

RED RUBY SERIES

7. Curse of the Mad Pirate



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CURSE OF THE MAD PIRATE

by

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SUMMARY

In the bustling, sun-drenched settlement of the Cape of Good Hope, a chilling rumor takes root. A pirate ship, bold enough to defy the very shadow of the formidable Castle, has anchored nearby. This audacious act throws the colony into turmoil, sparking fear and disbelief in equal measure. When a terrified hunter stumbles into the Governor's office, stammering tales of a pirate flag and cannon ports in Hout Bay, the Governor is forced to confront a reality he deemed impossible.

As the threat rapidly escalates, the colony's fate rests upon the shoulders of Simon Verbeeck, a seasoned seafarer with a notorious past of pirate hunting. Called upon by the desperate Governor, Verbeeck and his crew set out in their ship, the Red Ruby, to challenge the encroaching pirate. Yet, the confrontation takes an unexpected turn, plunging Verbeeck into a harrowing pursuit that leads him far beyond the harbor's safety.

He finds himself ensnared in a treacherous web woven by the cunning and ruthless pirate, John Rogers, a man driven by a deep-seated vendetta and an insatiable desire for conquest. With a shocking arsenal at his disposal, including a terrifying method of attack that threatens to decimate the entire settlement, Rogers uses cunning and strategy to create a deadly game of cat and mouse, pulling Verbeeck into a desperate battle to save everything he holds dear.

Secrets and betrayals unfold with every perilous turn as the line between savior and victim blurs. Will Verbeeck be able to outwit the mad pirate, or will the Cape of Good Hope fall victim to a ruthless plan that will change everything? Prepare for a thrilling high-stakes adventure filled with suspense, action, and impossible choices. The survival of a settlement, and the fate of its most beloved citizens, hangs precariously in the balance.

EXTRACT

At the exact moment that Simon had worked out with the greatest accuracy, he gave the order to his helmsman. The pirate was so close that they could almost see the colour of the eyes of the men on deck.

The helmsman swung the wheel, and the Red Ruby swerved in its course to the right. Joy surged into Simon's heart. They had done it so unexpectedly that the pirates apparently had not anticipated it. They were apparently getting ready to fire, not to manoeuvre. But that was precisely where Simon had miscalculated. Seconds after the Red Ruby had swerved to the right, the pirate also swerved, and so quickly and carelessly that it almost looked as though the vessel was going to capsize. It made a sharp, daring turn.

A few sails were quickly adjusted. The pirate's speed increased rapidly. "Fire!" yelled Simon as the pirate turned sideways.

Wilhelm Rieckert and the gunners did not keep them waiting, and even before the pirate knew what was happening, a full broadside smashed into his port side. You just saw fire and smoke and pieces of splintering wood.

"Fire!" yelled Simon again, and when he gave the second order to fire, then he saw what they had now gotten themselves into.

For any maneuver at sea, there are always the incalculable elements. You can work something out as accurately as you please, but at the last moment, something happens that you hadn't taken into account, and that you couldn't have taken into account. Such a factor had now crept into this drama. When the pirate turned and the wind caught its sails, it shot forward rapidly.

7. CURSE OF THE MAD PIRATE

Chapter 1

When the secretary of the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope entered, the man was distraught and pale.

“Your Excellency,” he said, breathlessly, “there is a matter of urgent importance. There is one Jansen van Vuuren, a citizen of the settlement, who urgently wishes to speak with you.”

“Jansen van Vuuren?” asked the Governor. “Who and what is he?”

“He is a citizen, Your Excellency. Actually, a hunter, I believe. He supposedly observed something in Hout Bay that he wishes to convey to you.”

“What is it that the man wishes to convey?” asked the Governor, somewhat irritably.

“I regret, Your Excellency,” answered the secretary nervously, “but he will not tell me. He says it is something very dangerous, but he wishes to convey it to you personally.”

“Let him come in,” commanded the Governor.

A moment later, a smallish man stood before the Governor. He nervously held his tricorn hat in his hands. The man was clearly exhausted to the point of death and utterly terrified. His small eyes darted back and forth, and he bowed low when he appeared before the Governor.

“Are you Jansen van Vuuren?”

“It is I, Your Excellency. Gerbrandt Jansen van Vuuren.”

“What is it that you wish to convey to me, Van Vuuren? Why can you not tell it to the secretary?”

Jansen van Vuuren, in his worn clothes, took a step closer. “Your Excellency,” he said, “I have come to speak with you myself because I saw something that should not be.”

“What is it, man?” asked the Governor, out of sorts. “Do not beat around the bush. Tell me what you wish to say.”

“A pirate ship, Your Excellency.”

“What?”

“A pirate ship, Your Excellency. I saw it myself in Hout Bay. It lies there at anchor.”

