

# OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

## 17. The Coast of Barbary



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# THE COAST OF BARBARY

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*Published by:*

**TREASURE CHEST BOOKS - PUBLISHERS**

Strand Mews

Strand

2025

## **THE COAST OF BARBARY**

The cover illustration for the Oloff the Pirate series was generated through AI software, enhancing the narrative. This book is being released in English for the first time in e-book format.

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## **THE COAST OF BARBARY**

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Published by:

Treasure Chest Books - Publishers, Strand Mews, Strand 7140  
South Africa

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Online Store: <https://panther-ebooks.com>

Website: <https://www.softcoverbooks.co.za>

## SUMMARY

Enter a world of swashbuckling adventure and courtly intrigue in *The Coast of Barbary*, where the line between pirate and nobleman blurs with every crashing wave. Captain Oloff van Wagenaar, once a scourge of the seas and now a decorated Dutch naval officer, finds his hard-won peace shattered by a cryptic summons. A clandestine invitation, penned by the enigmatic Captain Aurek Ben Suliman, lures Oloff to the shadowy depths of the Parisian underworld, a place where secrets fester and danger lurks around every corner.

Drawn into a web of deceit and betrayal, Oloff is abducted and spirited away to Omana, the formidable stronghold of Sultan Osman and his captivating daughter, Princess Shammar. Shammar, driven by an unyielding ambition to resurrect the Ottoman Empire, sees in Oloff the key to her grand designs. His legendary skill and ruthless reputation make him the perfect admiral to command her fleet. But Oloff's heart and conscience are caught between his newfound position and the ghosts of his past. The presence of Anna te Hoogen, his former love now held captive in the palace, ignites a burning desire to rescue her from her gilded cage. Torn between duty and desire, Oloff is forced to play a dangerous game. Does he surrender to Shammar's allure and help her realize a devastating ambition, or does he risk everything to dismantle her pirate kingdom from within?

Amidst daring escapes, clashing swords, and hidden motives, Oloff discovers that love and loyalty are tested by treachery. As he navigates the treacherous currents of Barbary politics, a shocking choice looms on the horizon. Allies become enemies, and the woman he once loved holds the key to a prophecy that could change the world forever. Will Oloff succeed in liberating Anna and escaping the clutches of the ambitious princess? Is his past coming back to haunt him in a way he never saw coming, or will he become the architect of his own destruction on the Coast of Barbary? And who is the power broker behind all the chaos?

## EXTRACT

The large ship was between the two forts. A thunderclap tore through the silence of the morning. A full volley was fired to both sides and the already damaged forts were covered in a cloud of dust while pieces of the breastwork were drawn through the air. Heem Beyers, gunner of the Seewraak, knew his task.

The Seewraak was inside the harbor. On board the fleet of Omanna, the crew swarmed like ants. Apparently, they had been waiting for the moment. A few sails were spread on every ship. Immediately, the entire fleet would turn askew and after that it would only be moments before the Seewraak was sent to the depths.

Shammar could not suppress an exclamation. Hadram stood like one who had been turned to stone. Instead of the ships of Omanna coming into position to deliver the coup de grâce, they were being driven back to the beach, helpless, like bobbing pieces of cork.

And in front of them, the Seewraak was swinging around with amazing and terrifying maneuverability. Salvo after salvo tore through the fleet. And at the forts, a fierce battle broke out. Behind the forts in the garrison quarters, most of the men of Fezanna had naturally been detained. But the devastating effect of the Seewraak's cannons had naturally given them the opportunity to jump out and now they were tackling the crews of the forts from behind.

## 17. THE COAST OF BARBARY

### Chapter 1

Captain Oloff van Wagenaar felt as if the rapier at his side was loose in its sheath. With profound suspicion, he surveyed the dark building before him. Then, he glanced up and down the street. He was on the bank of the Seine, but not where a bridge spanned the river. The street to his left ended abruptly at a dilapidated wooden lattice. A street lamp cast a dim light over the round cobblestones, and the desolation and silence around him were accentuated by the lapping of the river water against the stone wall behind the dark wooden railing.

