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The Rescue Details

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Michael says

When you close the covers of this book, you have been somewhere.

And not merely to its setting by Joseph Conrad in the Malay Archipelago, where the shallow waters of the Karimata Strait separate Sumatra to the west from Borneo to the east. Exotic to western readers, the locale renders even more special the romance between a freelance sea captain of a small boat and a British woman traveling with her husband on a yacht that has gone aground on a sandbar off one of the many islands. The locale enables it, in fact. The remoteness of the spot heightens and intensifies the action among the vividly drawn characters. It is a dangerous place, with political conflicts simmering among the islanders native to the region and the potential treasure of a British yacht and its passengers too much for some of the factions to resist.

The romance features only a few kisses, physically, but an emotional intensity that threatens to burn through some of the pages on which it manifests. The needs of the two characters, the odd circumstances of their meeting, the social and cultural obstacles and the limited time they have to share -- is it a week? maybe not even -- cause their surprised feelings to move rapidly on several levels.

That intensity is somewhat conveyed by Conrad's chapter titles, which begin (1,2,3) with "The Man and the Brig," "The Shore of Refuge," and "The Capture" to 4, 5, and 6 which are: "The Gift of the Shallows," "The Point of Honour and the Point of Passion," and finally "The Claim of Life and the Toll of Death."

Who, glancing over that table of contents, could resist?

A critic has suggested the grandiosity of the titles registers a weakness of Conrad's vision or execution. It's possible, as this is not a perfect book, just a great one -- but I fell for the rhetoric completely, baroque or not.

The major characters, perhaps six or seven, rotate through omniscient authorial treatments of their natures and feelings, immersing the reader. That is why finishing the book made me feel like I was rising to the surface of this shallow sea and both desired and dreaded coming up for air. Conrad's understanding of human nature make these haunted characters -- and by no means only the Europeans -- find their commonality with you or with people you have known.

Conrad had started *The Rescue* in 1898, when he was 41, but put it aside as too much of a challenge for his skills at the time. He went on instead to "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'," then "Heart of Darkness," "Lord Jim," and his other major works of the first decade of the 20th century. He came back to this manuscript 20 years later, feeling ready to bring it to completion. It runs 469 pages of poetic but restrained prose. You can hear phrases in spots that must have encouraged William Faulkner, among others, to unleash his own verbiage.

Captain Tom Lingard and Edith Travers had a romance that I expect to remember a long time. "The Rescue" is the third of Conrad's Lingard trilogy, starting with "Almayer's Folly," his first novel. Lingard was reportedly the real name of the figure Conrad knew from his 20 years at sea; Almayer, for another example, is an actual trader William Charles Olmeijer.

Sometimes the exoticism makes for risks. Many readers seem to have accepted the 1970s era claim that "Heart of Darkness" is a racist treatment of natives and colonial exploiters. There are characters some might consider racist, but the accusation doesn't stand up to scrutiny, in my view. To me the conflicts stem more

from the gulf between such different cultures, especially as experienced by characters with limited understanding, sympathy, or wisdom. Other than rereading that novel a few years back, I have not gone into Conrad titles since the few I read while young. This book tells me that was a mistake and I look forward to rectifying it.

Michael Graeme says

My introduction to Conrad after overdosing on Thomas Hardy. Compelling, pellucid and emotionally powerful.

Matthew says

For good and often for bad, Joseph Conrad's late novels saw a resurgence in his romanticism. Conrad's novels were always romantic, but the nature of that romanticism changed over time. In his early novels, the romance lay more in the description and the plotting than in the often sordid and seedy characters who dominated the stories.

By Conrad's middle period, the romanticism was more submerged, as he examined political systems with a cynical and pessimistic eye. Pessimism is of course itself a strain of negative romanticism, and occasionally Conrad used characters and storylines that could easily have been found in a romantic novel.

However, in his final phase, Conrad gave himself over to far more romantic tales, with characters who were far too idealised to exist in real life. While Conrad was not given to writing upbeat stories at the best of times, the later stories were almost doomed to an unhappy ending, because it was simply inconceivable that the romantic characters could do anything conceivably mundane, such as live like any normal married couple.

The Rescue is a novel of this kind. The characters are all romanticised, though thankfully the book lacks some of the worst romantic passages of late Conrad, perhaps because it was merely a work Conrad had written much earlier in his life which he now reconstituted for a late release.

