

OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

3. Scum of the Seas



GERRIE RADLOF

SCUM OF THE SEAS

by

GERRIE RADLOF

and

translated, proof-read and edited by
PIETER HAASBROEK

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by Gerrie Radlof

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SUMMARY

Adventure explodes on the African coast in *Scum of the Seas*, where Captain Gascon Dumont's tranquil life at Fort Louis shatters amidst a ruthless pirate attack. Deceived by cunning pirates, the French stronghold crumbles, and Dumont's beloved, Minette de Rouxleigh, heiress to a vast fortune, is stolen away. As the fort smolders, Dumont is thrust into a desperate race against time, entangled with the enigmatic Oloff van Wagenaar, a man branded a pirate, yet shrouded in mystery.

Oloff, accompanied by his own beloved, the sharp witted Anna te Hoogen, is driven to clear his name and to stop pirate atrocities, while Dumont is hell bent on getting his love Minette back. Alliances are formed and lines are crossed as the two men clash on the best route forward. Oloff is a skilled fighter, but there may be something more than a pirate as he strives to avoid conflict at first, as his reluctance hiding a devastating secret. This decision is crucial as Anna is kidnapped and it is now Dumont's turn to support and guide Oloff on what he needs to do.

From the bustling pirate haven of Deelen Bay to treacherous sea routes teeming with sea pirates, Oloff and Gascon must navigate a deadly web of deception and danger. Their quest intertwines with the fate of Count De Rouxleigh, a man of immense wealth whose capture could ignite a war. They face impossible odds, each decision carrying life-or-death consequences. Will Oloff truly escape the shadows of his past and prove his innocence? Can Gascon rescue Minette from a fate worse than death? Or will the insidious machinations of ruthless pirates plunge them all into the depths of despair, leaving the seas stained with betrayal and loss?

Their quest reaches a head in a final act of defiance where impossible decisions and an unyielding spirit will push them to their limits, but will it be enough? Prepare to be swept away in a whirlwind of action, romance, and intrigue, where trust is a fragile commodity and the only certainty is the relentless pull of the sea and its dark secrets.

EXTRACT

The Seewraak is still swinging around. Then the starboard cannons crack. Heem had fired those on the middle and upper deck at the same time. The ship swings back and wobbles in the water.

Oloff stands indecisively. Having to turn again will mean that Sias will have to steer the ship directly into the wind. This will mean that they may lie powerless for a minute or longer. In the meantime, those privateers can easily swing around downwind and send a third salvo at them.

“Swing to port, Sias.”

“We’re already dangerously close to the coast, Oloff.”

“I know. Steer towards the inlet. If we make it and we turn sideways, it will be impossible for them to descend on us. We will be able to hold them back from there.”

Without hesitation, Sias obeys. As the ship turns, the wind catches it fully from behind and quickly steers it into the inlet. The privateers’ cannons fall silent. Both of them have naturally understood Oloff’s tactics and they are now chasing him at full speed.

Oloff smiles. He feels satisfied. The point of the isthmus is barely two hundred paces to port. The coast of the mainland is about a quarter of a mile in front of them. Slowly the Seewraak pokes its nose into the inlet.

“Swerve to starboard, Sias,” commands Oloff. “Send men into the masts to lower the sails. If we lie sideways here, the privateers will have to come so close to each other before they can shoot that we’ll be able to hit both with one salvo.”

3. SCUM OF THE SEAS

Chapter 1

Captain Gascon Dumont felt invigorated and content. He saluted a few guards on the wall and walked behind the row of cannons, their barrels peering through the gunports over the bay, extending to the corner of the fort. Here, he stood against the low outer wall, gazing out over the sea. The rays of the late afternoon sun shone directly onto the sails of a ship approaching about five miles from the harbour mouth. Further away, in the haze, he distinguished a second ship. He would wait here until the first of the approaching vessels entered the bay. After that, it would be time for his appointment, dinner at the governor's residence. He looked forward to it with excitement, for there he would meet his beloved, Minette de Rouxleigh, again.