As if seeking reassurance, he rested his fingers on the cold metal of the pistol in his belt. He wore leather breeches with grey stockings and shoes with low heels. His pale brown velvet three-quarter jacket hung loosely over his broad shoulders. He pulled his hand from beneath the jacket, and his strong fingers, which nevertheless appeared slender and refined, sought a button just below his belt. He fastened it but left the jacket further open so that he could reach the pistol butt and the rapier's pommel without hindrance.

He moved with ease, like one who was calmly keeping an appointment. He had hesitated only for a moment before the door, as if wanting to make certain that this was indeed the place to which he had come. In the faint light of the two street lamps far on either side of him, he had seen the name above the door. Coffee Des Troulins. He pushed the door open.

Loud shouts and laughter and all indications of a boisterous revelry in full swing slammed against his ears. The stench of cheap wine and damp, sweaty bodies assaulted his nostrils. His eyes blinked against the warm fumes of tobacco smoke that mingled with the vapours of a multitude of oil lamps.

He pushed the door shut behind him, sealing off the silence from outside. He was in a small portal that was dimly lit by a single lamp. The sounds, the smells, and the stuffy air bubbled up the stairs from a cellar room as if being blown through a chimney.

"Looking for someone?" The question came abruptly and rudely from the left.

Oloff had paused within the threshold. Leisurely, he turned his head and for a moment, he scrutinized the man with the bloodshot eyes and the flabby face, the skin of which hung loosely over the cheekbones and around the jaws. But he also saw the powerful, hairy forearms. From experience, he knew what type of ruffian was chosen as a doorman of a gathering place for people who, due to their lifestyle and disposition, would not really be welcome in more civilised parts of Paris. He also knew how to act in such cases.

“Yes,” he answered coolly, but his voice was, notwithstanding, melodious and deeply refined. He made no attempt to conceal its quality. “Captain Aurek Ben Suliman of Barbary.”

He did not miss the fact that the eyes of the man behind the counter widened slightly, and larger spiderwebs of fine, red veins became visible over the eyeballs. It was as if he wanted to rise but then he slumped back into his chair. He nodded in the direction of the stairs.

“He is down there,” was all he said.

At his ease, and as if he was completely unperturbed, Oloff walked down the stairs. Before him, a scene unfolded that could only be found in a place where the scum of the earth gathered. Here were criminals, from thieves to murderers, and the outcasts of society who, due to selfishness and animalistic urges, could not adapt anywhere else. In this small corner on the outskirts of the city, there were no laws or restrictions. Here, the most powerful was the boss, and here the traces of violence very likely disappeared over the rotten wooden railings out there into the dark, silent water of the Seine.

Oloff had expected to find something like this here. From its location, he had guessed what kind of place the Coffee Des Troulins, notwithstanding its name, actually was.

Nonetheless, he had come. It was necessary for him since he had that afternoon received a message in such a mysterious way that he had to keep an appointment here.

In the suite of rooms of the luxurious inn where he was staying, he had been getting dressed. He and his fiancée had been invited to a ball at the palace. It would be the last public gathering they would attend before he married Rynette du Bois, the daughter of one of the most influential families in France and a personal friend of the royal family.

Suddenly, he saw the note lying there on the floor. It had apparently been slipped under the sitting room door. With mild surprise, he picked it up and unfolded it. His hand began to tremble as he read the short, business-like contents.

Captain Oloff, it read, you are cordially invited to attend a discussion regarding the gathering of a certain Miss Anna te Hoogen. Be at the Coffee Des Troulins at eight o'clock tonight and come alone. The name Captain Aurek Ben Suliman of Barbary was signed at the bottom of the letter.

The handwriting was that of an agitated man, and the letter was written in French.

The bravado of the request struck him. It was as if the writer had accepted without the slightest doubt that Oloff would heed it. It was as if Oloff could sense a subtle mockery in the words, the contrast between the first and last sentences. Immediately, Oloff knew that he was dealing with someone who saw his direction and goals in life very clearly and who acted without fear.

For a long time, he stood still, looking at the note. A feeling of anxiety for her safety ran through him when he read the name Anna te Hoogen. And rage and hatred rose up in him when the word Barbary burned into his eyes, the Barbary Coast, the home of a medley of races, every able-bodied man of which had given his life to the sea. He had closed his heart in solitude, but then he had rescued Rynette du Bois from the clutches of pirates. Her father had also been murdered by pirates, and a strong bond had developed between her and Oloff.

