

# **OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES**

## **1. Master of the Sword**



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# MASTER OF THE SWORD

*by*

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## **MASTER OF THE SWORD**

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## SUMMARY

In the heart of the Dutch Cape Colony, a young man named Oloff van Wagenaar is about to discover the devastating truth of his past and the dangerous path his future holds. Fifteen years after his father, Johan, a wealthy wine farmer, abandoned his family in Holland, Oloff sets sail to reunite with him, seeking a connection long denied. But fate has a cruel twist in store, as Oloff arrives to find his father murdered, his farm razed, and himself accused of the heinous crime.

A desperate quest to prove his innocence thrusts Oloff into a shadowy world of pirates, deceit, and deadly swordplay. A loyal slave's testimony points the finger at him, fueled by a vengeful mother's hatred, Oloff must navigate a treacherous web of accusations, with a cunning fiscal determined to see him hang. But Oloff's life takes an unexpected turn when he crosses paths with the captivating Anna te Hoogen, the governor's niece. Drawn to his refined spirit and desperate to see justice prevail, Anna risks everything to help him escape, setting in motion a thrilling adventure on the high seas. Mistaken for a ruthless pirate captain of Madagascar, Oloff finds himself caught in a deadly game of identity.

Joined by a band of former slaves eager for freedom, Oloff seizes a pirate ship and sets a course for the pirate haven of Madagascar, where he hopes to capture the real killer and restore his name. But as he closes in on his quarry, Oloff confronts not only his father's murderer but also a haunting truth about himself. As the sea becomes his battleground and revenge his driving force, will Oloff ever be able to come back to civilization, or is he doomed to a life among pirates? Only the open ocean holds the answer, and the price of freedom may be higher than he ever imagined.

## EXTRACT

He looked at the approaching ships. They were pirates who had raided False Bay, murdered his father, and destroyed Sandryk. According to the information he could obtain, there were supposedly two ships. A sudden tingling went through his body. It felt as if the blood was flowing faster through his veins. He suddenly felt like fighting. He felt like clenching his fists and shaking them in the air. He felt like roaring a war cry and challenging the pirates to attack.

“If they are both pirates, things will be tough,” Niels Heyns repeated for the umpteenth time. “Change course!” he bellowed. “Sail southwest!”

Still, the other ships approached. It became clear to Oloff that they were indeed being pursued.

“And they will catch up with us,” Heyns added as if he was aware of Oloff’s thoughts. “You surely know that there is no mercy with them. We will have to fight to the death, or else we will simply be killed in some amusing way.”

A shot rang out over the water. A cannonball splashed obliquely in front of them.

“Turn around, helmsman. Sail east, right between them!” bellowed Niels Heyns.

Oloff looked at the captain. It sounded to him as if the man had now become reckless because he had come to the conclusion that they would not be able to escape in any case.

# 1. THE SWORDSMAN

## Chapter 1

“The dogs are barking, Baas Johan!”

Johan van Wagenaar closed the book on his lap. His eyes then drifted over the cosy fire in the hearth before him. They then rested thoughtfully on the massive stone pillars of the chimney above, while he tilted his head in a listening posture.

The grey on his temples was already spreading over his unkempt head. His quiff, however, was still flaming red and, contrary to fashion, cut short. Hundreds of fine wrinkles ran across his cheeks on either side of his blue eyes. His nose was straight and slightly pointed. The chin was strong, but the corners of his lips were slightly downturned as if it were a trace left by a surge of bitterness that had passed over his features. The tranquility and resignation discernible in his expression, however, belied all thoughts of discontent and sorrow.

Johan van Wagenaar was one of the senior merchants at the Cape. He was also one of the wealthiest wine farmers. His farm was situated on the south side of the Wynberg. Of the officials' farms, it was the furthest from the Cape. Outside, he could hear the sighing of the wind through the young oak trees, and further away, the rumbling of the sea.

He looked around at the sturdily built Malay who had come from the kitchen, and who was now hesitating on the threshold of the living room. Johan's mouth softened into a smile as he looked at the faithful slave. Mamoed was better than any watchdog he could have had.

