

Calamity Bound

by Xavier Alcalá



The documents
behind the novel

AN OLD STORY THAN FOUND HIM

Buenos Aires. Librería Platero



The old Librería Platero in Buenos Aires has since closed.

Librería Platero was one of those secondhand bookstores where rare and out-of-print books shared the shelves with unpublished material—and the unexpected.

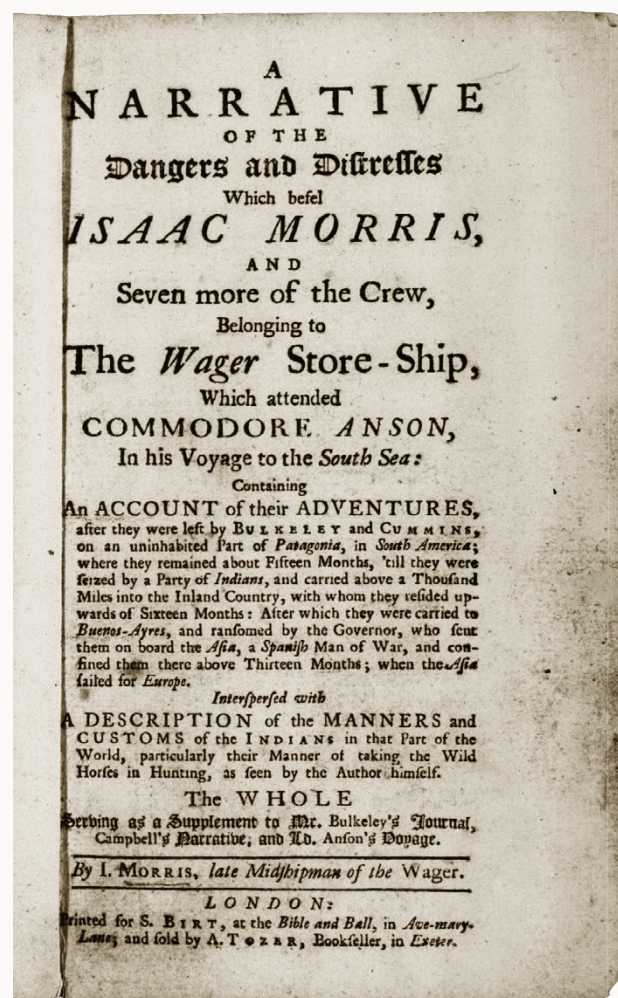
Xavier Alcalá had gone there looking for accounts of the Nazis who disappeared into Patagonia after World War II. That investigation would eventually lead to another novel, *The Making of a Crook*.

Instead, he came across an eighteenth-century narrative by Isaac Morris, a young British midshipman who had sailed with Commodore George Anson's expedition.

*One investigation
had opened another.*

Morris told of the wreck of the *Wager*, rebellion among its survivors, abandonment on the South American coast, an overland journey to Buenos Aires, captivity—and a return to England that did not end his ordeal.

The volume had not been hidden. It had simply been waiting in a Buenos Aires bookstore, far from the seas where its story began.



Title page from an 18th-century edition of Isaac Morris's narrative, reproduced from a digitized historical copy.

A COUNTERINTELLIGENCE OPERATION AT THE END OF THE WORLD

The hidden race for the Atlantic

By the middle of the eighteenth century, naval power depended on more than ships and cannon. Britain and Spain watched one another's dockyards, pursued technical knowledge, recruited shipwrights, protected their routes, and tried to anticipate what the other side would build—or attempt next.

Calamity Bound places this struggle at both ends of the Atlantic.

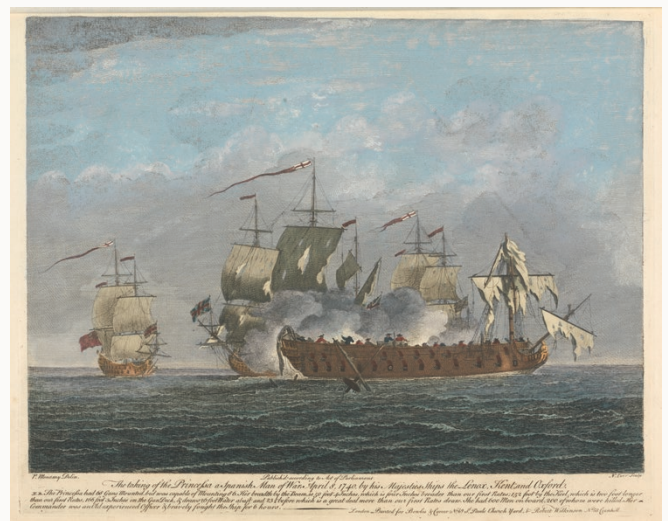
In the north, Ferrol's arsenal becomes a center of shipbuilding, scientific knowledge, political intrigue, and naval intelligence. In the far south, British movements, Spanish interests, and the search for an unknown passage converge in waters and territories that Europe had barely begun to map.