This is romance by character. Indeed, we see romance in all stages of life here – in the young shipman, Carter, the middle-aged hero, Captain Lingard and the elderly adventurer, Jorgenson. The heroine is also romantic, as is her detached observer, the Spanish D'Alsacer. All of the Malays represent romantic stock figures, and are less well-defined.

The story concerns Captain Tom Lingard, a supporting character in two earlier novels, now taking centre stage. Lingard has befriended a Malay prince and princess, Hassim and Immada, and has plans to restore them to power after they are overthrown. Lingard's confidence in his own abilities is soon put to the test when a small ship is stranded close to the area where Lingard has been seeking support from the natives.

The ship is owned by the odious businessman, Travers, who is caught with his bored and scornful wife, Edith, and their acquaintance, D'Alsacer. The presence of Europeans complicates Lingard's plans. He feels obliged to help his own people, and to prevent them from falling into the hands of the natives, his ruthless allies. Travers and D'Alsacer fall into the hands of a faction among the natives, and Lingard finds it a difficult job to extricate them, especially since he is falling in love with Edith Travers, and neglecting his

duties towards Hassim and Immada.

His dalliance causes his ally, Jorgenson to despair, and Jorgenson decides to blow up his ship, killing a number of people, including Lingard's enemies, Jorgenson himself, and Hassim and Immada. Wracked with guilt, Lingard allows Edith to depart with Travers, and the would-be lovers are parted.

It is a sad novel, and one that sets up a typical Conrad conundrum – a man who believes he is ready for anything, only to face a totally unprecedented and unusual situation that is out of his control. Lingard fails the test. As his name suggests, he lingers too long and fails to act.

To some extent, he is choosing between the native Hassim and Immada, who he regards as his own children, and members of his own race. In the circumstances, he does as many others have done, and chooses his own kind, precipitating the disaster. However, while his decision may be wrong, Conrad is sympathetic to his plight. Indeed, it is the European characters that bring the work to life, whilst the Malay characters are too shadowy to engage our interest. Conrad sides with the Europeans every bit as much as Lingard does.

The dilemma is presented with some weaknesses on Conrad's part. Firstly there is an excess of dense description and psychological motivation which serves to weaken Conrad's claim that this work is an adventure story. The book is rather static, appropriate for its subject matter perhaps, and the exciting events take place away from our full view. This may be intentional, but it sometimes renders the story slow and confusing.

Conrad is also uncertain how to present his heroine. We cannot help being drawn to Edith Travers, and in some respects her relationship towards Lingard is like that of an Ibsen heroine – romantic, passionate, fascinating the man in a harpy like manner, yet inspiring him. However, in Ibsen, they seek to inspire their lover to action, whereas Edith inspires Lingard to stasis.

However, while Edith is appealing in some ways, Conrad is ambiguous in his treatment of her. She is seen as bored and scornful, taking on roles that she should not. She wears Malay clothes, identifying her with the natives, something Conrad would not approve of. That the clothes are those that Lingard had laid aside for Immada also reinforces the sense of Edith interfering in a situation and taking their rightful place.

The Rescue is the third book in a trilogy-in-reverse. It takes place before *An Outcast of the Islands*, which in turn took place before *Almayer's Folly*, each work acting almost as a prequel to the last. However, the 20-year gestation has perhaps changed some of Conrad's original concerns.

The Tom Lingard of earlier books was a jovial bully, well-meaning but wrong-headed. There is something of that Lingard in this book too. He takes Carter and the Travers' boat captive because they interfere with his plans, which he was foolish enough to believe were impregnable. He is also committed to interfering in Malayan politics for no better reason than a feeling of loyalty to a brother and sister he once befriended.

However, this is a very different Tom Lingard in other respects. He is more heroic and strong-minded, passionate and reflective. He is therefore considerably more sympathetic than the older Lingard of earlier books.

Conrad has also removed a good deal of the excessive verbiage that was in his first draft of *The Rescue*, making this a better book than the other two works in this loose trilogy. However, while the book is vastly improved as a result, it cannot be counted as one of Conrad's best works. It is too wordy and abstract when it needs to be pacy and forceful.

Of course Conrad never wrote works for purely commercial effect, and the descriptive passages and psychology are the most important priorities in his writing. With all its faults, *The Rescue* is a worthwhile

book, and there is much to enjoy in its pages.