Fort Louis was a French stronghold on the east coast of Africa. As a trading post, it was invaluable due to its extremely strategic location. It was not difficult for the French ships that traded with the East to call here. Furthermore, it was a perfect hiding place where merchant vessels could seek refuge to avoid attacks from the numerous pirate ships that constantly threatened the trade routes to the East.

Fort Louis lay at the mouth of the Nantezi, which flowed from the dark jungles of Central Africa. On both sides of the bay, the coast was strewn with rocks and impassable. The only route to the interior from here was through the river mouth and through the pass in the hills behind Fort Louis. The settlement was, therefore, indeed a rock-solid fortress. It had already withstood several attacks from privateer ships with ease.

The latter were actually the only danger to the inhabitants of Fort Louis. Gascon Dumont watched the approaching ships and considered the possibility that they might be pirates, the scum of the sea! However, it did not bother him much. The fort's cannons, high on the ridge on the river mouth's bank, could send the attackers, forced into that narrow space by the nature of the coast, into the depths with a single volley.

He looked over the few large sheds down by the water. He looked at the beautiful dwellings higher up the hill. In the magnificent gardens that the governor had established, he saw the roof of the governor's residence. It was there that Minette de Rouxleigh, only daughter of the

immensely wealthy Count De Rouxleigh, was currently visiting her uncle. Gascon himself was the youngest son of a nobleman, the Comte Dumont, otherwise, he would not have had the audacity to call on Minette.

“Captain.”

Gascon Dumont startled slightly, as his thoughts were elsewhere. He turned around and nodded to one of the lieutenants, who stood at attention.

“Yes, Le Roy?” he inquired amiably.

“The lead ship has signalled a message.”

“What is it?”

“Apparently, it is being pursued by the privateer ship. It requests shelter. It asks if it may enter the harbour.”

“Of course, Le Roy. Signal back that it is welcome. What details did it give?”

“It is a Dutch ship, captain, on its way back from Batavia.”

Dumont made a gesture with his hand, and the lieutenant hurried away. Then he looked back at the bay. He could even see the crew on the deck of the leading ship now. It looked like a fast vessel. For a moment, he wondered if the ship could not have easily outrun the privateer ship. Then his eyes searched along the side of the ship, but nowhere did he see a gunport. Perhaps they were closed, and he simply could not distinguish them. There were not too many sailors on the deck. Perhaps the captain had had a setback with his crew, and that was the reason he did not want to risk trying to sail in the open sea under the privateer’s vessel.

He heard a sound behind him, and when he turned around, Le Roy was already there again. He was waiting for orders.

“Call out the garrison,” Dumont ordered. “Send a messenger into the town to recall everyone with free passes. Man the cannons and be ready. My honest opinion is that the pirate will not venture too close. However, should he do so, simply blast him with the heavy artillery. Is that clear?”

“Perfectly, captain.” The lieutenant hesitated. “And where will the captain be?”

“Bring me a telescope. As soon as we are completely convinced of the identity of the pursuer, I will go down to the quay to inquire what has

happened from the Dutch captain. I don't think you need my help, Le Roy. One ship is not really a danger, is it?"

The lieutenant laughed cheerfully. He felt satisfied with the trust placed in him. A few moments later, he had a telescope fetched.

Dumont observed the rear ship carefully. It was not long before he could distinguish the fluttering flag on the mast. It indeed had the dreaded pirate emblem on it. He shrugged. He handed the telescope to Le Roy and then looked at the merchant vessel, which at that very moment glided past the fort below and made its way through the slowly flowing waters of the river towards the landing place. The top sails were already being lowered rapidly.

He shouted hastily over the outer wall below and requested that his horse be made ready. Then he went down the stone steps to the inner courtyard of the fort.

A few moments later, he mounted the magnificent horse and galloped out through the gate. Outside, before turning right onto the gravel path towards the town, he looked out over the sea again. The privateer ship was barely a mile from the river mouth. He wondered what the pirates' plan was.

