

OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

10. Sea Vultures



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SUMMARY

Dive into the turbulent world of Deelen Bay, a pirate haven ruled by ruthless ambition and stained with daily acts of barbarity. In this unforgiving den of thieves, captain Oloff van Wagenaar, commander of the formidable Seewraak, walks a perilous tightrope. Feared and respected among the pirate brotherhood, Oloff harbors a dark secret. He's sworn to dismantle Deelen Bay from the inside out, avenging a past tragedy and bringing justice to the treacherous Indian Ocean.

Oloff's double life is a constant battle against exposure, aided only by his loyal crew, including the level-headed Henning and the ever-ready Heem. When a desperate Marc le Nuir washes up seeking vengeance and desperately searching for his long-lost sister, Estelle, Oloff finds his mission inextricably intertwined with a personal vendetta. Le Nuir's quest leads Oloff and Henning to Captain Haak, a brutal pirate with his own hidden agenda, and in the mix is young "Valk", Haak's protegee. But what are his/her secrets and what hold does Haak hold?

As Oloff navigates treacherous alliances and deadly betrayals, he finds an unlikely connection with the beautiful and sharp-witted Suzanne Renaux, a passenger on a ship targeted by Haak. Their bond deepens amidst daring escapes and fierce battles, blurring the lines between duty and desire. However, a hidden identity within Haak's crew threatens to unravel everything.

With time running out and forces closing in, Oloff must make impossible choices. Will he succeed in his mission to eradicate Deelen Bay's evil? Can he rescue the innocent and avenge the wronged, while keeping his true allegiance a secret? Or will the siren call of forbidden love compromise everything he's sworn to protect? In a world where trust is a luxury and survival a constant struggle, prepare to be swept away by the thrilling action, heart-stopping romance, and shocking betrayals that lie within Sea Vultures.

EXTRACT

Again, he sets the boat in motion. He kicks lightly with his feet under the water and steers it under the stern of the large ship to the other side, because it is there that the hold is located before him and then back up against the side of the ship. They are half-hidden by the curve of it, but if any of the guards should lean over the railing and look down, he might be able to distinguish the shape of the boat and also Suzanne in it.

Oloff almost bumps into Estelle before he notices her.

The rope on which she is hanging is fastened in the same place as the previous night when Oloff escaped from the hold. It therefore hangs past the porthole.

As they agreed, Oloff touches her calf lightly, and then she climbs up the rope. This means that she has already succeeded in opening the porthole and warning the people inside to be ready. She has the key with which Oloff unlocked his shackles. It will also fit on Gaston's.

Estelle will free him first. They will then pull in the rope and tie it around the shoulders of the first woman. After that, they will help her out through the porthole and slowly lower her down to Oloff.

Oloff hardened himself against the feeling of impatience that gripped him. It might take hours before all the prisoners were in the skiff. In total, there were only about twenty-five of them, but they would have to proceed so cautiously that haste was entirely out of the question. Oloff did not mind so much, but afterwards, they still had to row approximately twenty miles before they could begin to circle in search of Oloff's ships, and all this had to happen before dawn.

10. SEA VULTURES

Chapter 1

“Shoot, you imbecile!” a hoarse voice hisses from the darkness just ahead of the two men walking up the side street from the beach.

Barely do the hoarse whispers reach their ears before the two leap in unison and with lightning speed into the shadow of the wall beside them. Each has drawn a pistol from his belt and now stands motionless, holding his breath, while his gaze tries to penetrate the pitch blackness.

“I can’t see him too well,” the second voice grumbles tensely.

“There he goes! Look, he’s running hunched over. Shoot, man!”

“Better not!” a third person interjects. “The blast of the shot will attract the curious.”

The shorter of the two figures against the wall leans closer to the other so that his lips are barely an inch from his ear. His voice is so soft that it sounds like little more than heavy breathing, but each word is clear.

“Apparently, it’s not us they want to shoot, Henning,” he remarks dryly.