“I hear, Mamoed,” said the owner of Sandryk slowly. “Perhaps they are only barking at wild animals. We also live so alone here in the wilderness that our imagination runs wild with the slightest sound.”

“It is late, Baas Johan,” Mamoed replied. “If it were jackals or other animals, the dogs would have chased after them. However, they are barking in the yard and are not going any further. Nor will it be visitors. It is too late and...”

Johan van Wagenaar laughed softly.

“Don't look so worried, Mamoed!” he called to the faithful Malay slave.

“It seems as if you are deliberately standing there and predicting that there will be trouble.”

“I can feel it, Baas Johan,” the Malay countered earnestly. “I see in the night and I know.”

Johan van Wagenaar picked the book off his lap and placed it on the table beside him. He laughed loudly as he stood up.

“You Malays all think that you can fathom the unknown!” he exclaimed cheerfully. “Come, Mamoed, come along.” He stopped talking when he saw the slave’s eyes dart quickly towards the large, heavy front door. The door was not yet bolted, as this was only done when Johan went to bed.

Clearly, he saw the heavy brass knob turning as if someone outside were carefully testing it. Mamoed hastily moved across the floor without further ado, not towards the door, but to the rack beside the hearth on which the guns stood. He was only halfway through the room when the front door burst open and a pistol shot echoed loudly against the walls almost simultaneously.

Johan van Wagenaar swung around in fright. Confused, he stared at the figure of his faithful slave. Mamoed’s body jerked, and like a stone, he fell to the floor, where he lay motionless. Under his right shoulder, a red pool of blood formed.

Van Wagenaar stepped closer, but then he stopped and looked back at the front door. Inside the threshold stood a couple of men. In front was a fellow of at least 2.2 meters. His jet-black hair hung in glistening locks on his shoulders. It looked dirty and unkempt, although it was soaked with oil. His beard was equally long, but so matted with oil that it hung in thick ropes on his chest.

The stranger’s dark eyes laughed at the merchant, but a cold shiver ran through Johan van Wagenaar as he saw the merciless expression in the flat face of the man before him.

Then he noticed the broad sabre in the man’s right hand. He now also saw that the others were all armed in the same way, all except for the man who was leaning casually against the wall just to the right of the door jamb. In his hand, which hung loosely by his side, was the smoking pistol. It was he who had shot Mamoed.

But Johan was scarcely aware of this fact. He stared intently at the face of the young man. His gaze was intense, and yet there was something of fear to be discerned. He saw the flaming red hair and the blue eyes.

A straight, pointed nose rested above full lips.

“Oloff!” Johan van Wagenaar’s lips formed the word, and his breath blew it out loudly enough for everyone in the room to hear.

The man with the pistol raised his eyebrows. Beside him, the one with the black beard looked to his side and then again forward at the merchant as if he could not quite understand what was going on.

“It seems to me that he sees a ghost, Van Osse!” exclaimed the fellow with the black beard.

“If you mean by that that he is staring death in the face, you are right, Slinkshart,” Van Osse retorted. “I think...”

“Listen, Ben!” Borghort exclaimed angrily. “I don’t like you calling me Slinkshart.”

“Borghort! Slinkshart! What does it matter? I, in turn, don’t like you comparing me to a ghost.”

Borghort looked at the fellow askance for a moment. Then he laughed. “One of these days, the two of us will be at each other.” But he said it in such a way as if he wanted to indicate that the two of them were such great friends that there could never be any question of discord between them. This was just a game.

Johan van Wagenaar shuddered. Friendship between thieves, trust between murderers! By this time, he had already established that he was dealing with pirates. What they were looking for here at Sandryk, he did not know. It was rare for them to stray so far from their lairs. He knew that the route to the East was threatened by pirates, but that was beyond Madagascar, far from the Cape of Good Hope.

Ben van Osse did not bother himself further with Borghort. Apparently, they were on an equal footing. Most likely, there were two ships in the bay, or else Van Osse had hired Borghort to bring him here.