At an easy trot, he rode down the hill. On the stoops of a few houses, there were some of the merchants and other inhabitants of Fort Louis who were also watching the approaching ships. They waved, and he waved back amiably. A few called out to find out who the visitors were. He informed them that he himself was on his way to ascertain it.

He rode between a large shed and a storehouse. The waterfront was now only a few hundred paces ahead of him.

Suddenly, he jerked hard on the reins and brought the horse to a standstill.

The Dutch ship lay directly in front of him. From six gaping gunports and over the bulwark protruded a total of twelve cannon barrels!

Hardly had he observed this phenomenon, and even before he had fully recovered, it was as if the earth around him tore open from the roar of the artillery. Dark clouds of smoke swirled between the rigging and sails. The entire ship trembled from the impact and created small breakers that lapped against the quay.

Slowly, the state of affairs dawned on Dumont. Even before he heard

the wild shouts of the savage pirates, he realised what a trick they had played. Both were obviously pirate ships as they were working together. As if his thoughts were being confirmed, there came a thunderous roar of a volley of cannon shots from the harbour mouth. Involuntarily, Dumont looked towards the fort.

He squeezed his eyes tightly shut. The devastation was worse than he had expected. There were a few gaping cracks in the front wall, and one of the towers was no longer there.

Around him, there were surprised exclamations. He heard the screams of women. Nobody, of course, understood what was going on yet. Over the rails of the pirate ship swarmed the rabble. A few boats had been lowered, but most of them climbed down rope ladders to the quay. Behind them, the cannons thundered again. Dumont realised that the two ships would be able to fire a few volleys before the fort's crew had recovered, and by that time, there would likely be very little of the stronghold remaining.

He yanked frantically at the reins. The horse spun around, and while Dumont spurred its flanks, the animal bolted in a wild gallop away up the hill in the direction of the governor's residence. A few soldiers who had been summoned by the messenger ran past him in terror. He stopped them.

"Pierre!" he called to one. "Run for all you're worth to the fort. Tell Lieutenant Le Roy to come to the governor's house with every available man. You others, follow me there immediately!"

Without waiting and seeing if they obeyed, he hurried on. Behind him, there were pistol shots. He heard the shouts of the pirates mingling with the terrified cries of men and women. From most of the buildings, people were now pouring out. They ran blindly into the street, away from the waterfront.

Then it roared again as the cannons fired anew. He heard the whine of the cannonballs, and then they tore and crashed between the buildings here beside him. One of the heavy cannonballs ploughed into the street, and a few of the fleeing people were hurled to the ground. A thick cloud of dust rose from the road, and Dumont sped through it at full speed. It was barely a quarter of a mile to the governor's house. In the town behind him, there was now a deafening commotion. The second ship

had also dropped anchor, and another volley was fired between the houses. Everywhere, pistol shots crackled, and here and there, where the inhabitants were trying to defend themselves, there was the clashing of swords.

At the gate in the ring wall in front of Dumont, stood two guards. They stared in terror down the hill.

“When the fugitives arrive here, let them through!” Dumont roared. “Send them to the outbuildings. And you,” he ordered one, “go open the governor’s storeroom. Hand out weapons. When the garrison arrives, what is left of them, have them come to the residence itself. I will be there.” Without further ado, he sped up the driveway. On either side of him was a long row of trees, and behind them, the gardens around the house. In the forecourt were a few of the servants. They ran around in fear and indecision.

“Go inside! Close the windows and doors and pile all the furniture against them. Quickly!” Dumont recognised the governor’s personal guard. “You take command,” he ordered the man, “and hurry.”

On the balcony above the large front door of the opulent building stood His Excellency and Minette de Rouxleigh. Gascon waved and swung out of the saddle. He ran up the steps to the entrance hall, then up the broad winding staircase to the upper sitting room, from where the double glass doors led out onto the balcony. The governor and his niece had already gone inside.

“What is going on, Gascon?” His Excellency exclaimed, concerned. Minette, meanwhile, came to Dumont and took his hand while she stared questioningly into his eyes with her dark eyes.

“Pirates, Your Excellency!” Dumont exclaimed. “They have led us terribly astray. I was asleep!”