The Governor leaned back in his magnificent chair and laughed lightly. "My dear Van Vuuren," he said, "you are surely touched in the head."

"Your Excellency, I swear. I swear it is a pirate ship. I went hunting in Hout Bay and saw it. The pirate flag flutters on its mast. A warship, Your Excellency. I saw its cannon ports with my own eyes."

The Governor stopped laughing. His eyes were now serious, and he looked attentively at the weathered man before him.

"Van Vuuren," he said, "do you wish to tell me that a pirate dared to anchor in Hout Bay? A pirate here at the Cape of Storms? Here, close to the fire mouths of our castle? No, man, no, I do not believe it."

Van Vuuren fell to his knees and frantically pressed his hat between his fists. "I beg you, Your Excellency. You must believe me. It is a pirate ship. If you do not wish to believe me, send someone to go and look. I am your servant, I am your subject. Why would I deceive you? I beg you, in the name of heaven, believe me, Your Excellency."

The Governor leaned forward on his large writing desk. Was this man possessed, or was he merely a nuisance? Or could it be that he was speaking the truth? But a pirate ship here at the Cape of Good Hope? It sounded so impossible. What would its intention be?

"Very well, Van Vuuren," said the Governor, "I thank you for your information. I will find out what is going on here."

"Thank you, Your Excellency," said Van Vuuren, rising and bowing submissively again. "I beg you, you must investigate yourself if you do not believe me. I ran from Hout Bay all the way here. Over the mountain."

In the small eyes of the citizen, the Governor saw sincerity and earnestness. Therefore, he summoned his secretary immediately after Van Vuuren had left.

"Send for the commandant of the fort," commanded the Governor. After a quarter of an hour, the commandant stood before his desk.

"I have received a peculiar report," said the Governor. "A man was here who says that there is a pirate ship at anchor in Hout Bay. I can hardly believe it. What do you think of it?"

The commandant stood stiffly at attention, but he allowed himself a smile. "A pirate ship, Your Excellency? Here at the Peninsula in Hout Bay? Forgive me, Your Excellency, but I do not believe it. No pirate

would dare to come here. They have never dared to do so. They are well aware of the fort of the Castle.”

“Be that as it may, I want to know if it is the truth,” said the Governor. “And because you do not believe it, I am now sending you on horseback to go and find out. If what the man Jansen van Vuuren said is true, then give him a reward. If it is untrue, give him thirty-nine lashes.”

“As you command, Your Excellency.” The commandant bowed charmingly, turned, and walked out.

The Governor of the settlement of the Cape of Good Hope rose and went to stand before the window. He looked out over the harbor, which was empty and still. He looked away towards the black smudge of Robben Island, and he wondered what was behind Van Vuuren’s story. He could hardly believe that a man would come and mislead him so openly. Few people would dare to do so. He tugged at his moustache and then stroked his fine hand over his chin beard.

Could it be that there was a pirate who was bold enough to defy the military might of this settlement? Was there perhaps a mad adventurer who wished to attack the settlement of the Cape of Good Hope?

He sat down again in his chair, and he was full of apprehension.

It was scarcely two hours later when the Governor heard a clatter and quick footsteps outside his door. There was a loud knock, and almost immediately afterwards, the door swung open. The commandant of the Castle burst in. He behaved somewhat unorthodoxically, for the Governor had not even ordered him to enter.

The man trotted up to the Governor. “Your Excellency,” he said, “it is true. What the man Van Vuuren said is true. There is a pirate ship in the vicinity.”

“Do you wish to tell me that you have already been to Hout Bay and back? That is a bunch of nonsense, man. You have been gone barely two hours.”

“Your Excellency,” said the commandant, “I rode past the Twelve Apostles. Then I saw the vessel approaching. It is no longer in Hout Bay. It is on its way to Table Bay.”

“What?” screamed the Governor, jumping up. “Do you wish to tell me that a pirate is on his way to Table Bay?”

“As surely as I live, Your Excellency. I hid myself there and looked

through the telescope. It is a pirate, short and simple. Its flag is clearly there for all to see.”

The Governor slammed his fist on his writing desk. “Get everything ready,” he commanded, “set up your cannons and warn the garrison to be ready. I will come immediately to take command myself. I do not want to see anything amiss when I arrive. Is the pirate under full sail?”
“Under full sail, Your Excellency.”

The commandant turned to go and carry out his orders, but before he reached the door, the Governor called him back. “Commandant,” he said. “Are there any ships in Table Bay?”

“Only one, Your Excellency.”

“Ah, of course,” said the Governor. “The Red Ruby, is it not?”

“That is correct, Your Excellency. The Red Ruby. The vessel of skipper Simon Verbeeck. They are busy cleaning and preparing it.”

“Excellent,” said the Governor. “Go and summon Verbeeck immediately.”