Tony says

Conrad, Joseph. THE RESCUE. (1920). ***. This was Conrad's last major published book, and, unfortunately, not one of his better ones. It is worth reading, however, because it is the first in a trilogy even though it was published last. It is the last novel in which Captain Lingard appears, but is the first in time. This seems to be an idea borrowed by George Lucas in his Star Wars series. If you want to read the trilogy in order, you read this novel first, then move on to "Almayer's Folly," then to "An Outcast of the Islands." Lingard's brig (A brig is a two-masted vessel having square yards on both masts as well as fore- and aft-jibs, staysails and a gaff-rigged spanker. Does that make it clear now?) is named the "Lightning," and plays a central role in this tale of adventures in the Malay Archipelago. Lingard is called upon to rescue the yacht "Hermit" from a sandbank, along with all of its passengers, but it is not so simple. Aiding the freeing of the "Hermit" from her stranded condition upsets Lingard's former plans for his voyage and gets him involved in a lot of local politics that will thrust him and his crew into danger. At the time of the "Hermit's" encounter with Lingard and his ship, Lingard is embroiled with a native Rajah named Hassim who, with his beautiful sister Immada, has been dispossessed of his rule. Lingard has promised to do everything he can to assist them in their attempt to regain their land and reign. Added to these two plot elements, Lingard becomes intranced by the wife of one of the yacht passengers, Mrs. Edith Travers. This changes the thrust of the novel, and we no longer have a sea novel, but one exploring the relationship between a man and a married woman. Aside from these plot boo-boos, the novel is full of wonderful descriptive passages for which Conrad is famous. You have to put up with a lot of naval talk (see the definition of a brig, above) but if you skip through most of this, the story is a good one.

Peter Prentice says

This had a strong naval feel to it as most of Conrad's novels do, but I had a brighter, more enjoyable time while reading this, too. It was not as dark as his other texts, and it was nice to be in the shoes of a sea captain. Still, as part of a trilogy, it carries the same undertones as its predecessors, and a must read for those interested in colonialist works.

Vernon Dewhurst says

Not the best of Conrad, slow, verbose, heavy, over egged. Foggy plot, and the main character seems two dimensional. But i love Conrad and can forgive him this one!

Feliks says

This novel was a revelation for me; who am well-familiar with most of Conrad's other titles. I'm just knocking off the last few I have left (*The Rover*, *An Outcast of the Islands*) and discovering in Conrad a writing style I didn't believe he had any inclination or facility for.

Rescue is a slow, dense, read; but its immediately noticeable that Conrad here has not skimmed or made

things convenient for himself --as he can often be fairly accused of doing--by writing only the content which he is master of and comfortable with. But he didn't take the easy route in this effort. Its not lightly-told, or one-dimensional; its got all the myriad facets we expect from a novel. You can't say that he 'always' dodged challenges, after this read.

'Rescue' is not just muscular descriptions of the churning sea, or some kind of intrigue or action. In a head-on manner, Conrad resolutely takes on things like lengthy/nuanced conversations; character development; thoughts-inside-characters-heads; etc. After putting it down, you may still feel that it's not that appealing a yarn, but you can't fault him for "skipping".

For me--although right from the start, I doubted that the 'predicament' of the characters in the tale was quite coherent--I thoroughly enjoyed the way Conrad brought about the emotional pitch I was seeking.

The book has all the great elements of Nostromo--but where that title is often criticized for 'shirking' female characters--Conrad more than makes up for it here. Not only does '*The Rescue*' prominently feature a memorable female character, she is quite vividly drawn and we are made fully privy to her inner thoughts and psychology. Conrad writing about women! Amazing!

The book has some of the themes and some of the atmosphere of '*Heart of Darkness*' as well--similarly exotic natives and brooding jungle--and while its not as powerful--'*Rescue*' doesn't suffer from the same flaws as that book does either. [*Heart* left me unsatisfied for it is so short and the climax so swift. Conrad's prose in HoD is so transcendent, soaring, and otherworldly that he neglects clear, straightforward storytelling. You're not quite sure what's actually going on in those last few pages].

You can see this same fault hobbling *The Nigger of the Narcissus* where Conrad departs from the matter-of-fact struggle of men vs sea; to ruminate pointlessly about catharsis. (Uncle Joe: show us! Don't tell us!)

One more example: the awful, *Almayer's Folly* which is nearly non-stop psychological rumination with but a few scraps of dialog and gesture thrown in (*the climax of that tale is Almayer simply walking down the steps of his verandah briefly, taking a look around, and then pacing back inside*). Groan!

Here, in '*Rescue*' you don't have to fear any of that. Its nearly the same exciting set-up as 'HoD' but instead of going off into speculative inquiries on mankind's fate; Conrad's '*Rescue*' has all its characters confronting each other directly. Face-to-face conversations! Something one craves desperately in '*Heart of Darkness*' but which one does not receive there.