When he shortly thereafter delivered a devastating blow against the pirate community of the Indian Ocean, he decided that he owed it to his crews to make a home for them somewhere. Virtually every member of the crews of the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer owed their life to Oloff. From the slave camps of Madagascar, from the burning deck of sinking ships, or from a drifting plank on the open sea, he had saved them. Yet, they wanted a place where they could return to after tiring voyages. And on the south coast of Africa, along the mouth of a river, they had established the village of Wagenaarsrust.

Oloff had given them the choice to return to their land of birth or to stay at Wagenaarsrust. But everyone decided to settle in Wagenaarsrust and

brought their wives and children there. But they were constantly ready to navigate the seas if they heard of the activities of pirates.

With the Seewraak, Oloff had come to Europe. In Paris, he joined Rynette, and their wedding day was set. Although his innocence had been proven, his reputation had preceded him, and his arrival in Paris caused quite a stir. Daily, he found that he was still the centre of attention. Adventurous men sought his company, ladies glanced after him with sparkling eyes or stared at him with open admiration, this man who a few months ago was still known as the dreaded Oloff the Pirate and who now moved among them with so much charming politeness, who did not have to take a back seat to any of the haughty nobility and who conversed with a lively flicker of humour in his blue eyes. And everyone eagerly awaited the wedding, but who followed only one profession, namely piracy! Where trade was carried out with the blood and life of people, where cities sprouted like mushrooms, and the inhabitants led a regal existence on plundered spoils.

A few years ago, Oloff van Wagenaar's father had been murdered by pirates. The young Dutch nobleman had taken an oath not to rest until he had freed the sea of the pirate scourge of the privateer fleets. He had followed his father's murderers to the coast of Madagascar and had succeeded in establishing himself there as one of the pirates. With his two magnificent ships, the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer, he had stabbed the pirates in the back at every opportunity that presented itself. But often, he had appeared on the scene too late to save the innocent prey. Then, the black flag with the skull and crossed bones on it was seen at the mastheads of his ships, and the survivors of the crews of merchant ships had assumed that Oloff had taken part in the attack. In time, Oloff the Pirate had become known as the most feared of all.

Before Oloff began his life's work, he had met Anna te Hoogen. They were engaged when he went to establish himself among the pirates. Through her mediation, Oloff had befriended her brother, Rynhardt, admiral of the Dutch fleet. Rynhardt knew that Oloff was innocent, and for his services, Oloff was elevated to captain of the Dutch fleet. But all of this was kept secret, for Oloff did not want to give up his strategic position among the pirates. In this way, he could always remain aware of their movements, and systematically, he cleared the routes to the East

of privateer boats.

And precisely because he had led the life of a wanderer, constantly living in mortal danger, he could not expect Anna to remain faithful to him. He had asked her to forget him, because it would take place in the palace, and the King himself would give the bride away.

That afternoon, there in the sitting room, Oloff relived the events of the past few years. Even now, where he stood on the bottom step of the Coffee Des Troulins, he compared the nest of depravity before him with the stateliness of the ball in the palace.

That afternoon, he had paid a hurried visit to Rynette and explained to her that urgent matters would cause them to leave for the palace late. To the best of his ability, he had reassured her with vague explanations, and she had, with a sigh of resignation, requested that he please complete his business as soon as possible.

The reference to Anna te Hoogen had stunned Oloff. As far as he knew, she was visiting the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope. Yet, this Captain Aurek Ben Suliman knew of her. He also knew what Oloff's name was and where Oloff was staying.

In any event, he came from Barbary, and Oloff did not doubt for a moment that he was a pirate captain. It was one of Oloff's greatest desires to track down as many of the pirates of the Mediterranean as possible, for his hands itched to come to blows with them. He was planning to, as soon as possible after his wedding, deploy all his strength and skill and experience against them. With every raid, their audacity had increased, and their fleets had sown destruction on the southern coast of Europe each year with greater impertinence.

