

# **OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES**

## **13. Arm from the Deep**



**GERRIE RADLOF**

# ARM FROM THE DEEP

*by*

**GERRIE RADLOF**

and

translated, proof-read and edited by  
**PIETER HAASBROEK**

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## **ARM FROM THE DEEP**

by Gerrie Radlof

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## SUMMARY

The Indian Ocean, a tempestuous realm of merchant ships and lurking shadows. A pirate scourge threatens the Dutch East India Company, and Admiral Rynhardt te Hoogen, a rising star, finds himself embroiled in a dangerous game. Accusations fly, loyalties are tested, and Rynhardt's unwavering belief in the notorious pirate, Oloff van Wagenaar, as something other than a villain, becomes his undoing. Stripped of his rank and banished from his homeland, he's a pawn in a game orchestrated by his ambitious rival, Gerhard Rheedert.

Gerhard, propelled by his father's influence and a hunger for power, claims the glory of destroying the pirate haven of Deelen Bay, painting himself as the Company's savior. But beneath the veneer of heroism lies a dark secret, one that connects him to the very pirates he claims to have vanquished. His ambition knows no bounds, and Rynhardt's downfall is only the beginning.

Lost in the chaos is Rynette du Bois, a woman caught between two worlds, haunted by a past tragedy and bound by a complicated connection to both Oloff and Rynhardt. She finds solace and friendship with the exiled admiral, but a treacherous act rips her from his side, forcing her to confront her deepest desires and grapple with a dangerous truth. Oloff the Pirate may not be the villain everyone believes him to be, and his fate, as well as her own, is far from sealed.

When Rynhardt's reputation is threatened once again, is Oloff really dead as everyone believes, or does he emerge from the shadows, bringing with him the full force of his wrath? The game becomes deadly and he must expose the truth behind Gerhard's rise to power, even if it means sacrificing everything. All the while, Rynette is the prize that is yearned for. Can the exiled hero and the haunted pirate join hands once again to save her, or will old betrayals doom them all to a watery grave?

## EXTRACT

From door to door, he walked on his toes. At each one, he listened for a while, but nowhere did he discover anything. According to the general pattern of ships, the officers' cabins ought to be here alongside. Those of any guests were usually above the stern where the captain's cabin and reception cabin were also located. He lingered longer at those doors, but there too, he learned nothing. He stopped before the reception cabin. Clearly, he could hear someone talking inside, and the voice was not unknown to him either. He knew immediately that it was Gerhard Rheedert. He pressed his ear against the door and listened attentively. "Have I tried to harm you in any way?" It was an impatient but half-biting question. There was no answer.

"You are being treated like a queen. I'm sorry that I cannot give you your freedom on the ship, but that will all be changed." Still, no answer. "You ought to know that I would do anything for you!"

Oloff's heart was beating violently. It was as if he saw Rheedert there inside, and without the slightest doubt, he knew with whom he was talking. His heart melted as he saw Rynette there in his mind's eye. He could imagine how she was listening to the man, proud and with implacable resistance. An almost uncontrollable desire to push open the door and go to her almost overcame Oloff when she suddenly spoke.

"In that case, you ought to take people into account and put me ashore as soon as possible."

"But Rynette, why?"

"You also ought to know that I don't like you addressing me so informally."

"My patience is not endless," Rheedert hissed, but he immediately seemed to control his temper. "Where do you want to go back to," he exclaimed. "Te Hoogen is a weakling. He got his just deserts. I can offer you everything. Wealth, position..." Oloff heard him walk around the cabin. Most likely, she was ignoring him.

## 13. ARM FROM THE SEA

### Chapter 1

“Is there anything further you wish to state before sentence is passed upon you?” The sharp, dry voice cut through the great hall where a deathly silence reigned. There was a hint of malicious pleasure in the speaker’s words, as if it were entirely unnecessary, as if the sentence had already been decreed, and nothing that might be said could alter it in any way.

The single sentence echoed dully against the finely wrought woodwork of the galleries that extended along the sides and the back wall. The benches with their high backs on the floor of the hall were packed. The multitude held their breath. There was tension, but it was uncertain, like that of an audience in a theatre where the performance is approaching its climax, a culmination that is known in advance and which evokes an unsatisfying, bitter taste.

