

Purity of Blood Study Guide

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Contents

Purity of Blood Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	9
Chapter 4.....	11
Chapter 5.....	13
Chapter 6.....	15
Chapter 7.....	17
Chapter 8.....	20
Chapter 9.....	22
Chapter 10 and Epilogue.....	24
Characters.....	26
Objects/Places.....	30
Themes.....	32
Style.....	34
Quotes.....	36
Topics for Discussion.....	38



Plot Summary

A woman is found strangled outside the church of San Gines, and Captain Alatrisme, in doing a favor for his friend, the poet Francisco de Quevedo, quickly becomes embroiled in a tangled net of political intrigue. When the Inquisition, working with Alatrisme's enemy the royal secretary Luis de Alquezar, attempts to bring down both the Conde de Olivares and Alatrisme himself by prosecuting Alatrisme's young squire Inigo for heresy, the captain and his friend don Quevedo must race against the clock to clear the boy's name and avert an appointment with the stake.

Chief Constable of Madrid Martin Saldana is called to investigate the discovery of the body of a woman found strangled in front of the church of San Gines. Days later, Captain Alatrisme, hired sword and ex-soldier, is approached by his friend, the flamboyant and irascible aristocratic poet, Francisco de Quevedo, to take a job assisting in the rescue of a young woman named Elvira de la Cruz from the convent of Adoratrices Benitas. Vincente de la Cruz, the girl's father, insisted that his daughter and the rest of the nuns are being mistreated by the priests Fray Coroado and Fray Garzo. He has tried diplomatic channels, but both of the priests are well connected, and de la Cruz, whom the Church suspects of having non-Christian blood in his family tree, does not have the leverage to get his daughter out of the situation.

Alatrisme and don Quevedo help Vincente de la Cruz and his two sons sneak into the convent, but they are immediately ambushed by forces of the Inquisition, which has been having the de la Cruzes followed. Vicente and his younger son are killed while the elder son, Alatrisme, and don Quevedo successfully flee the scene. Alatrisme's young squire, Inigo Balboa, the narrator of the story, attempts to return to the scene and help his master and is caught by the Inquisition forces led by Alatrisme's nemesis, the evil Italian assassin Gualterio Malatesta.

The Inquisition tries to induce Inigo to incriminate Alatrisme, but the boy staunchly denies any involvement or knowledge of the affair. Finally, a broken Elvira de la Cruz is made to falsely testify that she knows Inigo and that he practices Jewish rites.

Alatrisme uses his influence with his friend the Conde de Guadalmedina to gain an audience with the Conde de Olivares, the head of state, who Luis de Alquezar was attempting to public humiliate in the scandal at the convent. The Conde de Olivares hints that Luis de Alquezar himself is impure of blood.

While don Quevedo races north to find proof of this with which to blackmail Alquezar, Alatrisme goes to the auto-da-fe held by the Inquisition to publicly sentence Inigo and Elvira. There he is recognized in the crowd by Alquezar, who sets a group of men led by Gualterio Malatesta after Alatrisme. Alatrisme and Malatesta duel in a nearby alley and Malatesta is seriously wounded, but Alatrisme must flee before finishing off his rival because of the arrival of more adversaries.

Don Quevedo arrives at the auto-da-fe just in time to present the proof of impure blood to the royal secretary Alquezar, who, fearing the loss of his post, calls for Inigo's release.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 - Senor Quevedo's Difficult Moment: On the day of the festival bull fights in the Plaza Mayor, a woman is found dead outside the church of San Gines. Constable Martin Saldana is called to investigate. The woman is perhaps fifty, and has the look of a high class servant, perhaps a duenna. She has been strangled with a silk cord. In her hands she clutches 50 escudos and a note reading "For masses for your soul." No one can identify the woman. She carries nothing else remarkable. In her purse are a rosary, a key, and a religious icon. Her golden chain of Saint Agueda is around her neck. She bears no sign of trauma other than the marks left in her neck by the cord.

Saldana arrives late to the bullfights. By way of explaining his tardiness, he tells his friend Diego Alatrisme y Tenorio about the murdered woman. Alatrisme in turn fills in the constable on the bull fights. With Alatrisme is young Inigo Balboa y Aguirre, the son of one of Alatrisme old war compatriots, Lope Balboa. Inigo's mother charged Alatrisme to help her son make something of himself, and he serves as Alatrisme's squire.

The bullfights end with the goring of a blond German guard, who slips on his own entrails, to the delight of the crowd. This reminds Alatrisme of an incident that occurred during the siege at Ostend, twenty years before, in which Alatrisme, Saldana, and Inigo's father, Lope Balboa, had all taken part. The battle was a rout by the Dutch forces, but the Spaniards were able to exact revenge less than a year later, taking the town and ending the siege.

Alatrisme tells Saldana that he is considering returning to the Netherlands, where the on-again-off-again war has reignited. General Ambrosio Spinola is working hard to recruit enough young men to shore up Spanish forces in the Netherlands. Saldana agrees that, what with the enemies Alatrisme has made in Madrid, it might be a prudent move, and asks if he intends to take Inigo. Alatrisme says that Inigo may be too young, though he is thirteen, the same age Alatrisme was when he first enlisted.

Later, Alatrisme and Inigo meet up with Alatrisme's good friend, the irascible poet and swordsman, don Francisco de Quevedo. Quevedo asks a favor of Alatrisme. He has some friend who would like to speak to the captain. When Alatrisme asks if this inquiry might lead to some employment, Quevedo confirms it, adding that it will be well-paid employment. He warns Alatrisme that the matter will be dangerous. The money would come from Quevedo himself.

Chapter 1 Analysis

As is often the case with mysteries, everything is relevant, and the murder of the duenna, touched upon so briefly, quickly returns as part of the plot in subsequent chapters. Saldana concludes that the facts that the woman's necklace was not robbed



and money was placed in her hands, makes this more than a simple robbery ending in murder. The note further confirms this, and Saldana is sure that he is dealing with someone with a sick and twisted sense of humor.

The spectacle of the bullfights is described in lengthy detail, and in its pomp and gaiety provides a contrast to the gruesome scene that opened the book. The last scene though, with its visceral imagery, brings the two settings together. The reader is immediately made aware that at this point in Spanish history, life and death in the city of Madrid hangs on the point of a knife. The decadence of the bullfights also contrasts with the decline of the Spanish Empire. Bankruptcy looms for the attenuated empire, exacerbated by the failing war in Flanders and the decline of the influence of the Spanish navy. The bankruptcy, and the attempts of the Conde de Olivares to avoid it, plays a key part in subsequent events. Moreover, the main characters, including Alariste, don Quevedo, and Martin Saldana all sense that the prestige of the empire is sleeping, and that they, who as young men witnessed the apogee of Spanish power and influence, are now as older men being forced to witness its downfall.

Alariste's own situation mirrors that of Spain. Once a soldier whose clear-headedness and valor had caused his fellow soldiers to bestow the unofficial title of captain upon him, and who, through his heroics on the battlefield, had formed close ties with aristocratic men like don Quevedo and the Conde de Guadalmedina, Alariste now finds himself living close to his pockets, finding work as a hired blade to make ends meet. He is, like Spain, contemplating a return to war, in a bid to restore his fortunes.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The next morning, don Quevedo brings three gentlemen to meet Alatraste. The captain sends young Inigo for a walk, but Inigo sneaks a look at his master's clients on the way out. It appears to be a father and his two sons, and from their clothing Inigo suspects that they are not from Madrid. Inigo sneaks back into the house through a window.

Crouching in the kitchen, he overhears the conversation, already in progress. The captain remarks that the penalty for breaking into a convent is death. The older man, who Inigo later learns was called Vicente de la Cruz, remarks that he is aware of the danger, but that there is no other way to rescue his daughter. His sons are called Jeronimo and don Luis, and are twenty-five and eighteen, respectively.

