

RED RUBY SERIES

8. Pirates Execute the Verdict



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PIRATES EXECUTE THE VERDICT

by

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SUMMARY

A ship of death adrift off the coast of Africa... That's how Captain Simon Verbeeck, the scourge of pirates, first encounters the Sea Serpent, a slave ship ravaged by a brutal mutiny. Corpses litter the deck, and a chilling silence hangs in the air, broken only by the eerie meow of a lone cat. What began as a simple resupply stop becomes a terrifying plunge into chaos when Verbeeck's own ship, the Red Ruby, is seized by the mutineers. They are a band of freed slaves led by the enigmatic and ruthless Joost van der Leeuwen.

Left stranded and outmaneuvered, Verbeeck is plunged into a desperate struggle for survival. Stripped of his ship, his weapons, and most of his crew, he's forced to navigate treacherous landscapes and navigate dangerous allegiances. He discovers that Van der Leeuwen isn't just another pirate as his twisted ideals and thirst for power set him apart.

Haunted by betrayal and fueled by a burning desire to reclaim what's his, Verbeeck embarks on a relentless pursuit across the perilous seas, forging uneasy alliances with unlikely allies. The stakes rise as he's thrust into a desperate fight against not only Van der Leeuwen and his men, but the very brutal nature of man and thus fighting against forces far more dangerous than the pirates themselves. A thrilling voyage of vengeance and survival ensues, where honor and justice clash with desperation and greed, all while a shocking truth simmers beneath the surface. Can he win back his ship or will his own ruthless nature ultimately cost him everything? Prepare for a tale where the line between hero and villain is as tempestuous as the ocean itself.

EXTRACT

Simon Verbeeck went back to the deck thoughtfully. One of the men hurried excitedly towards him. "Captain," said the fellow. "We can't find any weapons here on deck. Whoever wiped out the crew took all the weapons."

Simon pretended to be very surprised and shocked, but this was one of the very first things he had noticed. And it was one of the phenomena that disturbed him the most. A bunch of sabers in the hands of a bunch of enraged Negroes could not bode well. He knew that all too well.

Verbeeck looked again in the direction of the beach, but it was still motionless and quiet. There was also no sign of the boats of the Sea Serpent.

There was still one task. It was a gruesome task, but Simon knew that it had to be done. He ordered his men to throw the corpses overboard. It took quite a while before they were finished, and when it was done, Simon and his men immediately left the Sea Serpent. They rowed back to the Red Ruby.

There, he told Wilhelm Rieckert what they had seen, and Rieckert's immediate explanation was also that it must have been a mutiny by the slaves.

"What are we going to do with the ship, captain?" Wilhelm wanted to know. "We can't just leave it here."

8. PIRATES EXECUTE THE VERDICT

Chapter 1 SHIP OF DEATH

As the sailing ship, the Red Ruby, gracefully arced around the headland, approaching the small harbor on the west coast of Africa, the man in the crow's nest shouted.

"Ship in the harbor!" he bellowed down, leaning over the railing of the crow's nest for a better view.

The message became a refrain on the busy deck of the Red Ruby, where nearly the entire crew had gathered, expectant and excited. It wasn't every day that the Red Ruby could take on fresh water, fresh meat, and possibly some green woodland produce, so there would be something different to eat again. Or maybe even a few pieces of game.

For the crew of the Red Ruby, fresh supplies were now desperately needed, as it had been several weeks since this elegant ship had been wandering the oceans in search of pirates. The men were also familiar with this small harbor on the coast, which would later become known as the Gold Coast of Africa. Here, they could always rest and relax.

However, none of the men had expected to find another ship here, least of all the commander, Captain Simon Verbeeck, the scourge of all pirates. When Verbeeck heard the announcement from the man in the crow's nest, he hurried to the forecastle and looked out over the sea. Even as he ran, he shouted an order for the cannons of the Red Ruby to be made ready. He did not want to be ambushed here by an unknown pirate or a slave ship.

When Verbeeck reached the forecastle, the strange vessel lay open and exposed before him, directly opposite the coast of the small harbor. It lay listing, looking like a duck that had been caught in a storm. From this distance, it looked rather cumbersome. It also lay quite a distance from the beach.

At first glance, Simon Verbeeck saw that the ship had run aground, and it immediately made a peculiar impression on him. It must be an inept crew to run a sailing ship aground here. What made this small harbor so popular with almost all seafarers was the fact that it was so sheltered that it was safe even when the sea was very rough. Simon himself had

sailed in here with the greatest ease during stormy weather. The cabin boy came running with the commander's telescope, and Simon immediately put it to his eye.