At a long table at the front of the hall sat five men. The one in the middle let his arms rest limply on the arms of his chair. His head was tilted back against the upholstery of the backrest, which loomed like the billowing sails of a ship. Through half-closed eyes, above a sharp, crooked nose and finely compressed lips, he peered at the man who stood proudly and upright across from the table.

From his expression, there was no doubt that, as far as he was concerned, the matter was concluded. Nothing could further influence the sentence.

“There is much that I could answer, Admiral Rynhardt te Hoogen,” came a clear, strong voice. But his young, robust countenance was slightly embittered, and his eyes showed distress and dejection, as if he were weary after the long hearing. His voice did not reflect this, but it was clear that he, too, realized that a further attempt at defense would be of no benefit to him. Yet he spoke with defiance and determination, for he was acutely aware of the injustice of the attitude being adopted towards him. He felt that the vast majority of those present at his hearing agreed with him that the accusations against him could not be substantiated. “But it would merely be a repetition of what has already been said,” continued the young admiral of the Dutch East India

Company. “The man who was known as Oloff the Pirate was my friend. He was my friend because, through his actions, he proved his friendship to me. Therefore, I believed in his innocence and the explanation as to why he had established himself in Deelen Bay, the pirate’s nest on the coast of Madagascar. He...”

“Te Hoogen,” interrupted the man in the high-backed chair, “do you wish to waste the time of this court any further with such assertions?”

“You asked me if there was anything further I wished to say,” retorted Te Hoogen sharply, and almost with impatience. At the same time, there was an almost dissatisfied murmur among the spectators, as if they, too, found the actions against him unreasonable.

The thin lips of Mijnheer Rheedert, chairman of the Lords Seventeen, Board of Directors of the Dutch East India Company, curled downwards at the corners, as if irritated by the disturbance. Nevertheless, he restrained himself, and with a slight movement of the fingers of his left hand, he indicated that Rynhardt might continue.

“Oloff van Wagenaar’s father was murdered by pirates. Oloff tracked down and killed the murderers, and he took an oath not to rest until he had purged the Indian Ocean of the scourge of the pirates and destroyed Deelen Bay. To achieve his goal, he went to live amongst them so that he could ascertain their movements, and in doing so, he was able to save many merchant vessels. Systematically, he attacked one pirate captain after another, dealing the pirate force blow after blow. However, it was a protracted process.

“On one occasion when I was instructed to pursue Oloff the Pirate with a fleet and take him into custody, I fell into pirate hands. Then Oloff rushed to my aid and saved my life, and it was then that I realized who he really was and what his goal in life was. I promoted him to captain of the Dutch Fleet, and this was ratified by the Lords Seventeen.”

“That was purely on your word, Te Hoogen!” snapped Rheedert at him. “My word was accepted,” replied Rynhardt coolly. “There was no reason to doubt it. There were sufficient witnesses.”

“Oloff the Pirate was known as the wealthiest of them all!” interrupted Rheedert sharply. “Testimony can be bought.”

Rynhardt te Hoogen did not reply immediately. He flushed red with anger, and then the color left his face until he was deathly pale, but with

a cold calm, he looked at the others.

“That was not the opinion when I submitted my report,” was all he said. “But in any case, that is not relevant now,” declared Rheedert curtly. “Those records have been removed and no longer exist. It has nothing...”

“It has everything to do with the motive for my actions,” Rynhardt countered. “That is why I responded when Oloff made contact with me and requested me to join him in delivering the final blow which, as was indeed the case, would have meant the end of Deelen Bay.”

Mijnheer Rheedert shrugged his shoulders slightly. He shook his head as if to indicate that the young admiral was insulting him and the others present by persisting with such assertions.

“It is to be expected, Te Hoogen,” he said almost reprovingly, “that you would wish to remind us of the fact that there were rumors at the time that Oloff the Pirate was, in reality, trying to render a noble service and that he was merely a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Naturally, you will try to use that argument to try and justify the actions of which you are now accused. You openly admit that you collaborated with the most ruthless of all scoundrels who have ever entered the Indian Ocean. In your own foolish trust, you practically placed your entire fleet at his mercy.”