The head priest of the convent of the Adoratrices Benitas is Fray Juan Coroado. He and Fray Julian Garzo control the convent, which is nominally run by Sor Josefa. Vicente says that Fray Coroado, who has money and power, and strong influence at court, has turned the convent into his own personal seraglio to satisfy his perversions, and that the Conde de Olivares is complicit in this state of affairs because he needs Coroado's wealthy contacts to funnel money out of the Genovese banks to fund the war. The confessor, Fray Garzo is also untouchable, because of his political contacts through an uncle on the Council of Castile. The priests have, according to Vicente, convinced the young women in their charge that their mortal souls depend on acceding to carnal acts to satisfy the two men.

Vicente has already tried official channels. He reported his suspicions to the Conde de Olivares, and to the Inquisition, which sent two examiners to the convent. But the power and influence of the two priests and their association with the Conde de Olivares has shielded them. Don Quevedo remarks that it is odd that the Inquisition, which has been trying to get something on the Conde, has not used this opportunity to denounce him. Vicente says that the prioress, Sor Josefa, who is much admired, and performs special masses for both the Conde de Olivares and for the king and the queen, has let the adulation go to her head, and fancies herself the new Saint Teresa. Because of the money and power of Fray Coroado, the convent is the wealthiest in Madrid, and many families, ignorant of what goes on inside, are eager to place their daughters there.

Elvira, Vicente's daughter, came to Madrid with two other novices a year ago. They were accompanied by a duenna, who was supposed to look out for them until they took their vows. With disgust, Vicente tells Alatraste that the duenna acted as a go-between for Fray Coroado. When Alatraste asks if they can speak to the duenna, he is told that she disappeared several days ago. The prioress has informed the family that Elvira has committed herself wholly to God, and they have not been allowed in to visit her in eight months. Vicente had confronted Coroado, but the priest knowing that Vicente's father had been in trouble with the Inquisition for having Jewish blood, laughed in the old



man's face. The younger son jumps into the conversation to deny any claims that the family has Jewish blood, though he admits that their ancestors were not all Christians.

Through the untimely leap of a street cat through the open window, Inigo is discovered.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Alariste notes that it is ironic that his friend don Quevedo, whose vicious poetic pen has lapsed into anti-Semitism often, especially to skewer rivals, is risking so much to help a family of potential Jewish decent in a matter so dangerous. It turns out that Vicente de la Cruz provided financial assistance for the poet when he was on the run from crimes in Italy. Don Quevedo, whatever else he is, is a man of honor, especially when it comes to such debts. He is prepared to risk his life and reputation to repay the debt, regardless of his own personal feelings about Jews. This is an especially honorable act because don Quevedo has nothing to gain and plenty to lose. His star has been on the rise in the court after he began penning anonymous poems supportive of the efforts of Conde de Olivares in Flanders. Because his style and wit is so evident, it is clear to all from whom these verses came, and the Conde is grateful because the poet is held in great respect, and anything he puts to verse enjoys popular support.

Though it is never said explicitly, every man in the room, and even Inigo hiding in the kitchen, knows that the de la Cruzes have already taken matters into their own hands with regard to the duenna. It is now that the words on the note clutched in the dead woman's hands become clear, not as the sick remark of a twisted psychopath, but as a dark, but serious comment on why the woman was murdered.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 - Madrid Steel

The next Sunday, Alatraste, Inigo, and don Quevedo go to mass at Las Benitas, the chapel attached to the convent of Adoratrices Benitas. The chapel is popular because of Fray Coroado's homilies and Teresa de Guzman, the wife of the Conde de Olivares, along with many other women of the upper class, regularly attends its mass. While Alatraste and don Quevedo examine, from a distance, the nunnery chapel, where the young women of the convent watch the mass behind a spiked, ornate screen, Inigo spots the eldest de la Cruz son in the crowd, also peering toward the screen. After the mass, as don Quevedo greets acquaintances on the street, Alatraste studies the exterior of the convent, looking for weaknesses and points of entry. The eldest son too, skulks about outside, eying the walls.

While following the captain, Inigo is run into and shoved by one of a pair of genteel young popinjays, walking away from the chapel in the company of two young ladies. Alatraste quickly comes to the boy's defense and asks the men to retract their harsh words, suggesting that if they do not, they may accompany him to the de la Vega gate, where such offenses are settled with steel. The young men, noting Alatraste's heavily scratched and nicked guard, the scars on his face, and his soldier's gaze, back down, and offer their apologies.

The next day Inigo, as is his custom, follows the carriage of Angelica De Alquezar, the young niece of the royal secretary who has bewitched him with her flirtatious glances, as it passes over the Segovia Bridge for an outing in the fields outside Madrid. Inigo had just parted with Alatraste outside the Tavern of the Turk. He had noticed two men follow as the captain strode away, but it had been at that moment that the carriage of Angelica de Alquezar and, in his fever, had forgotten about the two men and had taken up his customary pursuit.

Inigo approaches Angelica at the popular fountain in the fields beside the Segovia Bridge. She recognizes him as the friend of "Captain Triste, or Batriste." They talk, and Inigo boasts that he would give his life to save her. As the duenna approaches to take her away, Angelica removes a charm from around her neck and slips it into Inigo's hand.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The series is replete with moments of confrontation. Sometimes they are simply about honor, as it was considered disgraceful and cowardly for a man to back down from a challenge. There were, as this incident illustrates, ways to avoid a challenge honorably, and it is often the challenger that decides whether or not to leave the backdoor open. Alatraste framed his challenge to the young men in such a way that they could claim that



the incident was a mistake and not an intentional action, which they would have to defend. Hired swords also used this honor protocol to arrange lawful hits on targets. If hired to kill a certain person, they would bump into him in a public location and attempt to create an incident that would lead to a duel. Alatrisme himself has had this done to him, and, when hired for his sword, has done it to others. One of the few killings that he regrets was performed in such a matter.

The young nephew of the Conde de Guadalmedina was an embarrassment to his uncle, and the Conde, Alatrisme's friend, wanted the man done away with before he caused a political incident. He hired Alatrisme to do the job. The captain bumped into the young man at a public plaza when he was in the presence of several young women. The young man, not wanting to appear cowardly before the women, challenged Alatrisme to a duel and quickly had his throat slashed.

Angelica de Alquezar got both Inigo and his master into trouble in the previous adventure, when an unwary Inigo let slip to Angelica where his master would be going that night. This led to an attempted ambush of the captain by Gualterio Malatesta, who was hired by Luis de Alquezar and Fray Bocanegra. The symbols on the amulet are pictured in the book, but Inigo cannot read them, and cannot fathom their meaning. His ignorance and foolish trust of the girl sets the trap.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 - The Assault: The men plan their rescue, and under cover of darkness descend upon the convent. They secure a coach and have it waiting nearby to spirit the daughter away. Inigo scales the garden wall and lets Vicente and his two sons in by the side entrance. Don Quevedo and Alatrisme wait in the street as backup, swords drawn. Alatrisme had told Inigo to play his part in opening the door and then to return swiftly home. But Inigo lingers by the coach for several minutes until a gunshot sounds out.

A swarm of black clad men rush the garden patio with cries to hold in the name of the Inquisition. Alatrisme and don Quevedo are in the melee of gunfire and the clash of steel on steel. They each fight against several assailants, knowing that they have in some way been betrayed and have walked into an ambush. The bulk of the ambushers surround Vicente and his sons at the walls of the garden. Alatrisme and don Quevedo, knowing that they cannot prevail against such odds, set about fleeing the scene. The two men split up and flee into the darkness of the night.