“Yes,” Henning replies. “They’re completely unaware of us. I don’t think they could have heard our footsteps on the sandy path. What do you think is going on, Oloff?”

“I don’t know. Let’s listen. Perhaps we’ll find out.”

“He’s running across the street,” they hear again the voice that originally made them jump aside so hastily. The man sounds impatient.

“You can easily take him down.”

“But I’m telling you...” the third begins again.

“We’ll be gone before anyone can show up here!” the first snaps at him.

“A dead man can’t talk.”

“But what if I miss?” the second one argues.

“Well then, let’s go after him. If he escapes, we’ll have to answer to Captain Haak personally. I’d rather die than be at the mercy of his claws.”

“Then it’s another one of Haak’s victims,” Henning whispers.

“According to rumours, he’s had three men killed by his assassins in the past week or so.”

“Such things happen all the time in Deelen Bay, Henning,” Oloff sighs.

“What bothers me is that none of the three we know of are Deelen Bay

natives or ordinary pirates. It gives one the impression that this isn't just the normal kind of squabble and killing that is always going on. But we must try to save the man. I would like to hear what he has to say, aside from the fact that he might be innocent."

"It's dangerous to interfere in such matters, Oloff," Henning tries to dissuade him. But Oloff has already slid down the wall to the corner behind which they heard the whispers. Henning follows him, and they peek around.

A few streets further on is the dusty main street of Deelen Bay. By this time of the evening, most of the inhabitants of the smugglers' town have gathered in the taverns and places of entertainment. There are no streetlights in Deelen Bay, and the rest of the harbour town is thus shrouded in darkness.

Now Oloff and Henning can dimly discern three figures a short distance ahead against the slight glow from the main street's direction. At that moment, they see a fourth figure some distance further on disappear around a corner into the next side street, which runs parallel to the one Oloff and Henning were walking along.

"There he goes!" one of the three assassins exclaims. "Let's catch him!" and without further ado, they take off and run after the fugitive.

"Come," Oloff says matter-of-factly. "If we run straight up this street and then turn right, we might be able to intercept them."

He doesn't wait to see if his friend is following him. He knows that will be the case, but he sprints as fast as he can, and the tall, lithe Henning just manages to keep up. Without hesitation, they run down the next street. They make no attempt to hide themselves, for no one looking in their direction would be able to see anything, although Oloff and his companion can clearly distinguish objects between them and the main street.

They are halfway to the street into which the man fled when he comes around the corner and turns in their direction.

It's clear that he must have hidden somewhere for a while, because the distance he has covered since Oloff and his companion last saw him is barely half the distance that Oloff and Henning have covered. This has sealed his fate, for his pursuers have continued running relentlessly, and now they are hot on his heels.

Oloff hears the dull thud. He sees the man stumble and lie still. Immediately, he comes to a stop and grabs Henning's arm as the latter runs past him. He still has his pistol in his right hand, and now he calls out loudly.

"What are you doing there?" He turns to Henning. "We mustn't give them the impression that we want to interfere in such matters. Act as if we just happened to come upon them here by chance."

There is no answer from the three men. Oloff can still distinguish their figures, however, and he knows that they have heard him but cannot see who addressed them. Oloff cautiously walks closer, as one would under such circumstances.

"Who's there?" one of the three finally inquires.

"Captain Oloff of the Seewraak and Captain Henning of the Jansje Meer."

"Captain Oloff!" There is awe in the man's voice at this name.

"Yes," Oloff answers sharply, for he is now completely convinced that he is dealing with a few of Captain Haak's pirates. "What are you up to?"

"This, this man, Captain," the speaker stammers, pointing to the figure on the ground as Oloff and Henning reach them. "He, he stole money, he stole my money. We caught up with the low scoundrel and beat him senseless."

"Is he dead?" Oloff asks.

"I don't know, Captain. I hit him hard."

"It doesn't matter," Oloff says nonchalantly as he tucks his pistol into his waistband and walks past without another word. Henning follows suit.

"You did a wise thing not to ask any further questions, Oloff," says Henning when they are out of earshot.

