He dodged hurrying airmen, all of them readying the ship for launch, and made his way forward to the bridge. By ancient custom, he needed as much permission to be there as to board the ship in the first place, but when Montgomery saw what he was holding, beckoned him in.

“Is that what I think it is?” Montgomery peered at the complex knot of gears and dials. “An actual triskolabe?”

“We would be risking serious danger once we pass Danby’s, otherwise,” Jonathan confirmed, handing it out to him. Of course, the triskolabe did require certain materials and workmanship not favored by the Illuminated King. Beyond the compass, pointing north and south, and the inverted zint loop, pointing to Beacon, a triskolabe used two techniques not native to human reasoning. Zumar’s Bones, which longed to be in the great graveyard far to the south and west, and the Lens of Fools, a mechanical eye that let a navigator glimpse more than the light of zint would reveal and served as the calibration point for the mechanism.

“I advise you to use it only sparingly, however,” he warned. “On my last trip the navigator needed laudanum to sleep for weeks after we were blown off course from a storm and he had to guide us back.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Montgomery said soberly, hefting the triskolabe and putting it down carefully by the navigation orrery. Even after all his experience, Jonathan had trouble deciphering the complex clockwork display and couldn’t begin to guess how it was connected to the vanes and flaps outside the bridge. The navigator spared barely a glance for the triskolabe, busy with a checklist as he adjusted the levers at his console.

“I’ll let you get on with it,” Jonathan said, glancing around at the quiet hurry of the airmen. “Knowing how to *make* such a thing is far different from knowing how to *use* it.”

“I appreciate that, Mister Heights.” Montgomery’s leathery face broke into a smile. “You’d be surprised how many passengers think they can tell me how to do my job.”

It was less than an hour later, by the longcase chronometer in the observation room, that the *Endeavor* cast off her lines and her engines flared to life. The searing blue of zint engines pushed to their limits glared off the soot-stained towers of the yards as they powered out and up, heading east and above the city. Eleanor was fairly plastered against the front window, and Antomine was nearly as eager. The guards were more reserved, with the so-called maids

watching cautiously and Antomine's escorts in their own cabins, evincing no interest whatsoever.

Jonathan regarded the sight with an odd sort of nostalgia, reminded of other expeditions in happier times. Once he had been just as eager and amazed at the sight of the white city below them, the shrouded countryside stretching out in every direction. Illuminated rail drew straight lines out from the city walls, while farms and ranches formed a fainter latticework. Even so close to Beacon zint wasn't completely ubiquitous. Farms too poor to afford the lanterns and lampposts were illuminated by the green light of sheltershrooms, forming sloppy scattered puddles rather than the crisp lines of zint infrastructure.

The lights of other airships moved here and there, spotlights casting circles of illumination down onto farms and roads. Even so deep into human territory, occasionally things came from the darkness, and there was the ever-present threat of the Cult of Flame to the south or the Invidus Croft to the north. The navy of the Illuminated King was always busy patrolling settled territories, though more to spot a potential incursion than to defend towns or farms against the depredations of monstrous life.

"What a gorgeous view," Eleanor said admiringly, just short of pressing her face against the glass. "All that scattered light in the darkness. It's like — it makes me feel *something*, but I'm not sure what."

"Most people think that," Jonathan said. There was something about it that spoke to the human soul, perhaps fragmentary racial memories from a forgotten past. The view was not the sort of secret that drove men mad, but one that planted melancholy in their hearts after too long staring into the light-studded darkness.

"Humans are creatures of the light," Antomine remarked, hands clasped behind his back. "We are ever drawn to it, and we would be lost without it. Unlike many things in this world, which eschew the light and prefer the darkness." He stood stable in the gentle sway of the airship, white-pupiled eyes reflected in the glass. The words were not wrong, but there some something about their delivery that made Jonathan uneasy, lacking as it did either the rote recitation of scripture or the fervor of the zealot. Antomine was a considered believer, and all the more dangerous for it.

"So where are we headed from here?" Eleanor asked. Jonathan raised an eyebrow, and she rolled her eyes. "Yes, east, I know, but the maps don't really tell much of a story."