The wreck of HMS Virginia therefore opens more than a story of survival. It exposes a contest of information, loyalty, and imperial reach linking the naval bases of Europe to the southernmost coasts of the Americas.

Xavier Alcalá knew both ends of this geography. He grew up among the lands and maritime culture of Ferrol and later traveled extensively through Patagonia. Historical narratives, missionary diaries, naval research, and direct knowledge of both territories allowed him to connect worlds separated by an ocean.

A decision made in a northern shipyard could determine who survived at the end of the world.

*Naval espionage operated
at sea and shore.*



The taking of the Princessa a Spanish Man of War, April 8, 1740 by His Majesties Ships the Lenox, by Nathaniel Parr (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection).

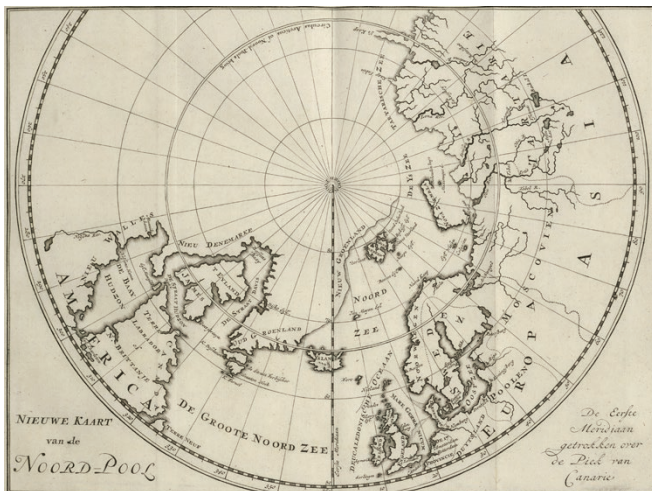
THE ANATOMY OF A JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN

The Ferro Meridian

The account given by midshipman Isaac Moore is based on contemporary documents. In these, longitude is measured not from the Greenwich meridian but from the Ferro meridian, which passes near the westernmost point of El Hierro, the westernmost of the Canary Islands. The westernmost point for Europeans for centuries.

Eighteenth-century cartography is inadequate to represent every movement described in the accounts underlying the novel.

The simplified modern map shown here therefore combines the maritime search for the “Southern Passage” with the overland journeys narrated by Isaac Moore and Father Sineiro.



Dutch map from 1720 over the North Pole with the Ferro Meridian.

For centuries, the Ferro Meridian was widely used as a reference point in European cartography. El Hierro had long marked the western edge of the known world for European navigators.

The meridian lies 17°40' west of Greenwich. Read from that zero point, the coordinates recorded by Moore suggest that, at the southernmost extent of their voyage, the British seamen may have reached what is now known as the Beagle Channel—explored and charted nearly ninety years later.



A Different Zero Point

FERROL: THE KEY TO THE ATLANTIC

The coveted base of the Spanish fleet

At the time of the events recounted here, Britain and Spain fielded the two strongest fleets in the Atlantic; France followed close behind.

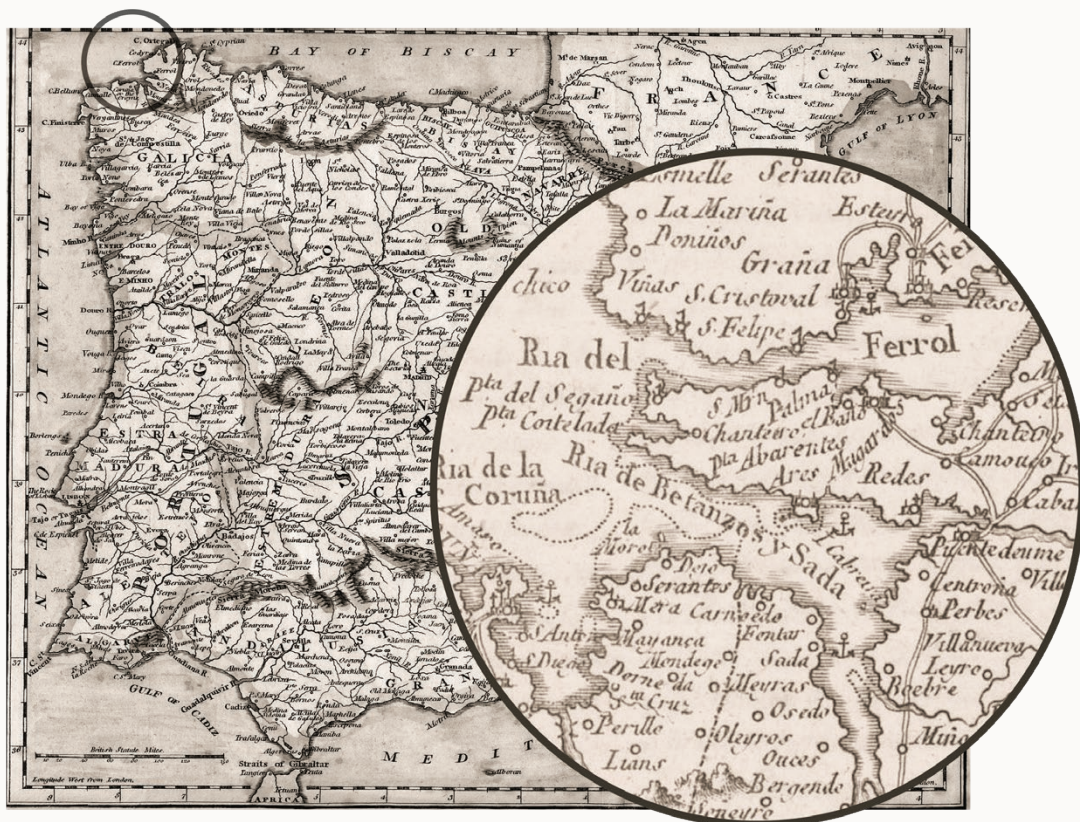
From the sixteenth century onward, the prospect of seizing Ferrol—or nearby A Coruña—recurred in English and later British ambitions. Control of those ports could strengthen control over the routes connecting the North and South Atlantic.