“Deelen Bay has been destroyed,” replied Rynhardt simply, as if he wished to prove the contrary with that fact.

“We know that!” roared Rheedert. “Had it not been for the actions of Captain Rheedert, and the fact that you finally heeded his warnings and accepted his advice and guidance, Deelen Bay would still be there today, and you and your entire fleet would have been destroyed.”

Rynhardt te Hoogen turned his head. For a few moments, his gaze rested quietly on that of a young man who was sitting in one of the witness benches against the wall to his right. Gerhard Rheedert, son of the powerful director, smiled with a slight trace of malicious pleasure. His lower jaw and cheeks looked soft and heavy for his face. But the self-assured expression in his eyes lent him a personality that would not otherwise have existed.

Then Rynhardt lowered his head. He said nothing.

“The captains of your fleet have all testified here,” continued Mijnheer Rheedert as if he were now presenting the matter for the last time, “that



you would have repeatedly led them into a trap if it had not been that Captain Rheedert had dissuaded you. It is he who planned the final assault on Deelen Bay, and he himself has told us how he sailed between Oloff's two ships and had them sunk just inside the entrance to Deelen Bay. You, Te Hoogen, held a responsible post. You were not worthy of it. You have neglected your duty and have placed the lives of hundreds of Company officials in danger with selfish, reckless purposefulness. You are therefore relieved of your post. You are dismissed from the service of the Company! You are required to leave your homeland within the next month and never return here again. You may settle in one of the colonies or refreshment posts. But never again will you be allowed into our service. You can consider yourself fortunate that the death sentence was not passed upon you. However, my son, Captain Gerhard Rheedert, pleaded on behalf of his fellow officers that your loyal service of the past should be taken into consideration, as well as the fact that Deelen Bay was, after all, destroyed, and that Oloff the Pirate and his full crew were sent to their watery graves. You may leave, but your movements will be followed until you leave the country!"

He struck the table with a hammer and stood up abruptly. The four fellow directors followed his example, and they exited through a door in the back wall.

There was an excited murmur among the spectators. However, they spoke in hushed tones, as if they were still aware of their presence in this paneled hall, where the highest council of the Company laid down the laws and passed sentences. Many of them looked at the bowed head of Rynhardt te Hoogen, where he remained standing alone in front of the long table. It was as if some of them felt the urge to go to him and speak to him. But then they followed the flow out through the large doors.

The officers in the witness bench and the officials of the court sauntered, chatting through the gate in the railings that separated the benches of the spectators from the front part of the hall. They deliberately focused their attention on each other, as if they wished to prevent themselves from possibly looking Te Hoogen in the eye. With many, there was the attitude of someone who had done something about which he was not comfortable and thought that he could shake it off

simply by turning his back on it.

But one man, quite elderly and dressed in a captain's uniform, walked straight up to Rynhardt te Hoogen. He placed his strong, powerful hand on the young man's shoulder and pressed it lightly.

"It could have been worse, Rynhardt," said Stefaan Wiehahn in a muted voice, and when Rynhardt heard the underlying anger in the words, he quickly looked at his friend, the only one of the captains of his fleet who, during this hearing, had at least tried to defend him, Rynhardt.

"It could well have been death."

"I know, Stefaan," he answered almost listlessly.

"There is someone else that I would gladly kill myself!" Stefaan seethed through his teeth. "The audacity of the fellow. After everything that he has done, he is now trying to become the magnanimous, noble person as well, pretending to have pleaded for the mitigation of your sentence. I am telling you, Rynhardt, if I ever happen to run into that low, insignificant nobody anywhere alone, I will tear him apart, piece by piece!"

"What good would that do you, Stefaan?" countered Rynhardt. "There is nothing that we can do about the matter. I could not even accuse him of the fact that he betrayed us time and time again. His father's influence is too great. If I had tried to do that, I would indeed have received the death sentence, and you too, if you had supported me."