Van Osse? Oloff! The terrible truth of what he was seeing refused to settle clearly in his mind. He had always thought that his son might hate him for abandoning him and his mother, but the last letters he had received, the rapprochement that he had found in them and welcomed. Apparently, it was all a smokescreen, all merely preparation for the revenge that was being taken here tonight.

As quickly as the thoughts settled in his mind, he rejected them. He found it simply impossible to believe that his own son would use these



methods to break him. Half-dizzy with shock, the merchant stood back. Ten, twelve of the ruffians who had stood behind their leaders now stormed forward. The room swarmed with strangers. Borghort had swung his arm. Apparently, that was the sign that they should search the house.

“We’ve come to look for some vegetables and water!” Borghort exclaimed. “And here we stumble upon a treasure chamber!”

His eyes wandered greedily over the silver candelabra hanging from the thick ceiling beams. On the table on the other side of the hearth stood a silver vase, and a golden figurine gleamed in the firelight. The wine decanter and the glasses on the large tray were of the finest design. Borghort aimed for it and poured from the red wine so that the goblet overflowed. “Come, Ben,” he called out as he filled the second glass, “let us drink of the Cape wine!”

Outside in the yard, a few shots rang out. There was the high-pitched screaming of women and children. Then followed the cruel laughter of the pirate vandals. Johan van Wagenaar realized all too well that not a single one of his slaves and their families would escape.

A man stormed in through the front door. He looked around the room and then came to a stop before Borghort and Van Osse.

“A few of the fellows are driving the herd of cattle and the small livestock towards the beach,” he informed them. “There is enough grain for both ships.”

“And wine?” Borghort inquired.

“Too much,” the man replied. “The fellows realize that. They have already smashed a few barrels, and if we don’t hurry, we won’t easily get them back on the ships.”

“The stupid fools!” Borghort bellowed. “Can’t they wait until we’re off the land before they start swilling?”

“And what example are we setting for them, Slinkshart?” said Ben van Osse casually.

Borghort laughed.

“You’re always making jokes, Ben,” he said with a grin. He did not always like the calm way in which Van Osse spoke. It seemed as if the fellow never lost his composure. “Tell Cuyler,” he called to the fellow in front of him, “that they must take all the barrels of wine to the beach.

What we can't load, we will destroy there. Hurry up! Tell them. Hey!" he bellowed as he grabbed his sabre off the table and dashed across the room towards one of the pirates. "Where are you going with that load of goods? You know that all the loot must be thrown on the pile in the corner. We'll divide it later. You know we don't tolerate thieves in our ranks!" The sabre was raised. The pirate recoiled in fright. He knew how mercilessly and quickly punishment was meted out.

"Slinkshart," Van Osse's voice came calmly from behind, but cuttingly enough to stop Borghort. "That is one of my men. If he is to be killed, I will do it myself. Throw the goods on the pile there, you rascal," he commanded the seaman. The fellow obeyed, and Borghort slowly returned to the table.

"One day you will go too far, Ben," he said softly.

"What right do you have to start rummaging among my men?" Van Osse retorted nonchalantly. His eyes rested on those of Borghort, who was glaring at him furiously. "Let them stuff the loot into the sacks and take it away. Here," he yelled at a couple of others, "break the tables and chairs to pieces and pack them in the corners of the room. Take burning embers from the hearth and set the place on fire. Hurry up!"

Borghort turned away. Van Osse followed him to the door. There they looked back to see if their orders were being carried out correctly. Van Osse's eyes rested on the figure of the merchant who had thus far stood motionless in front of the hearth. There was something in the man's posture that bothered him. Van Wagenaar was still staring at him intently. Van Osse had been aware of that gaze for a long time. Now he was annoyed. With a quick movement, he pulled a pistol from his belt. He took aim and pulled the trigger.