Through the telescope, the experienced seafarer saw a sight that did not please him at all. It was now quite clear that the ship had run aground. It lay sharply listing, and it lay much further from the beach than Verbeeck had initially realized. Some of the sails were in shreds.

But what struck Simon the most was that there was no life on the still deck. And did it not seem to him that he saw something hanging in the rigging and over the crossbeams? Could they be corpses? When Verbeeck finally turned away, he knew there was something amiss with this stranded vessel. A peculiar feeling came over him as he walked back and ordered his helmsman to sail towards the strange vessel. However, he again ordered his men to prepare the cannons and ordered a number of others to arm themselves and be ready to board.

The tall, dark man with his jet-black beard, who had declared relentless war on all pirates and brigands of the sea, knew well enough how quickly and unexpectedly the sea could deliver a surprise. He was not about to be caught off guard. He was always alert and careful, because he knew how many men of the sea were on his trail because he was so merciless towards all criminals on the ocean.

Simon Verbeeck himself stood by the helmsman, indicating to him exactly how to steer. In a flash, everything on deck was ready. The cannons were loaded, and the gunners stood ready with their torches to fire if necessary. The rest of the crew had armed themselves, and they stood poised with sabers and pistols.

Near the strange vessel, the Red Ruby swung gracefully broadside. Little sail was now set, and the vessel moved like a swan about to come to rest.

Verbeeck carefully observed the listing deck of the stranded vessel through the telescope, and when he was convinced that there was no life, he ordered that the boats be lowered.

"What's going on here, Simon?" It was Verbeeck's good friend and right-hand man, Wilhelm Rieckert, who had come running.

"I wish I knew," Verbeeck answered. "There's something very peculiar going on here. This ship has clearly run aground, and it seems to me

there are corpses.”

“But who could be so clumsy or ignorant as to run a ship aground here?” Rieckert asked, and it did not surprise Verbeeck that Rieckert had the same impression as he.

“I’m going to take a look, Wilhelm,” Verbeeck said. “I want you to stay on board in case there is trouble. This could also be a trap. I’m going to board with a whole bunch of men to investigate. Keep the Maid’s cannons trained on that ship and fire if it’s at all necessary.”

Wilhelm Rieckert felt disappointed that he could not go too, but he realized that someone had to stay on board the Red Ruby to fire if there was trouble.

“Be careful now,” he warned his commander as Simon stepped toward the ship’s rail.

“I’m always careful,” Simon said, laughing, and shouted an order for the armed men to get into the boats. They swarmed over the side, and in a flash, the few boats were full. Simon himself climbed over the side, and they rowed towards the deserted ship, which lay like a crippled bird in the water.

Simon Verbeeck stood upright in the bow of the leading boat, and all that was a man kept their eyes open. Everyone feared treachery, as they had experienced so many times that a ship that appeared completely harmless could, at a given moment, spit fire.

But they got there, and they saw that the gun ports remained closed, that nothing stirred on deck, and that there were corpses in the rigging and on the crossbeams. It was now completely clear in any case. There were more and more signs that this ship was a ship of death.

What surprised Simon was that rope ladders hung over the side of the ship, as if people had climbed up and down with them.

“Is anyone here?” Simon called as they reached the vessel. “What is going on here? Is there anyone who can hear me?”

There was no answer. The only sound was the light lapping of water against the bow of the vessel.

And the meowing of a cat somewhere. The sound of the cat sounded strange and conspicuous through the silence. And it filled the sailors with a dark foreboding. Men who abandon their ship do not easily leave the ship’s cat behind.

At the bow, Simon had seen the name of the vessel. Sea Serpent, Amsterdam.

Simon Verbeeck frowned. He had never encountered this vessel on his wanderings. Never even heard of it. He had already looked at the mast, but he had not seen a flag there. This did not seem to be a pirate vessel. "Follow me!" Simon ordered, and he immediately began to climb the nearest rope ladder. The men did not need to be asked twice. Like rats, they clambered up the rope ladders, almost trampling each other in their zeal to be first up.

With his broad saber clenched between his teeth, Simon was first over the side of the ship.

And when he jumped onto the deck, he stopped in astonishment and disgust. The stench of death hit him in the face. The mottled ship's cat immediately approached and rubbed against Simon's leg.

Some of the men gave cries of revulsion. There were others who turned their faces away from the scene on deck. Some tore off their colored headscarves and tied them around their faces.

