

OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

9. The Spy



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THE SPY

by

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SUMMARY

In the perilous waters of the 18th-century Indian Ocean, France's prosperity hangs by a thread, threatened by the notorious pirate, Captain Oloff. Count Durette, the influential minister of the French court, tasks his admirals and directors of the French East India Company with a seemingly impossible mission, to eliminate Oloff.

Young Admiral Pierre de la Fonte, haunted by past encounters with Oloff and a deeply personal obsession with a young woman named Rynette du Bois, proposes a daring solution, infiltrate the pirate's ranks. But who will undertake such a dangerous task? Enter Rene le Dour, an infamous swordsman with a dark past, and a man whose allegiance can be bought. As Rene assumes the identity of a seaman named Rene Camo, he finds himself amidst the cutthroat pirate community in Deelen Bay, Madagascar, a haven for the lawless. There, he is supposed to gather intelligence and lure Oloff into a trap. But Rene's own ambitions soon begin to surface, and he begins to wonder how much of his plans he should abandon, especially when he discovers the secrets of the pirate fleet.

Meanwhile, Admiral de la Fonte's obsession with Rynette and Oloff intensifies, clouding his judgment and blurring the lines between duty and personal vendetta. Rynette is sent to Angola, where Oloff hopes she will be safe. What he does not know is that De la Fonte is close behind him, planning to close in. Can Oloff evade capture and prevent a devastating attack on a city harboring innocent lives, including the woman he loves? In a world where betrayal lurks around every corner and alliances shift like the tides, Oloff must confront not only his enemies but also the turmoils within himself.

EXTRACT

The ship on the starboard side groaned under the blow of the bullets that moved through the masts like a swarm of bees. Sails hung in strips and the middle mast snapped in the middle to drag a few of the other sails down onto the deck.

Above the loud cheering of his crew, Oloff yelled to Sias to swerve to starboard. That ship would now be more clumsy in its movements than the other because of the damage that had been done to the sails. Oloff expected that both ships would swing in diagonally behind the Seewraak to then fire a volley at them.

This was exactly what happened, the ship on the port side succeeded in positioning its cannon muzzles on the Seewraak, but Sias had already changed course, and now only the slender stern of the ship was visible. Still, the fifty cannons thundered. Oloff, like most of the crew, threw himself down on the deck planks. A mast cracked above his head, and he jumped aside when splinters of wood fell down close to him. Several of the sails had been torn in half, but still, the Seewraak continued to sail.

“That was a nice piece of work, Oloff,” said Sias sincerely. “If we had swerved to the wrong side there, it would have been the end of us.”

9. THE SPY

Chapter 1

“It is a deplorable state of affairs.” The words cut through the small room and would have echoed loudly had it not been for the expensive wall hangings and the heavy curtains before the windows. “Oloff the pirate is a threat to the economy of our country. He must be driven from the sea, preferably captured so that he can be publicly hanged as is the custom with robbers of his ilk.”

When Count Durette ceased speaking, no one in the small audience responded immediately. The count is the most influential minister at the French court, for under him falls the navy and thus also almost full control of the French East India Company, that pulsating artery of France’s prosperity.

The few admirals and directors of the French East India Company who had been summoned by the minister looked at each other or lowered their eyes. They felt uncertain whether the minister was personally accusing them, for they did not know why he had called this meeting. Therefore, they avoided his piercing eyes, which rested on one after the other.

Only a young admiral seemed completely at ease. He sat upright in the armchair with the gilded armrests. His posture was proud, and his slender face was clean-shaven. His eyes had an expression bordering on the callous, like that of someone who has much to feel bitter about. But the faint smile around his lips indicated that he had not resigned himself to his fate, but rather had deliberate intentions to eliminate or avenge the factors that had caused his bitterness.

“De la Fonte,” the minister resumed after a while, glancing fleetingly in the direction of the young admiral, “has just returned from the East. His report is disturbing. He has had the misfortune to clash with pirates several times, and especially with this so-called Captain Oloff. It is not his fault, and I accept his report without question, that the pirate escaped the small fleet that M. De la Fonte had at his disposal. In any case, that is not the matter at hand at the moment. The reason I have summoned you is because this evil has once again been strongly brought to my attention and because I have decided that it must now be brought to an

end once and for all. I understand that the blow our trade with the East is suffering as a result of the activities of the pirates will soon be irreparable.”

“Eighty-four of our merchant ships,” added a director of the French East India Company, “have presumably become pirate prey in the past year, apart from the few that did not return or reach their destination due to the usual sea hazards.”

“We are not the only ones, of course,” one of the admirals opined. “The Dutch and English companies are suffering even greater losses.”

“Their losses have nothing to do with us,” the minister snapped at him, his voice sharp with impatience. “We shall confine ourselves to our own affairs.” He hesitated, looking at some documents in front of him. “With every voyage it becomes more difficult to man the ships. Everyone is afraid of that lurking death in the Indian Ocean. This pirate threat, with Captain Oloff at the helm, is therefore causing us not only direct but also indirect damage.” He paused. “I have here various reports from eyewitnesses who managed to escape. They have seen the two large ships of Oloff the pirate when our merchant ships are attacked, plundered, or sunk. From various rumours and other sources, it appears that the pirate community in those regions is highly organized. Apparently, they have a fortress on the southwest coast of Madagascar, a place called Deelen Bay.”