The Governor was utterly on edge. What a few hours ago had still sounded like a fantastic fairy tale had now so suddenly become reality. He knew these pirates. There were some of them who were completely reckless and totally fearless. There were some of them who were capable of coming to attack the settlement. This place was a desirable prize for them. Here was food, here was fresh water. Here were fruits and vegetables, and this settlement was so conveniently located along the shipping route to the East. It was indeed the halfway station. It was convenient not only for legitimate shipping, but also for the pirates.

The Governor was completely excited when they brought in the tall, powerful dark man with his bright eyes and his luxuriant beard.

“Ah, Verbeeck,” said the Governor, “I am glad you have come.”
Seafarer Simon Verbeeck bowed low. “Your Excellency,” he said, “is there anything I can do for you?”

“Verbeeck,” said the Governor, “have you heard of the pirates?”

“I have heard something of the sort, Your Excellency.”

“What do you think of it?”

“I do not know whether I should believe it, Your Excellency.”

“But, my dear man,” the Governor burst out, “what must we do to convince you? The commandant of the fort himself saw the pirate

opposite the Twelve Apostles. It is on its way to Table Bay. And you still do not believe it.”

Verbeeck’s dark eyes changed. The smile disappeared from them, and his whole face became tense. “I did not know that, Your Excellency.”

“What could the intention of this pirate be, Verbeeck? Do you think he will dare to attack the settlement? Surely all pirates are aware of our castle, our fire mouths.”

“There are some of them who are possessed, Your Excellency. Who knows, perhaps they are desperate. Perhaps a shortage of water and food.”

“In what condition is your vessel, Verbeeck?”

“We are almost finished with the renovations, Your Excellency. The new sails have already been hung.”

“Verbeeck,” said the Governor, “then I wish to entrust a task to you. You must engage this pirate in battle before he reaches the harbor. Shoot him out of the water, man. You enjoy hunting pirates, do you not, Verbeeck? And can you imagine what will become of your ship if the pirate enters the harbor?”

“I realize it all too well, Your Excellency. Will you excuse me?”

“You are excused, Verbeeck. All success.”

Simon Verbeeck had surely never run so hard in his life as that morning when he stormed towards the harbor to get everything ready before the pirate made his appearance.

And there in the Castle, all hell broke loose. The garrison ran like ants to bring everything to readiness. Cannonballs were carried to the ramparts. Gunpowder was brought in. Cannoneers toiled and labored to get everything in order, and all the while they peered through to the point of Signal Hill to see if they could see the invader coming yet.

Simon Verbeeck had barely reached the harbor when the fire mouths on the ramparts were ready. The cannoneers stood in their places with the torches in their hands.

The news about the pirate had spread like wildfire through the settlement, and everything was in an uproar. In the Heerengracht, groups of people stood excitedly chatting. Others had run to Signal Hill to see if they could see the pirate coming.

Simon Verbeeck was still climbing up the rope ladder to the deck of the

Red Ruby when he was already shouting out orders. When he landed on the deck, his friend and right-hand man, Wilhelm Rieckert, was there.

“Men,” shouted Simon, “a pirate is on his way to the harbor. Drop everything and get ready so that we can sail out.”

He did not have to repeat his order. The men virtually tumbled down from the masts where they had been working. Others who had been busy applying pitch alongside the ship clambered aboard. It became a hustle and bustle from another world. And Simon Verbeeck and Wilhelm Rieckert continuously gave orders to control the activities of the men and to ensure that everything that was done, was done correctly.

A small detachment was sent to bring extra gunpowder and cannonballs on board. Another detachment was busy getting the cannons in order. Still others were busy setting the last sails.

It was shortly after noon when the Red Ruby sailed away from its anchorage. It was a clear day, and a brisk southeasterly wind was blowing. The large sails immediately filled, and a cheer went up on land when the beautiful vessel, so tall and proud in the water, swung away towards the open sea. Hats were thrown in the air, arms were raised aloft. And everyone just shouted the name of Simon Verbeeck. He was a hero among them, for they knew what he had accomplished against pirates. Now he was more than a hero to them. He was their savior.

Simon had ordered full sail because he wanted to get out of the harbor as quickly as possible. He did not want to be trapped here. The Red Ruby groaned as the wind drove her on. Her bowsprit stood tall and proud in the breakers. Simon steered his vessel straight in the direction of Robben Island. Only then did he swing, for when he swung, he saw the pirate coming up fully under the wind in the direction of the harbor. Simon Verbeeck stood on his foredeck when he saw the pirate for the first time. Wilhelm Rieckert was here beside him. “What a ship!” said Simon with reverence. The pirate looked like a colossus in the water. He was coming under full sail, and he was plowing a white path through the blue sea. He was already close by.

Simon Verbeeck brought the telescope to his eyes and looked at his opponent. It was a beautiful ship, heavily armed. Proud. Fearless.