

Simon Atherton

(Season six of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 4 - Benghazi

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He was pointing out to sea; the small boat must have come from the main harbour and come around the harbour walls.

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Mia Cassar had been on ships in storms before, but never anything like the storm forcing them to run for shelter in Benghazi. It really did feel as though the wind was pushing them towards that part of the North African coast. So far, there was just one body pushed into a sail locker; the crew member who'd fallen from the rigging. Mia hoped the storm didn't kill any other members of the Mermaid's crew.

"We can't try to enter the harbour in this storm." Shouted Captain Galeoto. "If we hit the harbour walls, that'll be end of the Mermaid; maybe the end of us too."

"What do you intend to do?" Yelled Simon.

The noise of the wind was incredible, as it seemed to be trying to rip off the one tiny sail Galeoto had left raised. Without it there was no way of keeping the Mermaid slightly ahead of the storm. It certainly wouldn't have been steerable.

"We'll go past the harbour, there's a small bay with a sandy beach." Shouted Galeoto. "The harbour walls give shelter there and we can go ashore once the storm calms down."

It was still dark under the storm, probably too dark to try anything as clever as the good captain was talking about. Simon seemed to trust him though and the only other option was running ahead of the storm until it either abated, or they went aground somewhere.

"Sounds tricky." Yelled Mia.

"Oh, it is.....Very tricky." Shouted Galeoto.

"Do it.....Get the Mermaid into that bay." Yelled Simon.

Timbers complained, a few might have even cracked. The crew of the Mermaid looked worried, maybe even scared. Mia knew that most of the crew would never have learned to swim, considering it to be bad luck. The Mermaid was swept along by the storm, she saw the harbour walls go past on the port side. Not far from the harbour, Galeoto began to yell at the crew, though most of the work seemed to be done by him and his wheelman.

"Now.....Hard to the port.....I don't care if she lists over." Yelled Galeoto.

There was an order to put up one more small sail, tied and rigged to use the wind pushing them to the port. Everything Galeoto ordered was designed to push the Mermaid into the small bay with a sandy beach. If it hadn't been for the light of the lightning flashes, the ship might well have run aground on the rocks just past the bay.

"I think we're there.....We're going to make it." Yelled Mia.

"Get ready to drop the anchors." Shouted Captain Galeoto.

Several drenched and tired sailors grunted at the order; dropping the anchors could be harder work than it sounded. Anchor chains could get jammed in the kind of weather they were having. It almost felt as if the weather was trying to attack the Mermaid.

“Hard to starboard on my word.” Galeoto yelled at the wheelman.

“The bay looks a little shallow close to the beach.” Shouted the wheelman.

“Then don’t go that close in.” Yelled Galeoto. “Now.....Drop those anchors.”

“Wow, I’m sure the Mermaid sighed as the anchors were dropped.” Yelled Simon.

Mia could feel her feet slipping on the wet deck, as the anchors slowed down many tons of ship, moving at a speed it had never been designed for. Simon was sat on the deck, his arms wrapped round an artistically carved guardrail. Mia joined him, though Galeoto remained on his feet. It was amazing almost a magical trick; as the captain of the Mermaid kept his footing. He slipped a little, but never once ended up on his backside on a wet wooden deck.

“Captain.....We’re getting close to the beach.” Yelled the wheelman.

“I’ll tell you when.” Shouted Galeoto.

They seemed certain to go aground; it was so close to the beach. Every lightning flash showed the beach to be closer, and the rocks. Giovanni came up from below, his face ashen. Mia assumed that like so many other normally good travellers, the storm had given him seasickness.

“Crap, we’re close to the shore.” Yelled Giovanni.

“Now.....Hard to starboard.” Galeoto yelled at the wheelman.

It was as if it was something that happened every day. The Mermaid turned, actually lurched to the right was a better description. The anchor chains were taugth as it dragged its anchors across the bottom of the bay. All of a sudden it was over, the Mermaid came upright and the wind seemed to lessen quite a lot. There was still lightning, but there was no longer any need to yell all the time. A flash of lightning showed them being close to the beach, but they hadn’t gone aground.

“I knew he could do it.” Said Simon. “Captain Galeoto knows his ship.”

“There was something unnatural about that storm.” Said Giovanni.

“We just moved into a sheltered bay.” Said Simon. “Nothing more, nothing less.”

Mia wasn’t so sure, it was almost as if the storm had deliberately taken them to Benghazi and had abated quite a bit once they were there. Even the rain was easing up.