Johan van Wagenaar keeled over without a sound. When his body slumped fully onto the floor, his eyes were already glazed over. In the corners of the room, flames leapt up against the walls. Across Sandryk's neat yard, the pirates walked back in the direction of the beach. From the sheds and warehouses, red flames shot greedily into the sky.

On the floor of the living room, Mamoed stirred. He lifted his head quickly, because since he had been hit, he had not been unconscious. However, no movement and no sound had escaped him since the pirates had burst in here. Unfortunately, he could not see the door, and the last

pistol shot he had heard was therefore a mystery to him until he now saw his beloved master lying stretched out before the hearth.

Carefully, he tried to lift his torso off the floor with his left arm. Slowly, he pulled his legs under him, and while his right arm dragged on the floor, he crawled to Johan van Wagenaar.

Within a few moments, the Malay had established that his master was deceased. He looked in the direction of the door, but the flames were already devouring the walls around him, and he could see nothing outside in the darkness. He crawled hastily through so that he could get away from here before it was too late.

The reception hall of the Castle at the Cape was brightly lit. Everywhere there were dancing couples, while others stood in groups and chatted, or sat along the walls and rested. The Cape did not offer much entertainment, and thus a ball in the Castle was an opportunity for everyone to come together to hear the latest news and gossip, as well as to relax and be merry together.

In an adjacent room, there were several tables at which cards were being played. At one of them, the governor, the independent fiscal, and two members of the Political Council were busy with a game of bridge. His Excellency placed a card down and looked at his partner.

"This time, I caught them nicely," he said cheerfully and turned to the fiscal. "Isn't that so, De Nuys?"

The fiscal looked at his cards. There was a blush on his face as if he were annoyed. He was still young, but he had an unrivalled position of power at the Cape. He was directly accountable to the Lords Seventeen, and even the governor had to be careful how he acted before the fiscal. A soft exclamation from the door side made them all look up. Frederick de Nuys stood up from his chair. His elongated eyes narrowed, and his high cheekbones were accentuated by the smile that spread across his features.

Just inside the door of the room stood Anna te Hoogen, the governor's niece. She was an orphan who had been adopted and raised by the governor and had lived in the Castle for several years. Many of the high-ranking officials had come to the conclusion that she had almost as much influence on the affairs of the young Colony as the entire Political Council as well as His Excellency himself. She was intelligent and had

received the best education that the Colony could give her. Perhaps more than anyone else, she understood the problems of the officials, the free burghers, the grain and wine farmers, as well as the cattle farmers who only occasionally visited the Cape. The governor had realized this fact, and also knew that she had the ability to distinguish between what was important and what was unimportant. Her recommendations had therefore usually given His Excellency a good guideline.

It was not these facts that had made the young man on the right of the door exclaim softly. Still less was it what had caused the men in the room all to look up when she entered. Certainly, the independent fiscal was not thinking about political matters or grievances of the population of the Colony at this moment.

Anna te Hoogen was beautiful. From the perfect curve of her neck to her satin-smooth forehead under the high, scalloped wig, she was as if created by a master hand. Her features gave the impression of delicacy, and yet her face was strong, especially in the chin and lips, there was a fullness that also lent a pleasant warmth to her expression. Her blue eyes were bright and direct.

She moved gracefully between the tables to that of the governor. Everyone there, including His Excellency, had stood up. They bowed politely.

“Excellency!” Anna called out softly. “There is something I must speak to you about.”

“But of course, Anna,” the governor replied kindly. “I just wonder if this is the appropriate time and place, you know that.”

“I didn’t say now,” she replied calmly, and yet with a tone of rebuke and reproach for the insinuation that she was not aware of the circumstances. “Perhaps before you...”

“But does it matter all that much?” Frederick de Nuys exclaimed gallantly. His eyes were fixed on her. Of all the inhabitants of the Colony, he, apart from her uncle of course, was perhaps the only one who would dare to look her so intently in the eyes. “Perhaps I, and here are also two members of the Political Council, can help you with your problem, Miss Te Hoogen.”

“I would prefer to discuss it with my uncle, thank you.” Although each word sounded soft and musical and matched the pleasant quality of her