Conrad delivers, this time. When the rescue arrives, he diligently draws the outlines of everyone present; you see the tense postures of the natives and the nervous movements of the captives; you follow 'what they are gazing at' and you can see 'who steps towards whom' and 'what they are holding in their hands'. In other words, proper 'staging' is not left out. Its edge-of-the-seat stuff.

Suspense replete on every page. Every part of the narrative is soaked and saturated with it. And then when the climax is finally reached you just have to take your hat off to the Joe-Man. Ka-BOOM! You can never go wrong with a few barrels of gunpowder and a time-delay fuse; as he does here. Its glorious. Faint but much-needed touch of Alistair MacClean; reminiscent too, of 'Kwai'.

'*The Rescue*'. Difficult to get through along most of the way, I admit it...but the thematic and structural overtones of a really fine novel emerge in the last few chapters. Toothsome, delicious, and savory. Conrad at his best! An unexpected triumph. Hurrah!

Patrick says

Joseph Conrad is one of my favourite authors, so I was delighted to find a second-hand copy of this in the Penguin Classics paperback edition. I've read pretty much everything else he wrote but for some reason I had overlooked this one. While it isn't especially rare, it is one of the more neglected novels in the author's later works; it also has the interesting position of being a book that was originally started at the very beginning of his career, then set aside and only finished near the end of his life. You could even call it the last really big book he ever completed — though I do think that 'The Rover', which came later, was all the finer for its relative brevity. I don't think it's amongst his best work, or even his second-best, so I couldn't recommend it to new readers; but there's a great deal here that will be of interest to those who are fans of this writer's work.

The plot is one of those things that is simple to summarise but which is rendered complex by its execution. It follows the exploits of one Tom Lingard, a sort of roving sailor and 'adventurer' in what would now be called the Malay archipelago. Lingard comes upon a yacht which has run aground on a sandbank; the residents of the yacht are Mr and Mrs Travers, a sort of parody of a late-Edwardian gentleman with his intelligent and fiercely independent wife; D'Alcacer, a cool and observant diplomat; and Carter, who does all the actual sailing for the Travers couple. What these people don't realise is that their arrival has come directly between Lingard's work in restoring the kingdom of Hassim and Immada, the prince and princess of a tiny Malaysian kingdom who Lingard previously rescued from exile. What follows is a kind of delicate juggling operation between the immediate needs of the rescued white Europeans at sea with Lingard's responsibilities to a tangled and ever-changing political situation on land.

What complicates things further is a situation rare in Conrad's work: the presence of a love affair. It's not that this is exactly done poorly, but it seems to me that the model here is Henry James above all else, to the extent that the author has all but abandoned his own style in pursuit of the grand Jamesian manner. And so there is rather a lot of stylised dialogue which is somehow mannered and teasing and tedious all at once; lots of talk and very little action. The whole form will probably seem unrecognisable to those readers who have only previously enjoyed 'Heart of Darkness' or 'Lord Jim', but I suspect this is best considered as an evolution of an authorial method which was already emerging in books like 'Chance' and (the highly underrated) 'Victory'.

What this also has in common with those novels is Conrad's interest in strong female figures. Mrs Travers is a great example of this, and feels very much to me like an attempt to invoke a heroine in the vein of James: smart and passionate while also being tightly constrained by propriety but also her own idealism. The key relationship is between her and Lingard, but there's also D'Alcacer, who is supposedly also in love with her; if this were really a Henry James novel, D'Alcacer would probably be one of those cold-blooded protagonist-narrators, but by separating him from the actual narrative in 'The Rescue', Conrad is able to set up this Jamesian perspective as a slightly different thing to the structure of his novel as a whole.

The book also notable for its depiction of a foreign civilisation; unlike those aforementioned early novels, there's little sense here of the Malaysians as an 'other' who only serve to respect the unknowable aspects of their white masters. Instead, they are presented as developed and admirable characters in their own right, being active players in a well-developed political society — and the privileged whites who look down on them are also the most ridiculous figures in the book.

So far I've summarised this book as if it were a kind of love story, but there's a great deal of darkness here too. The mysterious white-suited figure of Jorgenson looms about the margins of this story; an old white sailor with a somewhat mysterious past, he harbours a kind of hollowness reminiscent of all those men Marlow encountered in the deep colonial outposts of the Congo. Like the Professor in 'The Secret Agent', he is a nihilist, with a casual contempt for the everyday value of human life.