Inigo, who had crept back toward the convent during the melee, runs into don Luis de la Cruz, the younger son, who has staggered away from the fight, mortally wounded. Inigo attempts to drag the young man to safety, but there is no hope. As the young man dies, Inigo arms himself with don Luis's dagger and stands to flee. He hears a familiar humming, the sound of "ti-ri-tu, ta-ta", and recognizes it at once. Gualterio Malatesta emerges from the shadows, blocking the only escape route. The Italian hired blade had already had a run-in with Inigo and Captain Alatrisme, and considers both despised enemies. Other men approach and tell Inigo, who is clutching don Luis's dagger, that he is under arrest. Gualterio draws his sword, but Inigo holds his ground and the men remark at the lad's gall. The Italian taunts Inigo. Inigo attacks, but is easily rebuffed and rendered knocked unconscious.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The trap is sprung on the de la Cruzes, and their hired swords are caught in the ambush. Inigo holds up at the cart in part because he feels that the situation is wrong, and he has remembered the two men that seemed to be following the captain the previous day. His instincts are correct, even if his subsequent actions were futile and foolish. The Inquisition was having the de la Cruzes followed and, after their meeting with don Quevedo and Alatrisme, the don and the captain picked up tails as well.

Gualterio Malatesta's little humming whistle will be familiar to readers of the first volume and they, like Inigo, will from this recognize the man for who he is before he steps into the light. It is important to note that Inigo had not made it back to the scene of the crime when he was caught. He therefore has some deniability as to his involvement, and he

will use this later. The Inquisition, however corrupt and immoral it is, has its rules about evidence and guilt.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter 5 - In God's Name: Inigo awakens in a moving carriage and is sure that he is being taken to the dungeons of the Holy Office, in Toledo. Outside the city of Toledo, Inigo is dragged from the carriage by Gualterio Malatesta, who hands him over to an escort from the Holy Office. For a moment, the Italian looks apologetically at the boy and tells him he is sorry. As Gualterio ducks back into his coach, Inigo asks about the captain. The scowl on the man's face is enough to convince Inigo that Alatrisme escaped.

Inigo is taken into the dungeons where he is stripped and searched before a preliminary interrogation. He is asked for the names of his progenitors, going back three generations, and quizzed on elementary Christian knowledge, such as the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria. He is then asked to name names, but he feigns confusion and distress, and breaks down in tears. This initial ploy works, but he is then taken before a panel of Dominicans in black robes, who ask him who his accomplices were in his sacrilege. He denies committing any sacrilege, at which point they ask him point blank if he denies profaning the convent of the Adoratrices Benitas. Inigo decides to act completely ignorant and tells them that he happened upon a unknown wounded man while walking the streets, at which point he was apprehended, for reasons he cannot fathom, by the Inquisition. He is then asked what he knows about Captain Alatrisme. Inigo goes silent, refusing to answer even when he is struck repeatedly. He eventually loses consciousness.

In the next interrogation, they ask him if he is aware that the blood of the de la Cruz family is not pure. Inigo claims that he does not know the de la Cruzes. They ask him if he knows that Elvira de la Cruz has been accused of inciting Hebrew practices among her fellow nuns. An older, menacing priest, new to this interrogation, remarks that Inigo's last name is common in Portugal. Inigo tells them that he comes from a good Christian family and that his father fought and died in the king's war. They ask him his age, and Inigo replies just as the screams of a tortured woman rend the air.

Chapter 5 Analysis

After Inigo foiled Malatesta's attempt to ambush the captain in the previous volume, it seemed clear that the Italian considered the young man an enemy, and would delight in eliminating him. But the gall that Inigo showed in the alley, trying to hold back a group of armed men with a small dagger, has altered Malatesta's attitude. He still considers the captain an enemy and would not hesitate in cutting down Inigo to get to him, but Inigo no longer seems to be a target in himself, and as Malatesta will tell the captain later, he had no joy in turning the lad over to the Inquisition.



Inigo's protestations of innocence, bald-faced lies though they were, temporarily stymied any action against him, though the truth is that they were hoping he would incriminate Alatraste and thus held off showing him the evidence of the charm, which, through Alquezar they had planted on him, and which they were holding back the whole time. Inigo infers, though he has no evidence, that the woman he hears screaming is Elvira de la Cruz. It is never revealed that this is so, though when he does finally meet the woman it is clear that she has been broken by torture.

Torture may not be performed on children thirteen years old or younger. Inigo, by just weeks, is still thirteen, and this saves him. He worries that he will be held captive until he turns fourteen and tortured then, but the Inquisition and Luis de Alquezar are eager to discredit the Conde de Olivares, and Alatraste, being only a side target, is not worth the wait.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Chapter 6 - San Gines Alley: Diego Alatrisme has been in hiding for two days, in a backroom in the gambling house of his friend Juan Vicuna. Vicuna comes to tell him that don Quevedo will meet him in San Gines alley in half an hour. Don Quevedo manages to escape and has been hiding at a friend's, but his name has not been made public and the Inquisition has not come looking for him. Martin Saldana has been to the Tavern of the Turk, looking for Alatrisme, but seemed to La Lebrijana, the owner of the Turk, who is the lover of Diego Alatrisme, to hint that he would not be able to cover for Alatrisme should his friend come out of hiding. Alatrisme asks Vicuna about Inigo and is told that the boy has vanished. Domine Perez, a Jesuit and friend of the captain's, is making inquiries.

Alatrisme and don Quevedo meet in the alley behind San Gines, which in the night acts as a place to conduct nefarious business for all of the miscreants currently taking sanctuary within the church. Don Quevedo brings Alatrisme up to date on what he has learned from his informants. The Inquisition was having the de la Cruzes followed. They allowed the father and his two sons to proceed with their plan and then ambushed them at the convent. The Inquisition did this not to aid Father Coroado, who because of his ties to the Conde de Olivares is their enemy, but to attempt to discredit the convent and capture and burn the de la Cruzes as conversos. But they failed to take alive any of the men in the fight. Vicente and his younger son were both killed. The older son, though wounded, had escaped. Don Quevedo says that it may have been impossible for their attackers to identify Alatrisme and him in the melee, but given that that the family was being followed, it is likely that the Inquisition knows exactly who was involved. Both Elvira and Inigo have been arrested and taken to the dungeon of the Holy Office.

Don Quevedo says that Alatrisme was the fourth target of the ambush. His enemies Luis Alquezar and Fray Emilio Bocanegra hoped to incriminate him in the affair. Their conversation is interrupted when Alatrisme recognizes hulking Cagafuego, a friend whom he met in debtor's prison. It is at this point that a squad of constables arrives and the men scatter out of the alley like rats.

From the shadows, Alatrisme watches the Tavern of the Turk, above which La Lebrijana lives. Though he can see no sign of movement in the street, he dares not return home to the apartment behind the tavern where he lives, and to the comfort of his lover.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Phillip IV, the young king of Spain, has proven highly susceptible to influence by the Church. He has decreed a prohibition on cards and gambling. Still, most of the citizens of Madrid gamble, and cards, or books without bindings, as they are called, are



especially popular. Thus establishments like Juan Vicuna's, though technically underground and hidden, are well-known even by authority figures like Martin Saldana. Still, a hidden room in a hidden establishment with a secret exit to an unused alleyway is an excellent hiding place for Alatraste.

The holy practice of sanctuary was frequently utilized by men with outstanding warrants for everything from murder to unpaid debts. The church was eager to provide the service as, in addition to the impecunious vagrants it attracted, it also put up wealthy clients, aristocrats who were in some way indisposed to the law at that moment and who would fill the church's coffers with money for separate rooms and services. Many of these men still needed to conduct business, and thus the alleys adjoining churches became popular nighttime meeting spots, where men enjoying sanctuary could take care of business outside of the church and yet be near to the door in case catchpoles or, in the case of popular alleys like San Gines, night patrol squads decided to visit.