"Well." Jonathan regarded her and Antomine, ignoring the attention of the Reflected Council guards. "From here to Danby's Point is up to the discretion of Captain Montgomery. I'm familiar with that stretch of human territory, but Montgomery will have contacts and favored ports of call along the way. When last I discussed it with him, he was planning to stop at Autochthon Reach and Whither before reaching Danby's." There was no map hanging in the observation room, but all of them should be sufficiently conversant with the geography of the kingdom to follow that much.

"I guess that's not so bad," Eleanor said, brow furrowed as she considered it. "Not very exciting, though."

"And after?" Antomine said, turning to Jonathan. "It is far more complex to navigate without the light of civilization to guide us."

“After depends on the disposition of things at Danby’s Point. The weather, the supplies, reports of beasts or caravans. Or other, more esoteric dangers.” Jonathan had long ago learned not to discount any news from the hardy folks who dared the edges of settled lands, even if it was mere muttering and gut feeling.

“I suppose it makes sense,” Antomine said, not entirely happy with the answer. “I hope you’ll provide a better accounting at the time, however. There seems little point in actual secrecy.”

“I’ve spent my entire life exploring, and it’d be difficult to pack that knowledge into a few weeks of travel time,” Jonathan said. “Not to mention there are some aspects to the maps that can neither be translated nor explained without insight that is difficult to come by.”

Jonathan did not mention that were he to reveal the full extent of the journey and all that was required to finish it, there would be considerable opposition. Antomine, or perhaps one of Eleanor’s maids, would want to assume command for the sake of their respective factions. That wouldn’t go well for anyone, and it would be best avoided.

“Well, it’s not like we’ll have much else to do, will we?” Eleanor said, reluctantly tearing her gaze from the view of the front window. “I’ve read some stuff, but I figure a few lessons on what it’s like from someone who’s been there will be worthwhile.”

“Yes, indeed,” Jonathan said, fingers drumming against the handle of his cane as he thought. “That, and lessons about *Endeavor* herself. We may be passengers, but I think we all would prefer to be useful in an emergency, rather than dead weight.” Jonathan himself was a fair hand at maintenance, and there was always a use for brute force in any situation.

Jonathan left the others to watch the landscape and retired to his cabin to finish unpacking. Most of his crates could actually stay sealed until later, such as the spices he’d brought along. It had only taken one long and laborious stretch of bland and boiled meals for him to learn the lesson of carrying along flavor. All he really needed at the moment were books, clothing, and toiletries — and a few weapons, as there was never any wisdom in being unarmed, whether in places civilized or not.

The first few days were reserved for settling in, for people to acquire – or reacquire – their air legs and become accustomed to cramped quarters and the limited, if hearty, menu. In truth the *Endeavor* was better equipped than some of his previous voyages, and he was pleased there were no complaints from any of the other passengers, who surely were used to more luxurious accommodations.

Jonathan was working diligently at extracting a lifetime of experiences, as well as dozens of reference books, into a useful précis for his fellow passengers when the general alarm rang over the speaking-tubes set into corridors. The sound of the frantic bell jolted through him, and he toppled his chair as he jumped to his feet. Pausing only to take a pistol and ensure the glass zint cartridge was in place and full, he swept out into the corridor with cane in hand.

“What is it, Captain?” He spoke into the tube set at the end of the deck. Antomine emerged a moment later, his guards exiting their room after him and drawing close enough to hear Montgomery’s reply.

“Spotted a ship running dark, on its way to intercept us,” Montgomery’s voice came back through the speaking tube, rendered flat and metallic by attenuation. “Even with those engines

you got us, they've just got more than we do. They're going to catch up in a few minutes and I doubt they're coming by to have a friendly chat."

"That's what the ship's armament is for, is it not?" Antomine said, almost impatiently. "I doubt any would-be pirate can stand up to a fusillade from Carmine Arms' finest."

"Aye, Mister Antomine," Montgomery said, only a trace of impatience in his tone. "And we're armored well enough, but we're not a battleship. Depending on what this other ship is, things might get a mite hairy."

"Do your guards have training with zint cannons?" Jonathan asked Antomine as Eleanor finally stepped out of her cabin, hair slightly disarrayed. She padded over to join them on silent feet, but asked no questions. "I expect Captain Montgomery's gunners might welcome a hand or two." Antomine hesitated a moment, then nodded.