From 1751 onward, English master shipwrights were at work in Ferrol's yards—men who were either Catholic or Puritan, and who had suffered ill treatment at home for dissenting

from Anglicanism.

Ferrol possessed one of Europe's finest natural harbors: a long, narrow entrance easily defended, opening into a calm, deep basin capable of sheltering entire fleets.

Inside it, the Spanish monarchy built the largest naval base of its day in Europe and one of the most advanced naval-industrial complexes of the Enlightenment—a purpose-built system of shipyards, dry docks, foundries, workshops, storehouses, defenses, and facilities capable of building, arming, repairing, and maintaining ships of the line.



A natural defense: at its narrowest, the entrance to the Ferrol estuary is about a fifth of a mile wide.

THE FILE REMAINS OPEN

A naval expedition leaves Ferrol for the far south. A wreck scatters its survivors across a territory Europe has barely begun to understand. Those who return will still have to answer for what happened.

Drawing on a survivor's historical account, missionary diaries, technical research, and Xavier Alcalá's knowledge of Ferrol and Patagonia, *Calamity Bound* reconstructs an ordeal at the boundary between naval history and fiction.

The novel places the reader aboard HMS *Virginia*, among sailors confronting wreck, abandonment, captivity, and the struggle to survive. While they cross a world scarcely represented on European maps, another contest unfolds around the naval intelligence and political interests that sent them there.

The documents show the route. The novel takes you aboard.



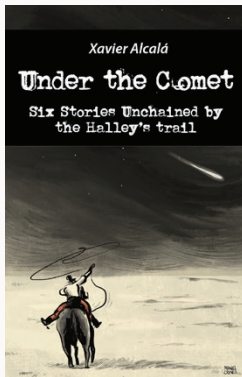
Read *Calamity Bound* on
amazon



Illustrations of the novel's principal characters by acclaimed Galician artist Siro López, Xavier Alcalá's longtime friend, created under the author's close direction.

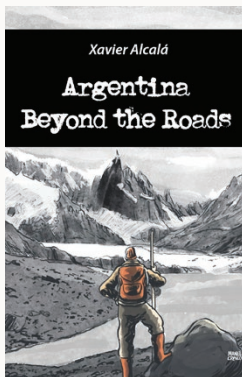
EXPLORE THE PATAGONIA FILES

The Patagonia Files brings together fiction and narrative nonfiction shaped by historical documents, personal journeys, and direct knowledge of the territory. Each book opens a different route into the human history of southern South America.



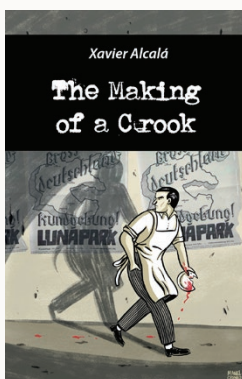
Under the Comet

Under the light of Halley's Comet, immigrants from different continents build new lives across Patagonia. Over several generations, family secrets, political conflict, and inherited feuds bind their stories together at the edge of the known world.



Argentina Beyond the Roads

Built from decades of travel, this chronicle follows Argentina beyond its familiar destinations—from Buenos Aires and the great rivers to the Andes, Patagonia, and Tierra del Fuego. It is not a conventional guide, but a personal investigation of landscape, migration, memory, and national identity.



The Making of a Crook

The investigation Xavier had intended to pursue when he found Morris's narrative eventually became The Making of a Crook. Drawing on Argentine police records rescued from destruction, the novel enters wartime Patagonia through immigration, Nazi espionage, corruption, and murder.

Coming soon in 2026