The scene on deck was in stark contrast to the beautiful name of this strange ship. It was a chaos of blood and corpses. Of broken sabers and splintered wood. A furious battle must have taken place here. Some of the corpses were caught in the rigging, and others had somehow ended up on the crossbeams.

What surprised Simon Verbeeck even more than the large number of corpses was the many black corpses lying there. A large number of Negroes lay dead on deck. The first thought that came to him was that there must have been a mutiny. But then where did all the black men who had died here come from? Black crew members who had risen up against the whites? No, that could not be, because the black corpses were far outnumbered, and black crew members were rare on any ship. Perhaps a slave ship? After all, these were the coasts where Negro slaves were captured to be taken to the American plantations. But how could that be? If they were slaves who had died here, how had they gotten here? Slaves were chained up in the hold of a slave ship and did not come loose until they were unloaded.

Simon Verbeeck was completely taken aback when he stepped over the pools of blood and walked to the door of the ship's cabin. He had the

impression that virtually the entire crew of the Sea Serpent must have died here. And those who had died had died horribly and bloodily. It must have been a fierce struggle.

Before he reached the cabins, something else caught his attention. The lid of the rear hold was open. The large lid lay on the deck. Simon looked down into the dark hold, but he saw no life or movement. All that struck him was the characteristic stench of these slave holds.

He called one of his men over and ordered him to go and find a torch. When the man appeared shortly afterwards, Simon ordered a few men to follow him into the hold. He ordered the others to search the rest of the ship and see if they could find anyone alive. If he could find just one who would be able to tell the story, he would be grateful.

The man with the torch climbed down into the hold ahead of Simon, and the few others followed him.

Halfway down the ladder, Simon and his men stopped, and in the light of the torch, they looked down below. They looked carefully, because they were not keen to be ambushed here like the crew of the Sea Serpent. A whole horde could be hiding here in the stinking hold, and the moment you got down, they could pounce on you.

But the hold was empty. It was empty to the farthest corners. All that was visible was the weathered straw and the wooden food bowls that lay scattered everywhere. And the chains.

Simon and his few men went further down into the hold and began to investigate. In a few of the food bowls, they still found food. Two jugs were still almost full of water.

However, it was the chains that piqued Simon Verbeeck's interest. These slave chains were heavy and strong. They ran along the sides of the slave hold, and they were firmly bolted into the thick ship's timber. Every few steps, there was a thinner chain attached to the beams. At the end of the thinner chain was a sturdy iron shackle with which the ankles of the slaves were shackled.

All these shackles were unlocked. They were not broken. They were definitely unlocked.

Simon Verbeeck could not believe it, and yet it was so. He took the trouble to examine each of the shackles separately. It was exactly the same with all of them. Human hands must have unlocked them.

When Simon Verbeeck finally stood on the old straw in the middle of the hold floor, he felt a sense of betrayal. Something big must have gone wrong here. The slaves in the hold had been released by someone, they had been taken to the deck by someone, and there the bloodbath had taken place. It was clear to him that the crew of the Sea Serpent must have been overwhelmed in some way. Possibly in their sleep. He had seen enough to know that it must be so. He had seen the helmsman lying dead next to the helm, with his skull caved in. The other men on deck were almost all naked. When the alarm was raised, they had of course just jumped out of their sleeping quarters and run up to the deck.

From the hold, Simon first went to the sleeping quarters of the crew. It was just as he had expected. It was a gruesome sight. Many crew members had died in their hammocks, others on the stairs leading to the sleeping quarters. Some of them had apparently not even woken up.

Suddenly, he had a need for fresh air. The stench and the stuffiness became too much for him. He was a hardened seaman, and he had already witnessed many bloody tragedies. But he had never seen a sight like this.

When he came out onto the deck, Simon knew beyond all doubt that he had stumbled into the aftermath of a mutiny. He looked away towards the beach, but everything there was quiet and peaceful. No one was moving there. The palms stood still in their own shadows, and the white foam of the sea was a beautiful string over the smooth beach where he and his men had left so many footprints in the past.

Although it was calm, it was as if something dark and menacing lurked in the shadows, in the stillness of the landscape, something that threatened to overwhelm him and his men.

As he had expected, there was no sign of any lifeboats. They had all been removed. It surprised him that he did not see them somewhere on the beach. But this was a day of surprises. Perhaps he would encounter even more surprises.

Simon Verbeeck went to the captain's cabin. There, it was the same story of blood and devastation. In the main cabin, three naked men lay dead. Apparently, they had come here to try and protect their captain. And in the smaller sleeping cabin, Simon found the captain of the Sea Serpent dead. He too had not been able to leave his bed. He had slid