The reader can never fully determine whether Alatraste was right not to return home. Don Quevedo insists that the Inquisition does not have the evidence to arrest them, and that he himself has not been hassled. This, says the don, is proof that the good lad Inigo has not incriminated them.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter 7 - Men of One Book: The Inquisitions interrogates Inigo relentlessly. He is beaten, but not tortured. Inigo has clung to his story of innocence. Inigo has learned that the older priest, the cruelest of them all, is Fray Emilio Bocanegra. Finally, he is brought in to witness the priests question Elvira de la Cruz. She is a small plump woman. She is perhaps no more than eighteen or nineteen, but looks much older because of the abuse she has received. Her head has been shaved bald and her eyes are red-rimmed. She cannot stand without help, and her joints have been permanently crippled by the rack. They ask her a series of questions about Inigo. Does she know the boy? Does he observe Jewish practices? Did he participate with her father and brother in a conspiracy to take her from the convent? A beaten Elvira de la Cruz answers yes to all the questions. As Inigo begins to protest, Fray Bocanegra pulls out the charm that was given to Inigo by Angelica de Alquezar. He has Elvira confirm that the symbols on the charm refer to the Hebraic superstition of cabala.

In the back room of Juan Vicuna's gaming club, Alatraste and don Quevedo meet with their well-connected friend Alvaro de la Marca, Conde de Guadalmedina. He confirms their suspicions that the convent ambush was designed both to discredit Conde de Olivares and to incriminate Alatraste. They now intended to burn Elvira at the stake for the conspiracy. Guadalmedina says that Inigo could be subject to the same fate. Luis de Alquezar is continuing to act meek around his master, Olivares, but there is every indication that he is making great efforts to bring the man down. Guadalmedina says that the fact that the Inquisition has not entered Alatraste's home or made a serious effort to find him means that they have been unable to induce the boy to incriminate him. Alatraste asks Guadalmedina if he brought the items the captain had requested. Guadalmedina hands him a key and a map and tells him to use them with caution.

Guadalmedina conducts Alatraste and don Quevedo to a secret meeting with Conde de Olivares. Olivares acknowledges that he was a target of the affair along with Alatraste, but he says that there is nothing he can do to help Inigo. No one may interfere with the affairs of the Holy Office, not even the king. He says that it is likely the boy will burn along with the novice, and that the Holy Office is expediting the trial. Inigo may have only weeks left before execution. Pressed by Alatraste, Olivares admits it is actually within his power to get the boy off, but that it would require making concessions that would compromise many of Spain's interests. The captain then pledges that if the Conde could help in any way, he would have Alatraste's sword in any matter at any point in the future. Alatraste's pledge seems to move Olivares. He writes down four words on a slip of paper: Alquezar. Huesca. Green Book. He hands the captain the paper and glances pointedly down at the pommel of Alatraste's sword.



Chapter 7 Analysis

Inigo's anger with Elvira de la Cruz is quickly tempered by the understanding that she has been tortured into submission by the Inquisition. As young as Inigo is, he still understands this fact, and feels great pity for the young woman, not much older than him, especially when he sees her later wearing the conical cap that signals her fate at the stake during the auto-da-fe.

During the visit of Guadalmedina to the gaming house, the author relates the back story linked this high aristocrat with low-born Alatrisme. It was during the battle of Querquenes, on an island off the coast of Tunisia, in northern Africa, that a wounded Guadalmedina was dragged to the safety of a fleeing ship by a soldier with steely grey eyes who, despite the fact that the rest of the Spanish forces had broken rank and were being slaughtered in flight, rallied a band of soldiers into a close rank fight to rescue what wounded they could. Alatrisme had recalled this debt rarely, and only when he was in the most desperate of circumstances, as in the previous volume when he had sabotaged the ambush that he and Gualterio Malatesta were hired by the Luis de Alquezar and Fray Bocanegra to perform.

As is typical of works of historical fiction, the Alatrisme series makes use of both fictional characters and real figures from history. Thus, Alatrisme, Inigo, Luis de Alquezar and several other key characters are fictional, but Francisco de Quevedo and Gaspar de Guzman, also known as the Conde de Olivares, are real figures from history that the author places in the action. The Inquisition's desire to bring down the Conde de Olivares is based first and foremost upon Luis de Alquezar's desire for power. The Inquisition itself is at the height of its power, and operating at all levels of government under a compliant young king. But Olivares is at this point in time bankrolling Spanish foreign policy on the uneven taxation of the loosely tied empire and upon credit extended by Genovese Jewish bankers. It is this last source of income that the Inquisition finds distasteful and it is willing to use this as a pretext to help Alquezar bring down Olivares. There are numerous historical ironies to the situation. Olivares, a pious man who took confession every morning of his life, is not hostile to the Inquisition, and does not particularly like the fact that Spain is beholden to foreign money. He will in fact attempt to wean the Empire off these sources of incoming by declaring bankruptcy with five years of the events of this story. This bankruptcy and the attempted increased taxation of Catalonia will, along with the disastrous events of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), lead to Olivares being removed from power.

It is remarkable that Olivares, who is in practice the acting head of state of the Spanish Empire, should take time to meet with Alatrisme, and it is even more remarkable that Alatrisme should speak so boldly and plainly to the man. Alatrisme seems to have this effect on all who would consider themselves his betters, in that, when they look at this soldier's calm grey eyes, and behold his stoic acceptance of the reality of life, the magic which seems to tie up men's minds so that they observe fictions such as rank and nobility of birth fizzles. In many ways, these systems that place one human above another are make believe. They are fictitious conceits, and they do not seem to hold up



when presented with someone who is not designed to play the game, who is not designed to help those around him prop up falsehoods. This trait, this unwillingness or inability to play along with life, will be remarked upon later by Quevedo, when he considers to himself what Alatríste thinks about religion.

The title of the chapter is taken from Inigo's remark that one should never trust any man who reads only one book.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Chapter 8 - A Nocturnal Visit: Alatrisme uses the key to break into Luis de Alquezar's house in the night. He had earlier that day seen don Quevedo off at the Calle de las Postas. The poet had taken traveling gear and the slip of paper containing the four words written by Olivares.

Alatrisme sneaks upstairs to the secretary's bedroom and finds him fast asleep. The secretary awakens with Alatrisme's dagger at his throat. Alatrisme demands to know what Alquezar will do with the boy. The secretary feigns ignorance, but is clearly terrified. He finally says that he might be able to do something. Alatrisme knocks over a jug of water, and a few moments later, Angelica de Alquezar appears in the doorway carrying a candle. She screams at the sight of Alatrisme. She races forward and attacks a befuddled Alatrisme, sinking her teeth into his arm that carries the dagger. Her uncle springs from the bed, cries for help from the rest of the house and grabs a short sword from the nearby wardrobe. Alatrisme manages to make it into the hall, parrying blows from Alquezar, who seemed not to care whether he injured his niece. But once out in the hall, Alatrisme is met by a group of armed servants. He fires a shot at the charging men and springs back into the bedroom, and manages to escape through the window.

On his way back to Juan Vicuna's gaming club, Alatrisme spies an armed group of men hanging an announcement that the Holy Office of the Inquisition will celebrate an auto-da-fe on the first Sunday of the new month, in one week's time.

The next day, Alatrisme is amazed to find that no price has been put on his head. That night he pays a visit to Constable Saldana. Saldana says that the strangled woman has been identified as Maria Montuenga, and that she served as a duenna to one of the novices in the convent. Alatrisme feigns ignorance about the convent. Saldana warns Alatrisme that the auto-da-fe will be heavily guarded, and that he will be able to do nothing to rescue Inigo. He adds a further warning about an Italian swordsman named Gualterio Malatesta who has recruited some men and is known to be out for Alatrisme's blood. Saldana says he believes that Malatesta has powerful backers.