“Rest.....Sleep if you can.” Said Galeoto. “Think of that as an order from your captain. Once the storm has passed and we have daylight, we can begin repairing the Mermaid. Trust me, after a storm like that, there will be repairs.”

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Patsy hadn’t slept well, but her mum always said she could sleep through just about everything. By the time Simon disturbed her by coming back to bed, he woke her from a deep and mostly untroubled sleep.

“Everything alright ?” She asked.

“Yes, we’ll see what needs repairing once the storm passes.” Said Simon.

He smelled of the sea and there were some worrying stains on his shirt, as he hugged her. He was her man though and she hugged him back, not expecting to go back to sleep. She’d never been one to sleep while under stress, but her definition of stress had changed a lot. She woke sometime later to the sound of gulls outside. A tiny gap in a storm shutter over the windows, was allowing a beam of sunshine into their room. Simon was gone, though he’d left the smell of the ocean with her.

“Repairs.....Repairs.” Patsy muttered. “I must get up and help with the repairs.”

Transferable skills from her old life in North London weren't immediately obvious; at the time of the Medici, there wasn't much call for expertise in running a car spares counter. But Patsy prided herself on being able to turn her hand to just about everything. Once dressed, she strutted out onto the deck.

"Wow, the weather has changed for the better." She said.

"And Captain Galeoto says most of the damage to the Mermaid is minor." Said Juliana. "I think that calls for a celebration once we get everything cleaned up."

Patsy looked at the sunshine and the gulls flying around the bay and it brought a sense of unreality. Had they been dragged there, or pushed there by unseen forces? She definitely wasn't going to mention that to the crew; Simon said crews of that time were notoriously superstitious. Even Simon was wary of saying anything that might spook them.

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He was pointing out to sea; the small boat must have come from the main harbour and come around the harbour walls.

"I bet we owe a mooring fee or something like that." Said Rosa.

"They're wearing the uniform of those who serve the Governor of Benghazi." Said Galeoto.

"Whatever our visitor wants.....It will be more important than harbour fees."

Quite a long rowing boat, with four uniformed men rowing someone with a fancy looking hat and even more fancy robes. The Governor of Benghazi had been mentioned before, but not as someone who had uniformed guards.

"I thought the governor was a sarcastic name for the head of the bandits." Said Patsy.

"It started off like that." Said Galeoto. "Now it's different.....If anyone has a scam planned, or a robbery; the governor gets a cut. It makes him one of the wealthiest people in North Africa."

"Does this governor have a name?" Asked Patsy.

"Many, though I doubt if he was born with any of them." Said Galeoto. "He's even begun to call himself his Excellency the Governor of Benghazi. I know his real name from when he was a bandit operating out of Carcura, a few miles to the south of Benghazi. He was known simply as Khaled in those days. If we do get to meet him, be respectful and call him Governor."

A rope ladder was lowered over the side, long before the man in the fancy hat arrived. He had to visit ship regularly; he climbed the ladder like a pro. Soon he and two of his men were on the deck of the Mermaid. The man took his fancy hat off, to reveal a bald head and a long scar across his left cheek.

"I am here with an invitation for Simon Atherton." Said the man.

An invitation for their captain might have been expected, but not Simon. How did Khaled the governor and ex bandit, even know Simon was on the Mermaid? She was known too, simply as the woman in Simon's life. Juliana was known in full as the daughter of Dominico Colombo. Giovanni was named, though Mia wasn't. Named in what? The invitation was handwritten on expensive looking paper and everyone on the crew of the Mermaid had been invited. The governor of Benghazi was holding a party that night and those aboard the Mermaid were guests of honour.

"We'd love to come, but we've still so much work to do." Said Simon. "Cleaning and repairing the Mermaid will take us several days."

"You simply must come." Said the man. "I mean it.....You must come. Failing to turn up will be taken as an insult by His Excellency the Governor. It would not be wise the insult the Governor of Benghazi."

When it was put that way, Simon had no alternative than to accept the invitation. He was told where to bring everyone and then had to sign the invitation; effectively guaranteeing his presence. It was a typical carrot and stick approach to hospitality, with a lot more stick than carrot.

"I look forward to seeing you tonight." Said the man, once again wearing his fancy hat.

Down the rope ladder he went, like some kind of act at the circus. He and his boat soon disappeared back the way they'd come. Patsy wasn't keen on attending the party, partly because most of her clothing was getting fairly grubby after being chased across the Mediterranean by a huge thunderstorm. Galeoto echoed pretty much her own views.