With all these thoughts in his mind, he looked around the room. There were several doors in the opposite wall, through which slaves with trays full of beer and wine hurried back and forth. Tables were scattered over the floor where men and women sang and chatted and gambled and drank. Here near Oloff, a girl sat with a group, and she brazenly looked him up and down. Her eyes rested on the flaming red hair that was tied back with a ribbon behind his neck. As usual, it was unpowdered. The eyebrows and lips were straight, and his face was smoothly shaven. The bright blue eyes were cool and half-closed. The girl sighed deeply, but then the man next to her tugged at her arm and forced her attention onto

him.

On the right side of the room, there were a few tables where the commotion was not so bad. Dice clattered among the glasses and cups, and the players leaned forward with strained faces to see the result.

At one of those tables, Oloff saw a few dark men with turbans around their heads. Their presence was quite natural, for in the hall, there was a medley of races and a diversity of dress as if it were a gathering of pleasure-seekers from all corners of the world. Yet, the few Arabs held Oloff's attention.

One of them leaned back in his chair. He laughed half-mockingly, defiantly, as if he wanted to make the others understand how foolish they were to try to gamble against him. With short, thick arms, he gathered the coins into a pile in front of him. As if the pile was becoming too big for his liking, he grabbed two handfuls of it and threw them into a sack that a young slave behind his chair held ready.

With this movement, the slave looked up, his eyes locking with Oloff's. Over the distance between them, both stared at each other motionlessly for a moment. It seemed to Oloff as if the boy, for he could not be much older than sixteen or seventeen years, recognised him. And there was something in the boy's features that struck Oloff. They were refined, and the expression in the eyes was not that of a servant. Perhaps he was mistaken in his first assessment or perhaps he was a son of the Arab.

The corpulent Arab looked around. Oloff had not seen the boy's lips move, but he assumed that he had given the other a sign. A broad smile spread over the round face, and the small eyes sparkled with surprise. The thick lips moved in a command, and the boy moved between the tables until he was in front of Oloff.

"Captain Oloff?" The voice was hoarse and sounded cultured. "My master requests that you follow me," the boy announced in flawless French when Oloff nodded.

Then, the short, corpulent man was apparently Captain Aurek Ben Suliman. Oloff did not look to the left or right. He knew that he would not attract much attention as he had dressed deliberately for it. He became aware of the light tread, like a cat stalking its prey, with which the young slave walked out ahead of him.

The Arab had stood up. He was still smiling, but Oloff was now close

enough to see the subtle downturn around the corners of the mouth. The round black eyes were almost insulting in their mocking scrutiny of the man who was looking down on them.

“Aha!” the Arab exclaimed. “Oloff the Pirate! I...”

The other Arabs who were with him had fallen in behind him. The rest of the group against whom they had apparently been gambling had also risen, and one of them now addressed the Arab sharply.

“Did you say that we were finished playing?”

The Arab turned slowly. He looked at them quietly, and his eyes flashed. His entire demeanor spoke of disapproval that they dared to interrupt him.

“That is what I said,” he answered softly and ominously.

“But you’re mad!” the other retorted. “You have been winning all evening. It’s early, you cannot stop now.”

“I said I am stopping!” The words contained no anger. But the Arab behind him began slowly to move around the table. Oloff involuntarily thought of a snake that lay coiled up, preparing to shoot out its head and sink its fangs into its prey. Their demeanour was so threatening that the few men on the other side of the table only cast a fleeting glance at them and then suddenly decided to make their escape.

“We are known to the scum,” said the Arab conversationally, as if nothing had happened. “We often come here for a bit of entertainment. I am Captain Aurek Ben Suliman. Sit.” It was a command. He pointed to a chair.

Behind him, the noise continued. Oloff was certain that no one was paying any attention to the group here against the wall. He was becoming extremely annoyed with the bearing of the short man with the long, gorilla-like arms. He did not move.

“I understand from your note that you have something to say about Miss Anna te Hoogen,” he inquired measuredly and with an expressionless face.

“That can wait until later. Sit!”

A biting answer stopped on Oloff’s lips. The black eyes were now venomous. It was completely clear that Captain Aurek did not like to be contradicted. Only fleetingly did Oloff look at the other Arabs behind Ben Suliman, and the large eyes of the young slave caught his