Imprisoned in the dungeon of the Inquisition, Inigo kills the rat that shares his cell to keep it from biting him in the night. He then regrets killing the creature as loneliness weighs on him. He thinks about the fate that awaits him and about his love for Angelica de Alquezar, which still burns strong despite the fact that he knows how evil she is and that she played a part in his downfall.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Alatrisme's adventure in the house of Luis de Alquezar almost reads as a vaudeville play, with its pratfalls, Alatrisme knocking over the jug, and the bizarre fight scene, Alatrisme



attempting to parry Alquezar's sword thrust with the secretary's twelve-year-old daughter between them, latched onto his forearm by the teeth. Indeed Alariste must take great care not to harm the child, who first rushes at him so fast that he must quickly draw down his sword to prevent the girl from running herself through.

It was not Alariste's intention to kill the man. He wanted to show the secretary that power could not keep him safe if he crossed Alariste by going ahead with the prosecution of Inigo. But there is a moment, just before he knocks over the jug, when Alquezar is cowering before him, that Alariste recognizes the truth, that tomorrow, when the secretary is back safely in the halls of power, nothing will have changed. He will consider that he once again has the upper hand, and the night visit would have done little to change Inigo's fate. It is at this point that the captain seriously considers simply dispatching the man. The shattering jug brings Alariste back to reality just as it brings Angelica and the servants to the secretary's aid. Killing the man would probably not save the boy either. After he is safely away, Alariste takes comfort in the fact that the one thing that his visit likely accomplished, was to insure that Luis de Alquezar would not sleep easily at anytime in the future.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Chapter 9 - Auto-da-fe: Roughly twenty heretics are due to be sentenced in the auto-da-fe, and they are moved to Madrid the night before and placed in holding cells close to the Santo Domingo plaza, where the spectacle will take place. In the morning, as thousands pack into the surrounding streets, Alatrisme makes his way to the de la Carne section of the plaza. The king and queen arrive, along with the rest of the royal court, and take their places in balconies overlooking the plaza.

The prisoners are brought in a procession, organized into groups by their heresy, blasphemers, bigamists, sodomites, Judaizers, followers of Mohammed, and finally those accused of witchcraft. The procession includes effigies of condemned who died in prison or who escaped, and which will be burned in their place. All of them are dressed in white robes, most of which are adorned with icons of the flames of Hell, but Inigo notes that his robe has a different picture, that of St. Andrew's cross. All carry candles, and the worst offenders, Elvira de la Cruz among them, are made to wear conical hats. The prisoners file onto the platform and one by one are publicly sentenced. The punishments range from lashes to burning at the stake. All who recant after being sentenced will be granted the mercy of being garroted before burning. Elvira de la Cruz, accompanied by the effigies of her father and brothers, recants all of her crimes, of being a Judaizer, of heretical conspiracy, and of violating a sacred place, before the Tribunal of Six, led by Fray Emilio Bocanegra. Alatrisme does not spot Inigo until the young man is on the platform, and is relieved to see that he is not wearing a conical hat, meaning that he is not destined for the stake.

Alquezar, from his loge by the royal balcony, spots Alatrisme in the crowd. Alatrisme sees him signal twice and, looking around, the captain sees several hats moving his way in the throng. Freeing his vizcaina, he melts away into the crowd. Two men pursue Alatrisme into a nearby alleyway. Alatrisme quickly ambushes and slashes the throat of the first man. The second man is Gualterio Malatesta. Alatrisme and Malatesta duel with vizcainas in the narrow alley, and though the Italian wounds Alatrisme near the right hip, it is the captain who is clearly superior. He wounds Malatesta several times, and is on the point of finishing him off when a third man rushes into the alley and draws his blade. Alatrisme takes one last slash at Malatesta, slicing into the man's cheek, and then flees.

Back on the platform, the line of condemned has dwindled, and Inigo is the next to be sentenced. At that moment a commotion appears in the loge of the royal secretary. A man in dark clothes, dusty and muddy with travel appears and hands a letter case to Luis de Alquezar. Inigo, watching from below, recognizes the traveler as don Quevedo.



Chapter 9 Analysis

The vizcaina, Alaric's Basque-made dagger, is almost a short sword, and is used by the captain to lash beneath a blow parried with his sword, often disemboweling the opponent. The small sword is also called a Bilbo, likely from its origin in the Basque city of Balbao. Balbao is the birthplace and last name of Inigo. This relationship between Inigo and Alaric's most trusted weapon is not commented upon directly in the text, but it is possible that the author intends a metaphorical connection between the two.

The auto-da-fe is described in heart-rending detail. The author points out the irony that as it was considered a religious ceremony, punishment was not allowed at the auto-da-fe. Sentence were read out and the prisoners were turned over to secular authority for the punishment to be performed. Through this hypocritical bit of rhetoric, the Church was able to claim that it was not responsible for the imprisonment, enslavement, and execution of those found guilty of religious crimes.



Chapter 10 and Epilogue

Chapter 10 and Epilogue Summary

Chapter 10 - Unfinished Business: Later that night, with Inigo safely back in the Alatrisme's lodgings on Calle del Arcabuz and under the ministrations of Caridad la Lebrijana, Alatrisme and don Quevedo mill about with the rest of the town outside the walls by the bonfires of the heretics. They had already seen Elvira de la Cruz garroted and burned. Don Quevedo pears around at the festive atmosphere they auto-da-fe has brought and tells Alatrisme that he mourns for Spain. Quevedo tells the captain about his desperate ride to Aragon. The four words that Olivares had written led the poet to the town of Alquezar, the origin of the family of the royal secretary, and to the green book that town keeps detailing the genealogy of its families. It turns out that Luis de Alquezar's grandfather was a Jewish convert. He would never have been able to attain his place in court and his status as a member of the order of the Calatrava if this fact had become known. So he had used money and his influence with friends like Fray Bocanegra to cover it up. This information had been presented to him at the last minute by don Quevedo, and was used to blackmail him into pardoning Inigo. The two men continue to talk as the fires burn. Don Quevedo laments not arriving in time to save Elvira de la Cruz.

Later, after being assured by Martin Saldana that he was safe to do so, Alatrisme returns home to La Lebrijana and Inigo. Inigo feigns sleep as La Lebrijana welcomes the captain home. Inigo feels ashamed at his humiliation in the plaza, but even more ashamed that he disobeyed the captain's orders and allowed himself to be caught.

Two days later, as the captain, don Quevedo and the other members of their circle celebrated with a dinner in the Tavern of the Turk, Inigo sat outside in his customary spot, composing lines. The carriage of Angelica de Alquezar drives past, and the young girl looks out at Inigo and blows a kiss. Inigo finds that he is still bewitched by the blond temptress.

Acting on a tip-off from Martin Saldana, Alatrisme visits Gualterio Malatesta in his filthy apartment in The Posada Lansquenete on filthy Calle de la Primavera. The Italian is in bed, feverish, surrounded by the blood-soaked rags he has been using to bandage the wounds he sustained in his duel with the captain. When Alatrisme enters, pistol in hand, the wounded man makes to pick up the pistol lying at his bedside, but cannot manage it, and thus resigned, lays back and watches the captain approach. Malatesta asks if Alatrisme has come to kill him, and the captain nods his head. Malatesta says that he is glad the boy is safe, and that he did not enjoy handing the lad over to the Inquisition, but they, he adds, were paying. Alatrisme asks Malatesta if he is at least able to hold his sword, and urges him to make a grab for it. Malatesta refuses. A woman enters with clean sheet, stifling a cry when she sees Alatrisme standing over Malatesta, pistol in hand. She looks pleadingly at the captain, and he can see that, for whatever reason,



she cares deeply for the man in the bed, and wishes that he not pull the trigger. Alatrisme lowers his weapon and leaves.

Epilogue: The epilogue takes the form of a weekly bulletin to friends by Jose Pellicer. It relates the reforming of the army unit, the Tercio Viejo de Cartagena, of which Alatrisme is a part, and of their imminent departure for Flanders. It also mentions the strange murder of Padre Juan Coroado who, while standing in front of Last Adoratrices Benitas, was run through on the spot by a young masked man in broad daylight.