"It does not matter," said Stefaan with fire. "I am not going to let the matter rest here. I had the opportunity a few times during the hearing to hear people talking about it. There are many who do not agree with this state of affairs at all. The things that you said sounded convincing, Rynhardt. I know that your defense collapsed because you were unable to lift your finger and point it at that damned Gerhard Rheedert. But there are many people who would like to hear the full truth." Stefaan took Rynhardt by the arm and led him into the passage between the high benches. The hall was already almost empty, and there were only a few people left who were pushing to get out of the door. "I am going to draw up a petition, Rynhardt. I am going to speak to the other captains again. I am going to approach every officer, from the helmsman to the kitchen boys. I am going to get as many signatures as possible, and then I will go to a few influential people and lay the matter before them. Even if it

takes a lifetime, I will ensure that Gerhard Rheedert gets his just desserts!”

“No, Stefaan.” Rynhardt shook his head wistfully. There was a soft smile around his lips because this expression of friendship touched him deeply. “You have your work to do. If they find out that you are occupying yourself with such things, it will most likely just mean your dismissal as well.”

“And are they perhaps the only employers in the world?” snapped Stefaan back. “I am telling you, I am going to do it, Rynhardt. Nothing will stop me. I...” He suddenly stopped talking, and Rynhardt looked quickly at him to see what the reason was. Stefaan Wiehahn’s expression had softened, and Rynhardt followed the direction in which he was smiling.

Just inside the door, where the last people had just exited, stood a young woman. Her dark eyes were soft and warm and anxiously directed at Rynhardt. Her full lips trembled in a smile, but the paleness of her face and the fine line of suffering around her mouth testified that a great setback had struck her in life. With outstretched hands, Rynette du Bois came to meet Rynhardt.

“So you waited for me, Rynhardt?” said Rynhardt almost surprised when he took her hands.

“Of course,” she replied, looking straight into his eyes. “Did you expect me to slink away with the others as well?”

He smiled almost cheerfully, pressed her hands, and then held onto one of them.

“Is that what they did?” he asked.

“What else?” she said almost vehemently. “After they sat and watched, like accomplices, the injustice that was done to you!” Then she laughed. “But you are free, Rynhardt. Let us walk out together into the sunlight. The world is large.”

“No,” he stopped her. “Let us first stand here inside for a while. I would prefer not to have to listen to a lot of expressions of sympathy. Let the people disperse first. Many of them will probably be standing and talking out here on the square.”

“And there will be many of them who will mean it completely sincerely when they shake your hand, Rynhardt,” said Stefaan with conviction.

“It does not matter. We will wait for a while. I want to talk to Rynette anyway as I have not seen her since the start of the hearing.”

Rynette laughed. She shook her head.

“For two days,” she replied, and then she became serious again. “But, Rynhardt, why did you allow Gerhard Rheedert to tell such lies? You know, we all know, how he colluded with the Deelen Bayers just to try and prove that Oloff was indeed and to get you into trouble.”

“That is what I am saying,” Stefaan began heatedly. “I am not going to let this business just...”

“Wait now, Stefaan,” Rynhardt interrupted again. “There was nothing that I could do, Rynette. You heard in what light my assertions about Oloff’s innocence were viewed. Of course, I would say it. How else can I prove my own innocence? Anything that I said would merely be accepted as an attempt to whitewash my crimes. If I had accused Gerhard, they would have laughed at me. They would have viewed it as a desperate attempt to place the blame on someone else, and Gerhard’s father is one of the most powerful men in the country. It would have been of no benefit to me in any case. The other captains are too afraid for their skins and their positions. They would have supported Gerhard Rheedert in any story.”

“But that he was able to say that he had the two ships of Oloff, the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer, sunk!” Rynette exclaimed indignantly. “You yourself told me that Oloff’s ships were there amongst the pirate fleet and that they had fired on the privateers until they themselves had eventually been sent to the depths.”

Rynhardt shrugged his shoulders. He quickly looked away when Rynette blinked and he saw a tear rolling down her cheek. He thought back to that night when he had sailed into Deelen Bay with the Dutch fleet. They were unaware of the fact that they had been led into a trap, and while they had thought that the forts and batteries of Deelen Bay would be unmanned and that the privateers were all far to the north, the opposite was actually the case. Suddenly, the heavy artillery from all sides had opened fire on them. Shortly thereafter, they had seen the privateer fleet at the entrance to the harbor, and they had realized that they were lost. At that stage, neither Rynhardt nor Rynette knew where Oloff was. Even they thought that he had turned against them because