Jorgenson is a puzzle. On one hand I wonder if he was included simply to add shades of gloom to the corners, as if that was what his readers were expecting; but on the other, his appearances are so scene-stealing that I can't help but feel that he might contain some secret inner desire of the author to be done with the world, a desire so dangerous it must be personified in the character of a madman. Indeed, there is a reoccurring sense throughout this book — manifest from various perspectives — of someone who is not only alienated by their society, but who is actively repelled by it, who even wants to destroy it.

Of course you couldn't write that directly in a novel in 1920, I suppose. But It's most haunting regardless. Look at the ridicule inherent in the masterful flashes of bitter irony in this little passage, for example, in which the author inhabits D'Alcacer as he considers the possibility of his imminent execution:

'He wondered also how far he had been sincere and how far affected by a very natural aversion from being murdered obscurely by ferocious Moors with all the circumstances of barbarity. It was a very naked death to come upon one suddenly. It was robbed of all helpful illusions, such as the free will of a suicide, the heroism of a warrior, or the exaltation of a martyr. "Hadn't I better make some sort of fight of it?" he debated with himself. He saw himself rushing at the naked spears without any enthusiasm. Or wouldn't it be better to go forth to meet his doom (somewhere outside the stockade on that horrible beach) with calm dignity. "Pah! I shall be probably speared through the back in the beastliest possible fashion," he thought with an inward shudder. It was certainly not a shudder of fear, for Mr. d'Alcacer attached no high value to life. It was a shudder of disgust because Mr. d'Alcacer was a civilized man and though he had no illusions about civilization he could not but admit the superiority of its methods. It offered to one a certain refinement of form, a comeliness of proceedings and definite safeguards against deadly surprises...'

Benjamin says

I remember liking Conrad a lot in high school, and I still enjoy the intense dialogues that elaborate the themes of a thoroughly gripping adventure story. But everything is melodramatic and absolute--from the opening description of the sea down to the smallest twitch of a character's arm--and that can get a little tiring to read.

Jrohde says

my favorite of Conrad - I relate to Lindgard somehow, the independent captain of a lovely brig and admirer of a young heroic deposed chief in the jungles of Borneo. his life work of replacing this man back on his throne is abruptly interrupted by the appearance of an English 'yacht' grounded at the mouth of the river where he is mounting his native force to retake the throne/power for his friend. he relates to the woman on the yacht as a fellow European and is unable to seperate himself from her fate and that of her detested and smug husband. his life goal is frustrated in rescuing her and her husband from the tribes leaving him to sail away having reneged on his promises and self esteem. the characters are amazing and the setting so reminiscent of my time in Indonesia. I always wanted to be a Tom Lingard - and realise I would have made his choice as well. great read!

Lydia says

' "Am I a fat white man?" snapped the serang. "I was a man of the sea before you were born, O Sali! The

order is to keep silence and mind the rudder, lest evil befall the ship." '

Enjoyed this read. Conrad knows how to describe a sea calm better than anyone else.

Bill Kupersmith says

Except for Heart of Darkness, which any instructor in Intro to Lit gets to know a lot better than one ever wanted to, I'd not read any Conrad in decades. Lucienne in Nicholas Freeling's Gun before Butter drew me to this under-appreciated novel - Conrad's hero Captain Lingard was her masculine ideal & I wanted to find out if he was worthy & indeed he is. Tho' the sleaze & the homme moyen sensual represent most of the male species, one can aspire to being a decent man or even better, a real man. A real man is who you need to come to your aid should you be kidnapped by pirates. The victims are the odious snob Mr. Travers & his friend Mr. D'Alcacer. Their rescuer is Captain Lingard, master of the brig Lightning, a merchantman turned arms smuggler who's sworn to help his friend Hassim, an exiled rajah, regain his realm on the Malay coast. But Lingard is distracted by his fascination for Travers' beautiful wife Edith. The Rescue is a wonderful study of masculine strength, & weakness. But the character who really haunts me is not Lingard, but old Captain Jorgenson, late master of the barque Wild Rose - which like Jorgenson himself is a burnt out wreck. Jorgenson has gone totally Malasiatic and serves as both a model & warning for what can happen to a real man. Lingard has recruited him for one last adventure, with fateful results.

If you know the difference between a brig & a barque & can tell a topsail from a royal stay, you should enjoy this book very much. I liked it more than the better-known Lord Jim, which I'd read as a schoolboy.

Debbie Zapata says

Review coming tomorrow. I have to think more about this one.