Chapter 10 and Epilogue Analysis

Huesca, now the capital of Aragon, is presumably where don Quevedo had to visit to obtain information about Alquezar's hometown. This is never mentioned in the text and is left to the reader to puzzle out. It is ironic that Alquezar's hometown in northern Spain places his origin so near to that of Inigo, who he has framed for having impure blood. The persecution of citizens for "impure blood" will have obvious links to Nazism in the modern reader, but the Inquisition extended the accusation beyond that of having Jewish blood to that of having non-Christian blood in a family tree. This broad brushstroke allowed the charge to be leveled against almost anyone, especially those whose family roots were not Italian, and was used by the Church for centuries as a way not only to persecute Jews, but ensure that families loyal to the Church gained and kept influence in many parts of Catholic Europe.

Simply put, it is the similarities that Alatrisme notices between himself and Malatesta that causes him to stay his hand and not execute the man. But, it is that act of mercy, or the capacity for it, that separates them. Alatrisme recognizes this as he walks out. Malatesta is what he would be if the most important things about himself were absent.



Characters

Captain Diego Alatraste y Tenorio

Diego Alatraste was born to a common family in Leon in 1582. At the age of thirteen, he left home and enlisted with the Spanish army. His title of captain is unofficial, but was instead given to him by his fellow soldiers in the Tercio Viejo de Cartagena, the unit of soldiers in which he served, because of an incident in Flanders when he took charge of the battle when all of the Spanish commanders were killed. His courage and cool-headedness on the battlefield led him to form ties with many men in Spanish society, including many above his station like Francisco de Quevedo and the Conde De Guadalmedina, whose life Alatraste saved in Tunisia.

Alatraste is entering his forties, and bears many of the marks and scars of being an old soldier. His face is scarred in several places. His eyes are a steely grey and are his most remarkable physical feature. His clothes are carried for, but worn, and patched in places, reflecting the meager life he has made for himself working as a sword-for-hire in Madrid. He is not without his sword, its guard scored with many nicks and dents, and his long vizcaina, the Basque short-sword that is his most trusted weapon.

He rents a small room above the Tavern of the Turk, which is owned by his mistress, former actress and ex-prostitute Caridad la Lebrijana. He lives there with Inigo Balboa, the son of Lope Balboa, one of Alatraste's friends from the war, now deceased. Inigo acts as his squire, though Alatraste limits the boy's involvement in dangerous missions as much as possible.

Alatraste's fortunes have taken a turn for the worst as a sword-for-hire, and he has been seriously contemplating returning war, as a new front of what will become the Thirty Years War has opened up in Flanders.

In *Purity of Blood*, Alatraste admits that he is the grand-nephew of the legendary Don Juan Tenorio, the famous Lothario of song and story.

Inigo Balboa y Aguirre

Inigo Balboa is Diego Alatraste's thirteen-year-old Basque squire. After the death of his father Lope Balboa, Inigo was sent to Alatraste by his mother, who knew of the respect his father had for Alatraste and hoped that Alatraste could help the boy make something of himself in Madrid. Inigo does not possess any remarkable skills, but his association with the poets and playwrights friendly to the captain, chief among them Francisco de Quevedo, has already led to his taking an interest in poetry and literature. As the narrator of the stories, Inigo often interrupts the flow of the story to relate incidents that occur many years later, and it is inferred in many of these flash forwards that he has become a man of some learning and poetic ability.



It is possible the author derived Inigo's father's name partly from Lope de Aguirre, the infamous mutineer from the sixteenth century Spanish expedition that ventured up the Amazon River in search of the mythical El Dorado, but Lope de Aguirre died more than half a century before Lope Balboa, and thus the reference is not direct.

Inigo has a dangerous infatuation with Angelica de Alquezar, an orphan who, now in the care of her uncle, has become a handmaiden to the Queen. In the previous volume, Angelica used her influence over Inigo to trick him into divulging the captain's plans, which allowed Alatraste to be ambushed. Inigo rescued the captain and redeemed himself, in the process killing a man for the first time.

Inigo is fiercely loyal to Alatraste, but that loyalty sometimes causes him to make foolish mistakes that exacerbate the difficulty of the situations the two frequently find themselves in.

Francisco de Quevedo

Headstrong fighter, sharp critic, accomplished poet, Francisco de Quevedo is one of the true historical figures cast in the story. He is Alatraste's good friend and is fiercely loyal to the captain. In Madrid, don Quevedo's pen is feared as much as his sword, and the Conde de Olivares has recently been shown his favor to the poet in return for verses favorable to his foreign policy.

Constable Martin Saldana

An old soldier and friend of Alatraste, Martin Saldana likes his job as constable in Madrid and does not wish to do anything that might jeopardize it. Still, he is not averse to tipping off his old friend Alatraste with news both official and unofficial.

Vicente de la Cruz

The father of imprisoned nun Elvira de la Cruz, Vicente comes to don Quevedo and Captain Alatraste for help in freeing his daughter.

Don Luis de la Cruz

The youngest son of Vicente de la Cruz is killed during the ambush at the gates of the convent of Adoratrices Benitas.

Jeronimo de la Cruz

Jeronimo de la Cruz, the eldest son of Vicente de la Cruz, escapes from the ambush in which his father and younger brother die, only to watch helplessly as his sister is burned



at the stake. He is presumed to be the masked man who later assassinates Fray Coroado.

Elvira de la Cruz

Held captive in the convent of Adoratrices Benitas by the wicked Fray Coroado, Elvira de la Cruz is later turned over to the Inquisition where she is tortured into implicating Inigo Balboa in heretical conspiracy. Broken physically and emotionally, she later recants to the Inquisition before being burned at the stake.

Fray Juan Coroado

Fray Juan Coroado is the priest in charge of the convent of Adoratrices Benitas. He has, according to Vicente de la Cruz, been using the convent as his own private seraglio, convincing the nuns that their eternal salvation depends upon acceding to his carnal desires.

Gaspar de Guzmán, Conde de Olivares

Conde de Olivares is the favorite of King Phillip IV and has recently become prime minister, the position he will hold for some decades to come. His power and influence are not yet at their height, but he is in many ways already the de facto ruler of the Spanish Empire.

Caridad La Lebrijana

Alatrisme's mistress is a former actress and ex-prostitute, who used a small inheritance to buy the Tavern of the Turk.

Luis de Alquezar

Conde de Olivares's royal secretary has ambitions of supplanting his boss. He enlists the help of the Inquisition through his close ties with Fray Emilio Bocanegra to discredit Olivares. He also has a score to settle with Captain Alatrisme.

Angelica de Alquezar

Angelica de Alquezar is a twelve-year-old orphan, taken in and educated by her father Luis de Alquezar. She is a burgeoning beauty, with blond curls and sky blue eyes, and she has already bewitched young Inigo Balboa.



Gualterio Malatesta

An Italian sword-for-hire, Gualterio Malatesta seems to take pleasure in his job. He is a vicious but shrewd man, and is Captain Alatrisme's nemesis.

Juan Vicuna

An old soldier friend of Alatrisme's, Juan Vicuna operates a hidden gambling club in Madrid.

Fray Emilio Bocanegra

Emilio Bocanegra is the presiding member of the Council Suprema of the Holy Order of the Inquisition.

Alvaro de la Marca, Conde de Guadalmedina

A leading member of the Spanish aristocracy, the Conde de Guadalmedina was saved by Captain Alatrisme from Berbery pirates in Tunisia. Since then, he has been Alatrisme's friend, someone of power and influence that the captain can turn to when he becomes enmeshed in the schemes of more powerful men.

Maria Montuenga

The duenna of Elivra de la Cruz, maria Montuenga is murdered, presumably by one of the de la Cruz men, for her involvement in the imprisonment her charge.



Objects/Places

Madrid

The Madrid of Captain Alatrisme's day is a bustling city of 70,000 people and the royal home of the King of Spain, Phillip IV. The city abounds in contrasts, and the author describes both its grand decadent festivals and its refuse-filled alleyways.