"No, we can't go." Said Galeoto. "They'll grab the Mermaid as soon as we're at the party and sail her south, to one of the villages Khaled knows. Or they'll attack us and take everything we're carrying that's of value. I know these bandits.....We can't go to the party."

"How did they even get our names?" Asked Juliana.

"Easy.....One of the pirates in Crete came this way and sold him our details." Said Cosimo.

"Yes, must be that." Said Patsy. "It's the only way that makes any sense."

"I tend to agree with Patsy." Said Juliana.

Juliana actually backed her up quite often, but Patsy still appreciated it when it happened.

"I'm not so sure." Said Giovanni. "One thing I'm sure of is that we have to attend the party. The Mermaid needs repairs, we can't run away. And we can't remain in Benghazi if we insult the governor by not turning up to his little get together."

"He didn't name the three pirates we hired in Crete." Said Simon. "We can all go to see the governor and they can stay to guard the ship."

"I'll stay too.....I wasn't named on the invitation." Said Hassan.

"Leave them Karkengara." Said Patsy. "Let them see him and think of him as a friend. It's the only way to guarantee we'll have a ship to return to."

"I agree, leave Karkengara to guard the Mermaid." Said Giovanni.

"Who is this Karkengara?" Asked Rosa.

"Karkengara is the bringer of fire." Said Juliana. "A deity who doesn't like being called a dragon."

"But he looks like a dragon." Said Simon. "It is time that you all met the bringer of fire. Large and scary looking, but he won't hurt any of us. We're a decent way from the shore and I can't see any boats nearby. I'll ask Karkengara to appear.....Just don't panic."

"Yeah.....Simon has a pet dragon." Said one of the pirates from Crete.

"Actually, if you'd listened.....I am not a dragon." Said Karkengara.

First a very dragon looking head appeared, as if the rest of him was scrunched up into the wheelhouse. The crew gasped and one of them actually jumped into the sea. The rope ladder was still there for him to use and it could have been worse. Patsy could now understand why Simon had left introducing Karkengara to the crew for so long. In an age when every parish had its own witch finders, it wasn't sensible to have your own dragon. The Inquisition would definitely view Karkengara as a large and unusual familiar.

"Don't worry.....He's on our side." Shouted Giovanni.

"I am here to help you, not harm you." Said the bringer of fire.

A dragon's head had to be terrifying to the crew, but a talking dragon's head was different. They seemed to calm down with every word Karkengara spoke.

"I am quite large." Said Karkengara. "Are you ready to see the rest of me?"

"Show us everything.....All of you." Said Rosa.

Most of the crew were nodding in agreement, one or two actually moved closer to what they obviously viewed as Simon's talking dragon. Karkengara appeared to come out of the wheelhouse, his shoulders appearing first. Patsy had never seen him appear gradually before, so it was good to see his wings appear next.

"Yes, I can fly." Said Karkengara. "But I am not a dragon; I'm a very ancient deity."

His skin looked greener than she remembered, but it was rare to see him outside on a bright sunny day. The gulls had decided he was a predator and after a lot of agitated squawking they'd flown away. The crew started smiling as it was obvious that the huge, dangerous looking creature was on their side.

"You'll need to give me space if you want to see all of me." Said Karkengara.

The crew moved to one side and it wasn't her imagination, the Mermaid really did rock from side to side a little; as the bringer of fire walked down the centre of the ship. Even the clump-clump of his feet against wooden planks, didn't stop the crew cheering. He was theirs now, the dragon who wasn't really a dragon.

"Can you really bring fire?" Asked Hassan.

Patsy was getting a view of Karkengara that she might never see again. The red flashes above his eyes and across his jaws, seemed to get brighter if he was excited. He also had male genitals, which brought up all sorts of questions. Could he father lots of tiny creatures like himself? If he could, who would be their mother? That though, was a question for when she had Karkengara somewhere more private than the deck of the Mermaid.

"Show them old friend." Said Simon. "Just don't set the ship alight."

"Can I produce fire? Of course I can." Said Karkengara.

He stretched his neck out over the portside of the ship and took in a deep breath. When he breathed out, there was fire coming from his throat. Bright fire, it made the daylight look feeble in comparison. If the gulls hadn't already fled, he'd have probably cooked a few of them. When the fire stopped, the crew cheered their new friend, their new weapon.

"Tonight Karkengara will stay and guard the Mermaid." Said Simon.