"It's the only way we can still exist in this pirates' nest," Oloff replies in a low voice. "We have to pretend that events like this affect us just as little as they do those who have no human feeling left."

"You would have tried to help the man," Henning says dryly, "if you hadn't known that he was indeed dead."

"Oh," Oloff remarks. "I must congratulate you on your keen eyes. So you also saw the knife in his back?"

“Yes.” He sighs. “There was nothing we could do for him.” He hesitates. “I’m tired of this existence, Henning, not for the role I play in it, but for the fact that there can be a place on earth like Deelen Bay, a place where things like this happen daily and where it is accepted as perfectly normal. A heated argument between neighbours in a decent community causes greater uproar than murder in Deelen Bay. We must put an end to it, Henning. We must destroy this place. We must prevent such things from happening.”

Henning Roux makes no comment. He knows his friend’s moods and he knows how deeply he feels about the injustice perpetrated by the pirates, so much so that he has made it his life’s mission to combat this evil. And Henning owes his life to Oloff. He will follow him through thick and thin. Now he says nothing. He lets Oloff speak his mind.

“So far,” Oloff resumes, “we have been content to send a privateer here and a privateer there to the depths. We have saved as many innocent lives as possible, but it is not enough, Henning. We must eradicate this place, this haven of the pirates of the Indian Ocean, root and branch. Come, it’s not too late yet. We can show our faces later at the Hanekraai. Now we’re going back to the Seewraak first. Heem and Sias will probably still be there. We’ll hold a cabin council immediately.”

“Then you’re serious!” Henning exclaims in surprise, for now he first realizes that Oloff is not just railing against the pirates, but that he is actually planning action.

“Of course I am!” Oloff retorts. “Deelen Bay must be destroyed.”

“That’s easily said, Oloff. But where will you find the fleet and the army to tackle this task? Deelen Bay is a natural fortress. There are numerous pirates all the time, and the most ruthless crews that have ever sailed the seas. They will fight to the death, because there can be no mercy for them anyway. I doubt whether any country has a fleet that can take Deelen Bay.”

“You’re exaggerating,” Oloff says calmly. “It’s not quite that bad.”

“I admit I might be magnifying the situation,” Henning concedes. “But you do know that the Deelen Bayers will know long before the time if a strong fleet is heading for the harbour. They will simply get out of the way and settle elsewhere or return at a more opportune time.”

“I take that into account.” Oloff makes an impatient gesture with his

hands. "There are other ways we can go about it!" he then exclaims. "It will necessarily have to be a slower process, but it can be done. We're going on board, Henning, and discuss the matter with Heem and Sias." Henning doesn't object any further. He realizes that Oloff wants to be occupied with his own thoughts, and he knows that he will have ample opportunity to raise his objections once the four of them have gathered. They reach the beach and the ship's boat of the Seewraak. The crew who were waiting there for their captain push the boat between the small breakers and grab the oars.

With Oloff's words in mind, Henning looks around him. In the harbour lie about twenty large privateers, for here in Deelen Bay the pirates come to rest after a raiding expedition on the trade route to the East. Every time they encounter a ship that is better than their own, they try to damage it as little as possible so that they can seize it. As a result, the pirate fleet of Deelen Bay consists of a collection of magnificent ships. Among them lie the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer at anchor, and of all of them, their streamlined hulls are the most striking.

On either side of the harbour, a series of hills stretch into the sea. These enclose Deelen Bay like a horseshoe and thus form a natural protection against an attack by land. Practically on the beach is the town with its flat, clumsy clay buildings. Closest to the water's edge are the large sheds where food supplies and the pirates' loot are kept. Behind that in the centre of town lie the places of entertainment and the taverns along the main street. Surrounding them are houses, for many of the pirates have families who live in Deelen Bay. To the left of the town is the large slave camp from which labour is obtained to work the extensive gardens and orchards up to the slopes of the hills. Deelen Bay is therefore self-sufficient, so it would do no good to besiege the place and blockade the harbour.