Angelica's charm

A small necklace entrusted to Inigo Balboa by Angelica de Alquezar after Inigo tells the young girl that he would die for her, the necklace is actually an incriminating piece of evidence that the young girl was asked by her father to insure would end up on Inigo if he was caught by the Inquisition. The charm contains characters and a diagram relating to the Jewish cabala.

Tavern of the Turk

The Tavern of the Turk is the bar owned by Alatrisme's mistress Caridad La Lebrijana, and is frequented by Alatrisme's friends including don Quevedo, Martin Saldana, Juan Vicuna, and Father Domine. Alatrisme lives with Inigo in one of the adjoining apartments.

Vizcaina dagger

Alatrisme keeps the vizcaina, or Basque short sword tucked behind his right hip. It is his most trusted weapon, more lethal in close quarters than the sword.

San Gines Alley

The alley abutting the Church of San Gines is used by those enjoying sanctuary in the church to conduct business affairs at night.

Juan Vicuna's gambling house

King Phillip IV, at the Inquisition's behest, as imposed a prohibition on gambling in Madrid. But most of the population still gambles in hidden clubs like Juan Vicuna's. It is here, in a back room, that Alatrisme hides when he suspects that he is being sought by the Inquisition.



Dungeons of the Holy Inquisition, Toledo

The dungeons of the Holy Inquisition are where the order wrings confessions from those suspected of heresy. Prisoners in the dungeon are subjected to malnourishment, isolation, and in some cases torture in order to induce a confession.

auto-da-fe

A religious ceremony, complete with a holy mass, that was used to reconcile or condemn members of the church who were accused of heresy.

Convent of Adoratrices Benitas

Prison to Elvira de la Cruz and other young woman, the convent of Adoratrices Benitas was one of the wealthiest in Madrid, and enjoyed the patronage of the Conde de Olivares.

Green book

Green books were kept by towns in Spain detailing the known genealogical history of the various families in the town. The integrity of the family's blood, its status as pure or impure, had harsh consequences in its member's being able to attain positions in society.



Themes

Purity of Blood

Purity of Blood serves as the title of the book and it is indeed the central theme. The witch hunt led by the Church for those of impure blood, blood that was tainted by familial ties to Jews or to non-Christians, was used by the Church for centuries to denounce members of the aristocracy that attempted to hinder the interests of the Church. Over time, the device was adopted at all levels of society, fostered by anti-Semitism.

When Vicente de la Cruz attempts to extricate his daughter from the nefarious clutches of Fray Coroado, he is ultimately stonewalled because of the questionable purity of his blood. Though his youngest son denies it in the presence of Alatraste and don Quevedo, the implication is that the de la Cruzes have Jewish branches in their family tree. This looming accusation keeps de la Cruz from being able to pull his daughter out of the convent. This ironically leads him to turn to don Quevedo, the ascorbic poet who has shown no love for Jews in the past and has used the Jewish label to deride his enemies. Alatraste remarks upon the irony of this when he and don Quevedo discuss the mission.

The Inquisition, attempting to force him to incriminate his master Alatraste, implies that Inigo Balboa, because of his Basque ancestry, is likely to have impure blood. This accusation is likely true, though Inigo denies it. The truth of the matter is that most Spanish families at the time were in some way subject to the accusation. This is what made the threat so dangerous, that it could be leveled at almost anyone, and thus it was simply used as a method for the powerful to control the less powerful. Powerful men, like Luis de Alquezar, could use their money and influence to fabricate clean family trees. Alquezar's is almost skewered with his own sword when don Quevedo discovers that Alquezar neglected to have the green book in his hometown altered when he took up his place of power in Madrid, and thus his family's own Jewish ties were evident. The royal secretary was then forced to release Inigo because the evidence that don Quevedo now possessed could, if released, cost the royal secretary his job and possibly his freedom if the Inquisition got involved.

The Defense of Honor

The defense of honor is one of the central themes of the whole series. Challenges to honor were part of the cultural milieu. These could result from incidence as serious as the stealing of a lover, and from incidents as minor as an accidental bump in the market. What was important was not the seriousness of the offense done, but the challenge to the honor of the man offended. These challenges did not always have life and death results, but always required a resolution for the sake of the honor of those involved. Duels and challenges to honor were the ways in which males distinguished themselves from one another, and carried with them implications about the social and sexual power



of the winning male. It is easy to regard this phenomenon as evidence of the animal instincts of man, but the social conventions surrounding honor were perhaps because of the complexity of the human brain, more complex than the dueling instincts of animals.

The author allows these incidents to interrupt the flow of the story, suggesting that in addition to all of the other concerns that these men faced, they must also at all times have needed to be prepared to defend their honor, with steel if necessary. While they are studying the exterior of the convent, Alatrisme and Inigo are bumped into by two young aristocrats, walking away from the mass with their lady friends. One of the young men shoves Inigo aside. Alatrisme cannot allow the dishonor to pass and stands up to the man. He is not hoping for a duel, and, in the way he frames his challenge, allows the younger man a way to avoid the duel without loss of honor. In the previous volume, Alatrisme admits that he had used a staged bump in a park as a pretext to assassinate a man for the Conde de Guadalmedina. This introduces another dynamic. Men like Alatrisme had to be careful that they were not entrapped by their honor into duels that were predesigned to result in their deaths.

Loyalty and its Price

Loyalty often has its price, and there are two different examples in the book to illustrate this. First, don Quevedo is forced, because of his loyalty to the de la Cruzes, a family which helped him out financially when he was in exile in Italy, to jeopardize his rising status in the royal court by taking part in the heretical conspiracy to rescue Elvira de la Cruz from the convent of Adoratrices Benitas. Don Quevedo's star was on the rise in the royal court because he had anonymously penned several verses favorable of the policies of the Conde de Olivares.

Second, Inigo Balboa shows his loyalty to Captain Alatrisme, first by returning to the scene of the Inquisition's ambushes, an act which lands him in the Inquisition's custody, and second by refusing to incriminate his master even while being beaten imprisoned in the dungeons of Toledo. Though he is beaten and forced to sleep in a filthy, rat-infested cell, Inigo is ultimately rewarded for his loyalty. The Inquisition, unable to extract solid proof of Alatrisme's involvement in the conspiracy, is forced to level a lesser charge against Inigo. This causes him to be placed further back in the line of the accused at the auto-da-fe and gives Francisco de Quevedo the precious minutes he needs to arrive and secure the boy's release.

Style

Point of View

The story is narrated by Inigo Balbao, who uses first person narrative. The narration is written as if Inigo is looking back at the events from some point later in his life, and he will often flash forward and reveal future details about the lives of the characters. When he relates scenes and incidents which he did not directly represent he does not usually explain how he knows what occurred. The implication is that he was later told what happened by those involved, and is now setting the whole thing down. Because the narrative is told by a character looking back in hindsight at the events from a distance of many years, the narration can in many ways be considered omniscient, because Inigo knows how matters turn out and in many cases knows the ultimate fate and the intentions and motivations of all those involved because history has by the point at which he is narrating exposed them. Inigo is quite frank about his own mistakes.

The only break in this narrative is the epilogue, which takes the form of a weekly bulletin to friends by Jose Pellicer, a famous poet of the era. In addition, the book closes with a series of poems by Don Quevedo and others.

Setting

The story is set almost entirely in the bustling city of Madrid, capital of the Spanish empire and home to 70,000 souls. The city is by turns beautiful, with its cathedrals, public plazas, and riverside fields, and disgusting, with its piss-soaked alleys, seedy bars, and impoverished underbelly. Alariste lives behind the Tavern of the Turk, a common bar, frequented by his friends, and owned by his mistress Caridad La Lebrijana. The pomp and decadence of the city is never far from the grime. In several scenes in the book, characters will step out of a crowded, festive city plaza directly into a shadowy, refuse-filled alley.