“Why don’t we send a fleet there then?”

“There will be an opportunity for proposals later,” the minister replied frostily to the admiral who had asked the question. “As soon as we are all aware of the full situation. This Deelen Bay is sheltered. Not only will half of our entire fleet most likely fail to take the place, but it will be impossible for them to get within a hundred miles of it before the pirates are aware of them. This will give them ample opportunity to prepare or evacuate the place. That is why I opened the meeting with specific reference to Oloff the pirate. He is the most powerful of them all. If we can restrain him, half of our task is accomplished.”

The minister stood up, and the company followed his example out of respect. “My time is limited,” Durette continued. “I leave you here to discuss the matter, and I expect a solution within the next two hours. I have His Majesty’s permission to inform you that any amount can be

spent and any part of the fleet can be used, within limits of course. As long as it will contribute to bringing about the end of Oloff the pirate.” When the minister left the room, there was a murmur of voices among the small company for a while. They all took their places again, but it took a while before they focused their attention on the young admiral, Pierre de la Fonte. From the minister’s conversation, it seemed as if De la Fonte had the most knowledge and the latest information about this matter.

“You say that he escaped you twice, Monsieur De la Fonte?” one of the directors inquired.

“I wouldn’t put it that way,” replied De la Fonte, “although that is what happened. You may recall that it was decided some time ago to replace the governor of our possessions in India.”

“Yes!” exclaimed another admiral. “Du Bois was sent to take Duplex’s place. He was taken prisoner and later died. There was also mention of his daughter, I think her name is Rynette...”

“She was also taken prisoner,” De la Fonte interrupted him. “It is precisely because of her that I was unable to scour Oloff from the sea.” His lips were firm. His voice trembled with emotion, which caused the rest of the company to flinch slightly. His eyes flashed with a murderous hatred. Then he controlled himself and continued earnestly. “The pirates who captured Rynette du Bois and her father wanted a ransom for them. Oloff heard of this and decided to seize the prey for himself.”

“But don’t the pirates work together then?” asked a director.

“There is often discord among them. The group that originally got hold of the Du Bois separated themselves from the Deelen Bay group. In any case, Oloff managed to steal Rynette from under their noses. Outside the bay where this happened, my six ships and I were lying in wait for him.” Again De la Fonte’s anger rose at the memory of his humiliation. “I had him cornered like a rat.” He sighed. “But I had to let him go, because he had Rynette on board. He made an agreement with me to hand her over to me in exchange for his safety. I had no choice.”

“And the second time?” asked the admiral next to him.

“It was a similar case. For one reason or another, Oloff focused on getting Rynette back into his power. I thwarted his plans but could not save her and arrest him at the same time.”

“And where is the young lady now?”

“I don’t know.” De la Fonte made a despondent gesture. “She was with Dupleix in Pondicherry. But just before I returned here, she disappeared. That is why the matter is so urgent. I realised that I could no longer act on my own, and that is why I approached the minister for a solution and for reinforcements.”

“And now he expects the solution from us?” said the admiral closest to De la Fonte. “But what do you think has become of Rynette?”

“I have no doubt that Oloff kidnapped her.”

“Tell me,” asked one of the directors. “What does this Oloff fellow look like?”

Pierre de la Fonte’s mouth corners drooped. A strange twitch shot across his face. It testified to hatred and jealousy, but also to suffering. “He is a young man,” he then said slowly. “He has flaming red hair and blue eyes. He is well-built, and I understand he is a master marksman and swordsman. In addition, it seems as if he has had a good and thorough education. And that is what makes him all the more dangerous.”

“According to your description, he is then quite attractive and still young,” the director remarked.

“Physically, yes,” De la Fonte replied against his will.

“A young lady would therefore not find his attention entirely repulsive,” said the director dryly.

The speaker was an older man than the admiral. If he had stepped forward and punched De la Fonte, the effect would probably have been less noticeable. De la Fonte sprang to his feet. His lips tightened over his teeth. His right hand rested on the hilt of his sword.

“Were it not for your years,” he finally said, so subdued that his words were barely audible, “and were it not that you speak out of ignorance, you would have died for the insinuation that someone like Rynette du Bois could be attracted to a pirate scoundrel.” So venomous was De la Fonte’s attitude that no one answered or made a remark immediately. Finally, the elderly director said,

“I admit that I spoke out of ignorance, De la Fonte. It is also possible that you reacted hastily to something that I didn’t mean.”

“The ignorance to which my colleague refers,” said another director in

an attempt to ease the tension, “is of course your personal feelings towards Miss Rynette.”

They all laughed. One of the admirals even dared to pat De la Fonte good-naturedly on the shoulder. They are French, with their own particular conception of love. Reluctantly, De la Fonte had to smile.

“You will therefore understand why this matter is so serious to me,” he then said. “Action must be taken immediately.”