"I will send my men to assist your people," Antomine said into the tube.

"Appreciate it," Montgomery grunted. "My men are just honest sailors, not navy-trained."

Antomine gave Jonathan a stiff nod and stepped around Eleanor to inform his people of their task. For that moment, at least, Jonathan was glad to have someone with proper military training. Eleanor watched him go and then turned to Jonathan, tilting her head in question.

"You'll want to get yourself and your maids ready," Jonathan said. "Piracy isn't common enough for me to believe this is a random attack. I suspect it is targeted, and a simple broadside won't be enough to dissuade them."

Eleanor replied with, rather than words, a cruel and jagged smile that showed the part of her which had stared into the shadows below the bright lights of Beacon. It was only there for a moment, then it was gone and so was she. Jonathan pursed his lips at the empty corridor and then turned, climbing the stairs and opening the abovedeck hatch.

Wind whipped past him as he circled around the spine of the ship, where the envelope joined the hull. He squinted as he peered out into the darkness behind the *Endeavor*, finding the faint blue glow of shrouded engines somewhat less than a mile away. The rest of the ship ran dark, save for, perhaps, faint illumination on the bridge for the captain and navigator, but he could still tell it was gaining. Another ten minutes before it was in range of the *Endeavor's* cannons, he judged, but he could guess there would be trouble sooner than that and so chose to stay on the deck as the two ships closed.

His eyes were very, very good, but even he only barely caught the flicker of movement a few minutes later, in the light reflected from the *Endeavor*. Jonathan aimed his pistol and fired. The bolt of light missed, but still revealed the batlike, goggled form of someone in a wingsuit, a tiny zint engine strapped to his back. A moment later the boarder landed on the deck, crouching and pulling out a different zint-gun, something that looked far more ominous than the pistol Jonathan carried. At that moment the rear gunner opened up too, the rapid fire of the chase gun hurling zint out into the void. He wasn't certain if the gunner managed to hit anyone but it illuminated several more shapes.

Jonathan ducked back down below the deck, zint bolts whining off the hatch cover above him and nearly covering the sound of other boots landing on the deck. Judging the hatch the best place to stymie the invasion, he holstered the pistol and drew his sword from his cane. At such

a range, a length of steel was faster than trying to aim and fire a pistol — one with only nine charges remaining.

There was a noise behind him and Jonathan glanced back to see Marie, the tall and fair maid, still in her dress but armed with a brace of long black stilettos. The crash and furor of combat echoed from the stairwell with a shocking suddenness, and he motioned downward with a jerk of his head. In return she inclined her head, and vanished down the stairwell on silent feet.

A moment later the hatch opened, the long and sinister gun barrel poking through, and Jonathan snapped to the side, reaching out to grab the man's hand where it held the gun and pull him through. The man yelped, the sound turning into a scream as Jonathan buried three feet of steel in the boarder's chest. Arterial blood spurted, dark in the zint light as the corpse continued down the stairs while Jonathan slung the zint gun over his shoulder by the strap. Not that he expected to be able to hit anything with an unfamiliar weapon, but better to have it than leave it.

He pulled the hatch shut again, waiting for the next assailant, but after a few seconds it opened a crack and a glistening cylinder shot through. Jonathan caught it by reflex, then a thrill of fear shot through him as he recognized what he held. He jumped forward to shove the hatch open, plying his prodigious strength against that which was trying to hold it closed, and was met with a shout of surprise as his heave flung one of the boarders backward. He tossed the zint grenade back onto the deck and hauled the hatch shut, holding it closed for two long seconds before the detonation came. The hatch bucked against his grip, the vibration numbing his fingers.

Jonathan suppressed a shudder. Even with his experience, there was something profoundly disconcerting about holding imminent death in his own hand. He had to force the hatch open again, metal squealing as the deformed frame protested its fit, and the light spilling from the interior showed three still bodies sprawled on the scorched and dented deck. Despite that, he emerged only cautiously, not trusting the grenade had accounted for all of them.

Sure enough, there was a fourth man at a remove, trying to clamber to his feet. Jonathan crossed the distance in a blink, driving the blade of his sword-cane into the man's neck, the fountain of blood that resulted passing him by. He would like to keep *someone* alive to question, but he didn't dare leave an enemy at his back. Not when there was the rest of the ship to consider.