Jan 21 ~~ The Rescue is unusual because it is technically an early effort by Conrad, but he stopped working on it in 1898 and never went back to complete it until 1918, finally publishing in 1920. In his introduction he explains that he had put this novel aside to finish another project that had captured his imagination, and it simply became easier to then finish the next project and the next until 20 years had passed and he began to feel guilty for leaving this book dangling. He never says how much he edited the original text or at what point in the story he had stopped writing all those years ago. I am not enough of a Conrad scholar to be able to say 'this part is the younger man and this is the mature one'. But like all of his books, The Rescue is darkly intense, with much more going on beneath the surface than even the characters seem to understand. It not an easy book to spend a concentrated amount of time on. The tension, the uncertainty of what will happen next, the gloomy atmosphere, are all vivid and overwhelming. I could read in only short doses before needing to come up for clear air.

In the first section of the book we meet adventurer Tom Lingard aboard his brig Lightning. They are stuck with no wind on their way to...somewhere. The destination is not revealed just yet. We just know that the ship is not moving, the night is dark, and there may be pirates in the waters around them. But it is not a pirate who arrives beside them in a small boat. A yacht has grounded on a sandbank and the men in the boat have been sent out with urgent messages for help. But Lingard is dismayed to learn the exact location of the stranded yacht, for it turns out to be the very spot he is heading for himself, and he knows the unexpected presence of the yacht will complicate his plans. The rest of the book deals with those plans and the way the people of the yacht (especially Mrs.

Travers, the owner's wife) affect the destinies of Lingard, his crew, the friends he is on the way to meet and the plans they had made.

The events in the story take place over one week's time. A week of lurking intensity: *The night effaced even words, and its mystery had captured everything and every sound—had left nothing free but the unexpected that seemed to hover about one, ready to stretch out its stealthy hand in a touch sudden, familiar, and appalling.* There is a great deal of confusion on all sides; no one (not even Lingard) is quite sure what what will happen by the end of the week, and the ending surprises everyone.

I will want to read this again someday; I can never completely 'get' Conrad on a first reading. I was confused by some of the conversations between Lingard and Mrs. Travers. And I was annoyed at other times by Conrad's way here of stopping the action at a dramatic point at the end of one section, then beginning the next section with Lingard remembering what had happened. Conrad does this a few times, and I always had a 'hey, wait, what about...?' moment before I realized I would then be told about the conclusion of the scene. That broke up the flow of the story for me, but at least the next time I read the book I will be prepared.

Jim Leckband says

I had a hard time with this one, my second book on estuary hijinks before the First World War (The Riddle of the Sands). Some of it had some of the best writing by Conrad I've run across - and some it I was in the same doldrums Lingard's boat starts the novel in.

In the introduction Conrad relates that he started "The Rescue" before all of his masterpieces (The Nigger of the Narcissus, Heart of Darkness, and Lord Jim and it was sitting there in an unfinished state while he wrote those books that are very related to the present one. However, those books were written with a hand of fire, while this one was written with a hand of smoke.

A brig captain, Lindgard, is hailed out of his ship's, and his, doldrums by a mysterious rowboat of sailors. This sets the tone for the rest of the book - his not knowing what is the ultimate aim of the people he brings on board and how much he should trust them. A yacht has been stranded in the shallows of a coast that Lindgard knows very well - and he knows that if that yacht stays there, everything he cares for is doomed.

This book would make an excellent sea-noir film - I'm surprised that somebody hasn't made it yet! All the tropes of noir are there - femme fatale, honorable yet conflicted "Man of Fate", shifting allegiances, mysterious and/or inscrutable happenings, and a gloom of static dread that pervades everything. However, Conrad lays on the inscrutable doom too thick - I got the point, I just want to know what is happening sometimes! I never really got why the native chiefs of the island were so interested in the hostages and why the hostages kept going back and forth like passenger pigeons.

The book might also suffer from a little too obvious allegory to the First World War - the character Mr. Travers is an obvious allusion to the dolts who started the trench warfare and then washed their hands of it. And the situations of the hostages setting off a war seemed like the assassination of a minor prince - a happenstance that really doesn't mean much, but because it took place in a powderkeg, the whole thing blew up.

Lukrezia Cosimo says

The best of the Lingard trilogy (for me). With the exception of the end, which somehow lacks the power of much of the rest of the book, a tour de force. I love the descriptions of the landscape, the light, the sea ...
Some good characters: Jorgensen, Lingard, Mr. Travers, ...