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It took a while to bring everyone ashore, no one wanted to arrive at the party in wet clothes. There were three small boats fixed in out of the way places on the Mermaid and they used all of them to get everyone who was going, onto the beach. The pirates from Crete then took the boats back to the ship.

"When we need picking up, we'll shout." Simon told Hassan, who wasn't going to the party.

The instructions for getting to the governor's mansion were detailed and mentioned that in some places lanterns were needed to see where they were going. Simon remembered the days when his neighbours in Hornsey had written angry letters to the council because two streetlights seemed to have died. He wondered how they'd have coped with sixteenth century Benghazi on a moonless night.

"Stay close to those with lanterns." Said Simon. "I don't want anyone falling into ditches, or finding a hole in the ground the hard way."

"Yeah.....Especially when you're drunk on the return trip." Said Giovanni.

From the beach to the governor's mansion was about a mile and half, following the sea due south. There were some paths and roads marked, but most of the city was further inland. It troubled Simon that they were taking a route that would be ideal for anyone wanting to ambush them. At least archers were fairly useless in the dark; no one could pick them off from a distance.

“Always be ready for trouble.” Said Simon. “We know this governor character can’t be trusted.”

“We should have brought the dragon with us.” Said Mia.

Simon was beginning to think the same, but he and Giovanni were vampires. He’d known them deal with people far more powerful than a bandit calling himself a governor. The protectors of the Mermaid needed Karkengara. If they lost the ship they might end up stuck in Benghazi for months, maybe years. Rosa brought up a subject, which cheered everyone up.

“Do you think we’ll get really nice food ?” Asked Rosa.

“Has to be better than Galeoto’s dried beef and cabbage pie.” Said Juliana.

“I’ll have you know that food on the Mermaid has won awards.” Said Galeoto.

Simon was tempted to ask for evidence of any such awards, but poor Galeoto was already getting the worse of the fairly friendly argument. It was hard on a ship then to store decent food. No tins, no freezers or even a fridge. If it didn’t come dried and in a box or bag, you were unlikely to see it included in a meal. Galeoto seemed to do no better, or worse than the other captains Simon had sailed with. Not that he’d put to sea with that many. Simon saw the argument as a harmless pressure valve for everyone’s stress; so he let it continue.

“Help me out here, Simon.” Said Galeoto. “My food might be a little basic, but no one has ever died of it.”

“If you tell me no one has died from your food.....I’ll take your word for it.” Said Simon.

“Ahhh, hardly a huge vote of confidence.” Said Rosa.

“What was that pie we had the first night out of Cyrenaica ?” Asked Patsy. “Strange white meat with cabbage.....Everything comes with cabbage.”

“You’re still alive, Patsy.” Said Galeoto. “Not everything turns out as intended.....But, food is food.”

“Sometimes, only just what I’d call food.” Said Cosimo.

Poor Galeoto was losing the argument, but a large building at the end of a short entrance pathway; came to his rescue.

“We’re there.” Said Simon. “This is the home of the Governor of Benghazi.”

“Wow, I’m impressed.” Said Patsy.

Simon’s mind was full of comparisons with the size and style of many buildings he knew, though he could hardly use those. Half the size of Buckingham Palace would mean nothing to the majority of his companions. He settled for a building in Florence that they’d have all heard of.

“Not quite as large as the Brotherhood building in Florence.” Said Simon. “But I’m sure it’s the biggest mansion in Benghazi.”

“He has style this governor.....I’ll give him that.” Said Giovanni.

It had probably been built from local grey stone, which had a slight blue tinge to it. Older than the new governor was likely to be, the mansion had been built for another purpose; perhaps the home of a long dead king of some kind. The building was three floors high and went back from the road, until it almost vanished among a mass of swaying palms. It would have been impressive without all the lamps hanging from outside walls. With them, it was truly amazing. There were no less than six uniformed guards at the doorway.

“Six guards.....Even my father only ever has four guards on his door.” Said Juliana.

Simon arrived at the door with everyone grouped around him, all of them wide eyed with wonder and curiosity.

“Names please ?” Asked one of the guards.

“I am Simon Atherton, with my friends.” Said Simon. “With me is Galeoto, Captain of the Mermaid; with his crew. We are all invited and should be on your list.”

The guard looked inside the mansion and beckoned someone they hadn't seen. The new man in a guard's uniform muttered to the man on the door, before going back into the mansion. The guard turned back to Simon.

"You are all welcome." Said the guard. "Please go inside.....And have an enjoyable evening."