Three quick cuts ensured the fallen by the hatch would remain that way, and he descended again, taking care to avoid leaving boot prints on the bloody stairs. He made a quick survey of their deck, ensuring that there were no intruders lying in wait, then followed the noises down one level. Even if the boarders couldn't take the ship, they could prevent anyone from manning the guns, and *that* would be a disaster.

What he found was a hall with scorched and melted spots from zint discharge, and one of Antomine's guards systematically demolishing a pair of men in wingsuits. The man — Jonathan couldn't tell which one it was, as they looked absolutely identical in the armor and he'd never seen either one without — had a long baton rather than a sword or a gun, and used it to batter aside the cutlasses each of the boarders had. Jonathan winced at the crack of the baton as the guard precisely targeted wrists, elbows, collarbones, ribs. There were several airmen slumped against the floor and walls, and Jonathan hoped that their injuries were not too bad, but they were being tended to by their fellows so he continued on.

He almost tripped over another border crumpled in the corner of the stairwell as he continued on, dead from a single puncture wound exactly above the heart. The corridor leading to the bridge held Antomine's other guard, holding the door to the bridge despite obvious damage to his armor. More evidence of fighting, but no attackers remained on their feet. The sound of a detonation came from below, and Jonathan hurried down the stairwell to the last deck.

Smoke billowed from a pile of crates where the remnants of weaponized zint burned through wood and metal alike, and was sucked away by a heady crosswind from open doors where intruders had made their entrance. Even as he watched, someone in a heavier and more ornate wingsuit than the others swiped a hooked boarding-pike at thin air, then bowed backward as an unseen knife punched through his back. Eleanor flickered as she shook blood from her sleeve, fading back into the shadows as Sarah, the small and dark maid, protected a wounded Marie from zint-gun shots with a shield made of spare piping.

The only remaining assailants were a pair fighting back to back by one of the rear cargo doors, and even as he watched one of them pitched another grenade in the direction of the maids. Jonathan darted forward, deflecting it out the nearest door with his sword-cane, then hopped up on the stacked crates to get at the attackers. Before he reached them, the nearest of the two grew a second smile on his neck, collapsing in a choking heap as Eleanor's knife took the second man through the spine. She gave him a vicious grin.

"I'll take care of the fire and your maids, see about the rest of this deck. Top and middle are taken care of," Jonathan told her, and she nodded briefly before melting out of sight again. It took him a moment of looking to find the water storage, the metal reservoir built into the upper part of the decking, but there were at least pails properly stored nearby and an emergency tap. That was enough to put out the fire before it spread, and he jumped down to offer a hand with Marie.

From the spots of blood staining her right side, she'd taken some shrapnel from the zint grenade, and he winced as he helped her to her feet. Even if he didn't quite trust Eleanor's companions, he didn't wish any particular ill on them, especially not the sort that required extensive surgery. She opened her mouth to murmur a thanks, but was cut off by the thrum of a zint cannon firing. Then a second one, as the ship listed, coming around to engage their attacker.

Eleanor reappeared as they approached the stair, and Jonathan made no complaint as she took his place at Marie's side. Two uninjured airmen, one burly and one wiry, burst from the stairwell and nearly ran into them. The burly one reflexively went to help the women but Eleanor gave him a sharp look and pointed back at the mess in the cargo hold.

"We're fine, secure that," she ordered, and the pair saluted.

"Yes, ma'am," the wiry one said, and they slipped past. The steady thrum of zint cannons continued as Eleanor and Sarah took Marie to the upper deck, and Jonathan walked the mid-decks, bared cane-sword angled at his side just in case. Of the twenty or so crew, it seemed that almost half had been injured one way or another and, judging by the bloodstains, the boarders had been dragged into the canteen. He turned the other direction, stopping at the door to the bridge as Montgomery shouted orders and the bo'sun relayed them into various speaking-tubes.

“—And be damned quick about it, because there’s a storm on the way,” Montgomery finished, and Jonathan narrowed his eyes, peering out at the darkness beyond the bridge. Far away, lightning flashed and the sound of distant thunder joined the sound of guns.