The community is ruled with an iron hand by a massive pirate captain, who is called the Admiral. Although he no longer goes on raiding expeditions himself, he has his own large fleet. The other captains who use the harbour must pay him a portion of their loot for his protection. He lays down laws, the few that are indeed necessary to maintain the little necessary order.

Henning shakes his head despondently. He still hopes that Oloff was

not serious with his remarks. Since they have taken the field against the pirates, the privateering industry has most likely suffered more damage at their hands than from all other quarters. Now it looks as if Oloff is planning bigger things.

The guards on board the Seewraak help their captain over the railing. Oloff greets them kindly, and before he walks to the sterncastle, he asks Henning to summon Heem and Sias.

In the corridor in front of the large and comfortable captain's cabin, he bumps into his faithful valet, Mamoed, the Malay slave. Mamoed smiles broadly in welcome. He had served Oloff's father, Johan van Wagenaar, a senior merchant at the Cape of Good Hope, until he died at the hands of pirates. Thereafter, he followed his young master and played a fatherly role towards him to some extent.

"I would be glad if you would stand watch in front of the door tonight, Mamoed," Oloff requests. "We want to discuss matters that not even my own crew must know about."

Mamoed nods. Oloff knows that his secrets will be safe.

Barely has Mamoed lit the lamps and Oloff opened a few of the panes in the large bay window above the stern, when Henning and his companions join him. Oloff greets Heem and Sias and motions for them to sit down.

Henning sinks into the soft cushions on the bench under the window. He observes Oloff intently and decides not to speak until his leader and friend brings up the matter.

He sees the frown on Oloff's high forehead. As usual and as the fashion among the officers in Deelen Bay is, Oloff is finely dressed. His natural, unpowdered red hair is neatly tied together with a ribbon behind his neck. His blue eyes stare out of the window at the still water of the harbour, where the light from the cabin and from the lamps on the stern is reflected in the slight swell.

Henning looks at the other two. They too are watching Oloff anxiously as if they know that they have not been summoned merely for a chat.

The large, bearded gunner of the Seewraak, Heem Beyers, catches Henning's eye. Henning sees the question in it, and he raises his eyebrows as if to indicate that he knows as little as Heem does about what is going on.

He stretches out his long legs comfortably. The young helmsman, Sias Myburgh, nods in Oloff's direction, but Henning shakes his head.

"Henning has probably already told you why we have come together," Oloff finally says.

"No," Heem answers in his deep bass voice. "We're sitting here waiting in suspense."

Oloff smiles. Immediately, however, he becomes serious again.

"Deelen Bay must be completely destroyed!" he says emphatically.

"Oh." Sias shrugs his shoulders. "Is that all?"

"I'm completely serious," Oloff rebukes his frivolous mood.

"Who's going to do it?" Heem asks dryly. "The four of us?"

"I expected such an attitude from you," Oloff concedes. "Henning has also already tried to convince me that it is an impossible task. I don't agree with him. I still think that we can succeed if we work with cunning."

"But that's precisely what we're doing at the moment!" Henning exclaims. "We are systematically attacking and sinking the privateers on the open sea."

"I know. But not on such a scale that we actually make much of an impact on their numbers. There are constantly others who fill the gaps. Moreover, we have played a double role so far. We always had to be careful that no one found out that we were against the pirates. Also, we have never coldly sent a privateer to the depths. Only when we have caught them red-handed threatening innocent merchant vessels."

"But I don't understand, Oloff," Heem says. "Here in Deelen Bay, you occupy the ideal position to continue your fight against the pirate evil as you are a respected captain, you sit at the right hand of the Admiral. Because they think that we are also of their kind, we find out what their plans are. This enables us to pursue them and either attack them or at least prevent them from doing any harm."

"Yes! Yes!" Oloff exclaims impatiently. "But it's an unsatisfactory state of affairs. We are constantly living under the threat that our true identity will be discovered. We can't act openly and with full force."

"Is your plan then now to attack the privateers openly?"

"Yes."

"And how will that help us?"