“That is the minister’s order,” a director remarked dryly. “With your knowledge of the matter, De la Fonte, we would be pleased if you could propose a solution.”

“I have already thought of thousands of ways in which we can proceed,” De la Fonte readily admitted. “By a show of force or in an overt manner, we will achieve nothing. I propose that we put someone in the camp of the enemy. Through him, we will then be able to ascertain Oloff’s movements.”

“To lure him into a trap?”

“Yes. That can be our first goal. We must at least convert two merchant ships into floating fortresses, but without them appearing so. They must have the appearance of heavily laden cargo ships returning from the East to France. Close by, but not in sight, must be a fleet of warships. At least twenty.”

“That sounds perfectly plausible,” a director conceded. “The two merchant ships can be obtained, and the fleet is at our disposal, but what about this man who is to act as a spy?”

“He must go to Deelen Bay,” De la Fonte interrupted him. “At the moment, there are a bunch of pirates in prison in Zanzibar. As you know, we are on good terms with the Sultan. This group, who were imprisoned through my doing, would have been hanged, but even then, I had thought of this plan and requested the Sultan to keep them there until I visit him again.”

“And among them, there is a man who...”

“Such a man must be placed among them.”

“Rene le Dour.”

“Rene le Dour!” From quite a few, there were shocked exclamations.

“That arch-villain!” one interjected. “Why he hasn’t been hanged long ago or is sitting in the Bastille, I do not know. That man has more

murders to his name.”

“Exactly!” exclaimed one of the admirals. “It would be difficult to find a better swordsman in France.”

“He is unscrupulous. He will do anything as long as he is paid,” opined another. “There is nothing that he will balk at.” Pierre de la Fonte smiled. It was quite clear to him that they agreed with him that Rene le Dour was the right man. They would be able to pay him well for his services.

Two months later, a French fleet of twenty warships and two large merchant ships sailed along the east coast of Africa. Thirty miles from Zanzibar, one of the warships left the others and sailed into the harbour. A ship’s boat was lowered, and after the rowers had taken their places, a few soldiers threw a man into it, who had his hands and feet tied. Then they stood at attention while Pierre de la Fonte climbed down the wooden ladder and sat in the stern.

The beach teemed with a crowd that had been drawn closer by the arrival of the ship. They could clearly see the admiral in his magnificent uniform, and they wondered who the poor prisoner was. As the boat glided through the water, De la Fonte bent down until his face was close to that of the bound man. He spoke quietly so that the others on board would not hear him.

“This is the last opportunity I will have to speak to you, Rene. Do you now know your role fully?”

“Yes,” replied Rene le Dour. “If you wake me up in the middle of the night, I will remember that I am Rene Camo, a seaman who is not entirely unknown in the Caribbean Sea.”

“Good, you will receive a message telling you when the guards we are bribing will be on duty. The messenger will also tell you which ship you can take. I will make arrangements with the Sultan and compensate him for all losses.” De la Fonte hesitated. “And you also understand well, Rene,” he then continued, “that my reputation depends on the success of this undertaking, but that is the least, you know what reward awaits you, not only materially, but also in status and honour.”

Admiral Pierre de la Fonte sat upright. He did not look once again at the man who lay at his feet. On the quay, the soldiers cleared a path for them through the crowd, and then De la Fonte left the group in a sedan

chair on his way to the Sultan's palace.

The soldiers hired a carriage and threw Rene into it. They reached the colossal building in which, among other things, almost two hundred pirates had been housed against their will for a few months. The soldiers chatted for a while with the chief warden, and then Rene was dragged along the cold stone steps down to the cellars. In a large, malodorous cellar, the roof of which was barely six feet above the stone floor, the pirates lay on piles of straw. Their beards were long and dirty, and their clothes hung in tatters. A musty, sweaty smell assailed Rene's sensitive nose. Despite his reputation, he had always led a life of comfort. When the iron gate slammed shut behind him, he wondered whether that huge sum that would be paid out to him after the completion of his agreement, justified an hour in this dirty nest.

His arms and legs were untied. Deliberately he jumped up and grabbed the iron bars of the door. He tugged and pulled at it and cursed at the warden, who walked down the corridor without looking at him once. When he turned back, there were several of the prisoners who were looking at him from underneath, as if they were wondering what had actually inspired him to kick up such a racket.

"Hey!" Rene bellowed at them. "You sit there as if you are all being paid to die. You miserable dogs," he continued loudly. "They will not keep me here long."

Without speaking further, he looked for a spot of straw for himself. He sat down with his back against the wall and let his head drop on his chest as if he were deep in thought.

"After six months, you may also be willing just to lie here and wait for death," said a thin, elderly man next to him. "Their food isn't too bad, though. It could have been much worse."

Rene looked up angrily. He stared at the man as if he had dealt him a personal insult.

"Lie here and rot!" he exclaimed. "We shall see, friend. This is not the first time that they have tried to stop me with stone walls and iron bars."

"Oh, really?" said the old man calmly. But Rene had noticed that a few of the others were watching him with more interest.

"And have you been in similar circumstances often?"

"Quite a few times," Rene assured him. "In my kind of existence, it's