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Cosimo was worried about being asked to give up his weapon, so he'd hidden a six inch assassin's blade inside his tunic. They were ushered into the grand hall of the mansion with their swords still on their hips, which surprised him. It might be a good sign, or the governor of Benghazi might be confident his guards could take their weapons when he wished them to.

"They let us keep our weapons." Cosimo muttered to Giovanni.

"Hmmmmm.....It wouldn't read too much into that." Said Giovanni.

There were a few well to do men and women, dressed as though they'd been invited to something grand in Florence, or Rome. Most were dressed like himself and Galeoto's crew, in what were probably the clothes kept for the occasional Sunday mass when they were onshore. A large crowd had been invited to the governor's party and they looked to be a very mixed bunch. From bandits with scarred faces to what probably passed for Benghazi's aristocracy.

"Ahhhhh.....I can see someone serving drinks." Said Mia.

They all followed her and the drinks tended to be ale served in tankards, which suited Cosimo. He wasn't really into wine, unless the ale ran out. As they drank, a group of servants brought out plates of food and placed them on several long tables. There were plates and a few eating utensils, but mostly it was use your fingers to pick up what you liked the look of. That too pleased Cosimo.

"I think I'm going to enjoy this party." He told Rosa.

"The food is pretty good after being on ship's rations for a while." Said Rosa.

"Do you think the governor will make an appearance ?" Asked Gabriel.

"Bound to.....It's his party." Said Juliana.

The ale and food kept coming. As fast as the barrels and the tables emptied; servants rushed in to fill them. Cosimo drank slowly after the first tankard full of ale, though he ate as though he had hollow legs. He was cautious about getting too drunk, because their host was an unknown. Cosimo was wary of unknowns.

"Ease up on the drink." He muttered at Rosa. "Just in case we have to fight our way out."

Rosa nodded at him and he noticed that Patsy and Juliana were now eating, but not drinking.

Everyone was preparing for the worst, which Cosimo hoped never came. The governor had a lot of guards lurking about, maybe too many for them to beat in a fight. Would the governor come out to greet his guests, or would they be invited in to see him ?

When he arrived, the governor came through a door to the right of the grand hall, as if he was a King, or maybe an Emperor. Lots of guards with him; the governor was rather a small man. Dark skin and raven dark hair, his grey eyes had an intense look of intelligence. Definitely not someone you'd choose to have as an enemy. He was wearing long yellow robes, which swirled around him as he strode into the party.

"Carry on eating and drinking, ignore me." Said the governor.

The bandit chief Galeoto had once known simply as Khaled, had obviously done well for himself. He toured the room, spending merely seconds with some people; yet leaving them looking as though they'd been honoured beyond words.

"He's impressive, I'll give him that." Muttered Juliana. "Like a darker, younger version of my father and probably just as crooked."

“Good looking though.” Said Rosa.

“Oh yes, very good looking.” Said Juliana.

It had to happen, the moment when His Excellency the Governor of Benghazi, robes swirling, strode towards Simon. There was a quick shake of hands and an almost whispered conversation. Simon looked around the hall and beckoned Cosimo to him, along with Patsy, Juliana and Giovanni.

“Here we go.....Be ready for anything.” Said Cosimo.

“I’m feeling a bit left out, but stay safe.” Said Mia.

“He’s probably been limited in numbers for an audience with the governor.” Said Patsy.

Everyone was smiling as though Simon was some kind of beloved relative of the governor. Cosimo had been in similar situations before though; he remembered how quickly things could change.

Simon was following the governor, when Cosimo caught up with him. Simon slowed down until everyone he’d beckoned was there.

“We’re going into the governor’s private rooms.” Said Simon. “He wants to discuss a venture that may be mutually profitable.”

“I like the sound of that.” Said Cosimo.

“More gold is always useful.” Said Patsy.

They were taken through several wood panelled rooms and into a throne room. The governor sat on his throne and beckoned them all forward. It was all beginning to get more than a little strange.

There was the governor sat on an ornately carved throne, while they were left standing in front of him. There were quite a few guards lining the walls, definitely enough to make it difficult to leave if the governor didn’t like the idea.

“Simon Atherton, I have been hearing about you.” Said the governor.

Not that much of a surprise, ship visited ports regularly on the North African coast. Often gossip was traded between the captains of the vessels. Some of that gossip could have a high value in gold coins.

“I hope what you heard was interesting.” Said Simon.

“It was, very interesting.” Said the governor. “A tale about a chest hidden in a lost city, an evil city. A story about deception and betrayal by someone trusted. I believe you now have the chest and the scrolls it contained.”