Alariste hides out in Juan Vicuna's gambling club. Set in the basement of an apartment building, the club provides a location to play cards and dice, away from the prying eyes of the Inquisition, which through the king has declared a prohibition on gambling. Modern readers may be reminded of the descriptions of speakeasies that cropped up across the country during Prohibition.

Inigo Balboa spends several weeks in the Inquisition's dungeon in the city of Toledo. The environmental details of the dungeon are doled out sparingly. Most of the questioning chambers are simply windowless rooms equipped with a table and chairs for the presiding priests. Several of the rooms have shackles on the wall, but Inigo is never taken to one of the torture rooms. His cell is windowless, filled with refuse from the previous tenant and a rat which Inigo eventually kills.



Language and Meaning

The author paints the scenes with dark hues, and a sparing touch. The book is not large for a work of historical fiction, and the author lets mood and color convey much of the setting. The work is translated from the Spanish, so the author's use of language cannot be properly analyzed. Spanish words have been left un-translated in many places and some familiarity with the Spanish language is useful for the reader. Some of the words appear to be deprecated, and reflect the author's study of seventeenth century Spain. They have likely been left un-translated for this very reason.

Much of the writing has a visceral realism that is very appropriate to the culture. Thus the reader is treated to frank descriptions of a guard disemboweled by a bull, of Alariste's blood soaking his side after a tooth and nail fight with Gualterio Malatesta in an alley described as stinking of urine and filth, and of the merciful garroting of the condemned who choose to recant before they are burned at the stake.

The vocabulary is collegiate in level. Whether this reflects the level of the actual text of the Spanish work or whether it is simply the preference of the translator is unknown. Inigo, the narrator, often relates stanzas of poetry to the action of the story. These are set off from the text with indentations and italicized.

Structure

The book is divided into ten chapters roughly equal in length. The chapter breaks correspond to scene changes, and are often used to cut away from the action to dramatic effect. Thus, in several of the chapters, the reader is presented with a crisis just as the chapter ends. This type of structure is typical of both mysteries and adventures, and this work can be said to be a little of both.

The story is divided into two parts. First are the events building up to the ambush at the convent, the failed rescue attempt of Elvira de la Cruz, and the capturing of Inigo Balboa by the Inquisition. Second is the attempt by Alariste and don Quevedo to rescue Inigo from the stake. The first part takes the form of a mystery, albeit something of an obvious one. In the second part, the story turns into a race against the clock. Chapters 1-4 make up the first part of the story, and chapters 5-10 the second part.

There is a small epilogue relating the reformation of Alariste's old unit, this hints at the events of the next book, and the assassination of Fray Corrado.



Quotes

"The detail of the pouch with money for masses for her soul indicated a twisted sense of humor—or, conversely, great Christian charity. After all, in the dark, violent, and contradictory Spain of our Catholic King Philip IV, in which dissolute wastrels and rough-living braggarts howled for confession at the top of their lungs after being shot or run through by a sword, it was not unusual to encounter a pious swordsman."

Ch 1, p. 3.

"'The fact is,' he said, 'that the walls of La Adoracion convent are thick enough to silence all that goes on within them: a chaplain who veils his lasciviousness beneath a hypocritical mysticism, a stupid and credulous prioress, and a congregation of unfortunate women who have been convinced that they have celestial visions or are possessed of the Devil.'"

Ch. 2, pp. 36-37.

"I was incapable of looking at the man without thinking of everything I knew about him, and about the convent in which he made a dressing gown of his cassock. I must apologize for mentioning the ill feeling and indignation caused by his ritualized performance, the fatuous unction with which he celebrated Christ's sacrifice. I was astounded that no one among the assembly shouted out 'sacrilege,' or 'hypocrite,' and that I saw nothing around me but devotion, even admiration, in the eyes of many women."

Ch. 3, pp. 60-61.

"Angelica remembered my name. And with it, a portion of life that I was resolved to place at her feet, sacrificing it to her without so much as blinking. I felt, and I wonder if you will truly know what I mean, like a man run through with a dagger: that I would live as long as it was not pulled out, and that removing it would kill me."

Ch. 3, p. 82.

"I am going to die, I told myself. And with all the vigor of my thirteen years, and all the desperation of the many beautiful things that I would now never know, ever, I focused on the gleaming tip of the enemy steel and commended my soul to God, clumsily, with a quick prayer my mother had taught me in her Basque tongue as soon as I could speak. Then, sure that my father would welcome me with widespread arms and a smile of pride on his lips, I gripped the dagger, closed my eyes, and, blindly swinging, threw myself against Gualterio Malatesta's sword."

Ch. 4, p. 105

"As I learned from that point on, the most fearsome thing about being a prisoner in the secret dungeon of the Inquisition was that no one told you what your crime had been, or what proof or witnesses they had against you—nothing about anything."

Ch. 5, pp. 117-118.



"In the rules of the dangerous game in which he often pawned his own skin, that was part of the deal. In every combat there were losses and gains, and the game of life provided the same ups and downs. He assumed that from the beginning, with his usual impassivity: an acceptance that at times seemed to be indifference, but was in fact nothing other than the stoic resignation of an old soldier."

Ch. 6, p. 154.

"[W]ith time, I learned that although all men are capable of good and evil, the worst among them are those who, when they commit evil, do so by shielding themselves in the authority of others, in their subordination, or in the excuse of following orders. And even worse are those who believe they are justified by their God."

Ch. 7, pp. 159-160.

"Because in the secret dungeons of Toledo, nearly at the cost of my life, I learned that there is nothing more despicable or more dangerous than the malevolent individual who goes to sleep every night with a clear conscience. That is true evil. Especially when paired with ignorance, superstition, stupidity, or power, all of which often travel together."

Ch. 7, p. 160.

"I am not fond of giving advice—no one can pound opinions into another's head—but here is a piece that costs you nothing: Never trust a man who reads only one book."

Ch. 7, p. 160.

"On a day like this, meant to be memorable, the Holy Office wanted to kill several partridges with a single shot. Resolved to undermine the Conde de Olivares's policy of rapprochement with the Jewish Portuguese bankers, the most radical inquisitors of the Supreme Council had planned a spectacular auto-da-fe that would strike fear into the heart of any who were not secure in the purity of their blood."

Ch. 9, p. 213

"I took one last peek at the loge of honor, where our lord and king was leaning a little to one side to whisper something into the ear of the queen, who seemed to smile. They were undoubtedly talking about the hunt, or exchanging pleasantries, or who knows what the bloody hell they were saying, while down below them priests were heartily dispatching their subjects."

Ch. 9, pp. 234-235.

"That please me, by God. He is a brave lad. You should have seen him that night at the convent, trying to hold me at bay with a dagger. Hang me if I enjoyed taking him to Toledo, and less, knowing what awaited him. But you know how it goes. He who pays, commands."

Ch. 10, p. 256.

"After all, however much the Italian insisted, the two of them were not the same. Perhaps they were in God's eyes, or the Devil's, or man's, but not deep inside, not in their consciences."

Ch. 10, p. 259.



Topics for Discussion

Discuss how the Church used the purity of blood as a method for undermining its adversaries.

How did honor and the defense of honor play a role in Spanish society during the times of Captain Alatrisme? Are there any parallels to this behavior at other times and in other cultures? Give examples.

How does Inigo prove his loyalty to Alatrisme? What does it cost him, and how does it ultimately save him?

How is don Quevedo's willingness to help the de la Cruzes ironic? Why would he risk so much for honor?

Inigo describes the Spain of Philip IV as 'contradictory.' What does he mean? Give examples.

Discuss the root causes of the Thirty Years War.

How did the Conde de Olivares's policies anger the Inquisition?

Compare the Spanish Inquisition to two modern systems of oppression.

How does Alatrisme's devotion to Inigo undermine his normal responses to the trials of life? Is Alatrisme a better person for this?