“But what happened, man?”

“The first one pretended to be a merchant vessel being pursued by a privateer ship. There was no time to investigate. I was obliged to let the ship enter. While our attention was fixed on the privateer, the supposed merchant ship opened fire on us. They are already pouring into the town. Soon they will be here. We must flee, Your Excellency.”

“Flee?” The governor stared at the captain in amazement for a moment.

“What do you mean?”

“We will all be murdered!” Gascon exclaimed desperately. “There are too many of them. They will overwhelm us. You must get horses ready immediately. We must flee into the interior.”

“And my people?”

“Your Excellency,” said Dumont sternly, “you are my first responsibility. You and, and Minette.”

“Minette?” The governor looked at his niece. Then he shook his head slowly. “You were right, Gascon. Prepare the horses.”

Dumont stormed out onto the balcony. Over the treetops along the avenue, he could see the ravaged town below. Halfway up the slope, there was a milling and swarming of people. The pirates had overtaken many of the townspeople. They showed no mercy.

To his left, there was the thunder of horses’ hooves. About six soldiers came galloping towards the house at full speed. Gascon shouted that they should enter the house and supervise the fortification work at the doors and windows.

He went back inside. The governor was at the top of the stairs. He called for his bodyguard.

“We can take horses from the garrison, Your Excellency,” Gascon informed him. “They are standing ready down here. Come, Minette. There is not a moment to waste.”

She was still standing in the middle of the sitting room. It was as if she hesitated.

“What is it, Minette?” he exclaimed urgently. “Why are you waiting?”

“It is only because of me that you are fleeing, Gascon,” she said softly.

“Your duty and also Uncle Andre’s is here. You cannot leave the people here alone.”

“There is nothing we can do about it, Minette. Come now quickly.”

Gascon ran towards her. He took her by the hand and practically dragged her down the stairs. The governor followed them. Down in the large entrance hall, tables and chairs were piled in front of the large windows. The front door was still open. Without a word to the others, they ran out onto the stoop and down the steps. Gascon’s own horse as well as those of the soldiers were still standing in front of the stoop.

Dumont helped Minette de Rouxleigh into the saddle. However, she sat uncomfortably, so he swung her down again and led her to his horse.

The governor had already mounted one of the other horses. Then there was a shout from the gate. Gascon turned towards it. Through the gate poured a whole bunch of the pirates! Even from there, they were already opening fire. The bullets whizzed past Gascon and the others. One of the horses was hit, and it whinnied loudly and shrilly. Dumont grabbed the girl around the waist. As soon as her feet touched the ground, he dragged her behind him. A few moments later, they were all back in the entrance hall. The doors were slammed shut, and a few heavy chests were slid against them.

Gascon looked around him. The soldiers were all there, six of them. He further counted seven servants and a few women. From the outbuilding side, he heard the crackling of gunfire. From that side, the defence was already underway.

Quickly, he shouted orders. He placed a few men at each window and door. He sent the others to other points in the building. Then he pulled Minette back so that they were in the middle of the entrance hall. From here he would be better able to give his orders, but also from here, he would be able to retreat more easily!

It was impossible for him to ascertain how many of the pirates there were. Only once did he go closer and look out through a window. It seemed to him as if the entire terrain was overflowing. From inside, the defenders had now started shooting. The soldiers were barely taking aim. A short while later, the portal was filled with acrid smoke fumes. Gascon coughed. He himself took up a position and fired his pistols rapidly. Then he stepped back while unscrewing the barrels and reloading quickly.

“They are against the wall, Captain!” one of the soldiers exclaimed.

“We can’t see them anymore. They are pressing against the door.”

“If they break through,” Gascon ordered loudly, “we will all retreat up the stairs. Up there we might have a chance to defend ourselves for a while.”

He kept his eye on the door. From outside, immense pressure was being exerted on it. Suddenly, there was a loud thud that reverberated in the portal. He could clearly see the doors moving. He stepped back and took Minette by the hand. In his right hand was an unsheathed sword. In his belt were two loaded pistols.