It was very good gossip that must have arrived in Benghazi on a very fast ship. Some ship’s captain obviously knew that the governor would pay well for genuine and potentially valuable gossip.

Cosimo noticed some of the guards looking tense, so he tightened his hold on his sword.

“Supposing I was to tell you I’d burned the scrolls ?” Asked Simon.

“I’d be quite upset; it’s the scrolls I’m interested in.” Said the governor. “I can offer you a good price for them, a very good price. Have they been destroyed ?”

“No, they’re still in the chest I found them in.” Said Simon. “Why do you want them ?”

“I’m told they contain incantations of old gods, powerful incantations.” Said the governor. “I will pay you a good sum in gold for the scrolls, provided they’re undamaged.”

“How much gold ?” Asked Simon.

Cosimo could see there were now four extra guards at the door, fighting their way out would be extremely hard. The guards were looking from side to side, as if waiting for some kind of prearranged signal, or moment.

“Much gold, Simon Atherton.....More than I think you could imagine.” Said the Governor. “Is the chest containing the scrolls with you ? I will need to verify the scrolls are the ones I seek.”

“The chest is on the Mermaid and the scrolls are undamaged.” Said Simon.

It seemed such a simple error, to tell the governor where the scrolls could be found. Cosimo knew that Simon was no fool and that he thought it was the right moment to force the governor to attack them, or let them leave the mansion unharmed. Things went the way Simon had probably anticipated.

"You heard, the chest is on the Mermaid." The governor said to a guard with a few more gold buckles on his sleeve than the other guards. "Recover the scrolls and there'll be a bonus for you. Capture their ship too, it may be useful."

The guard was gone, running out of the room to complete his orders. Capture the ship indeed.....Wait until they met Karkengara, the bringer of fire.

"You lying, thieving bastard." Shouted Patsy.

Cosimo decided action was called for. He started swinging his sword in the direction of two of the governor's guards. One he slashed so deep in his right arm that he screamed and began to bleed profusely.

"They look the business.....But don't fight that well." Said Cosimo.

Patsy was like a berserker, stabbing at one of the guards with her blue steel blade. A particularly large and muscular looking guard. He cut her, a nasty looking long cut on her cheek. Not that the cut slowed Patsy down. She stabbed him several times in the stomach and carried on stabbing until he fell to the floor. About that time, though Cosimo's memory might have been playing up by then; the governor of Benghazi began yelling for more of his guards.

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Hassan had been born in North Africa, maybe that was why he'd not been invited to the governor's party. He knew the reputation of the governor and it wasn't something he'd want Hassan talking about at his party. Not totally evil, but the governor was known to do anything for money. He was rumoured to have sent assassins to kill two of his aunts to gain a hefty inheritance. On the other hand, he'd set up a large orphanage in Benghazi for foundlings and unwanted children. Patsy had a word to describe such people and it seemed to sum up His Excellency the Governor of Benghazi. As Patsy would have said.....He's complicated.

There was just him and the three remaining pirates from Crete on the Mermaid. After one of their number had turned out to be a spy and killed by Giovanni, the survivors seemed determined to prove their loyalty to Simon. Karkengara was around of course, though they rarely saw him. The occasional view of his snout, or glimpse of a wing. The bringer of fire appeared often enough to reassure them he was there in case of trouble. It was late at night and very dark, when trouble seemed to be about to pay a visit to the Mermaid. It all began with one of the pirates pointing towards several lights in the distance.

"They're on the way.....The governor has sent his fighters." Said the pirate.

If they survived the night, Hassan had promised himself to be better at remembering names. To him the three pirates were just men in dark clothing from the island of Crete.

"I think you're right." Said Hassan. "Looks like at least a dozen small boats are coming to see us.....I guarantee they're not coming to drink beer and play dice."

"Bastards, we'll kill them all." Yelled one of the pirates.

A great sentiment, but they were probably going to be vastly outnumbered. The battle for the Mermaid would be decided by Karkengara and his fiery breathe and Hassan had no doubts that the dragon would win.

"Are you with us bringer of fire ?" Asked Hassan. "The governor's warriors are nearly here."

Karkengara's head seemed to come up out of the deck, before turning and looking towards the boats coming around the harbour wall. The bringer of fire sort of snorted, in an angry way. Hassan was glad the dragon was on their side.

"None of them will survive this night." Said Karkengara.

Hassan believed him and trusted the dragon to get the job done. It wasn't just his size and the fiery breathe, it was his voice. Maybe he was some kind of deity after all ?

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