

OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

18. Predators from the East



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PREDATORS FROM THE EAST

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Published by:

TREASURE CHEST BOOKS - PUBLISHERS

Strand Mews

Strand

2025

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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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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

Prepare for a thrilling high-seas adventure where clashing swords, cunning strategies, and a touch of forbidden romance collide. In the early days of colonial expansion, Prince Mahara Jaman Malik of Zanzibar sets his sights on a lucrative prize. It is the unsuspecting settlements along the South African coast. With a fleet of six sleek, lightning-fast ships, he plans to disrupt the established slave trade by flooding the market with educated and physically superior European captives.

But Malik's ambition clashes with the formidable Captain Oloff van Wagenaar, a former pirate now seeking a peaceful life for himself and his crew along the Kars river. When Malik's forces descend upon Oloff's settlement, Wagenaarsrust, kidnapping the women and children, Oloff is forced to confront his past and embark on a desperate chase. As Oloff pursues the fleeing fleet, he finds himself embroiled in a deadly game of cat and mouse. Malik proves to be a worthy adversary, and Oloff must use all his skills and cunning to outwit the prince and rescue the captives. The conflict is further complicated by the arrival of Gerhard Rheedert, a pompous Deputy Governor with a personal vendetta against Oloff, whose interference threatens to doom them all.

Amidst the chaos of naval battles and daring rescues, a spark of forbidden attraction ignites between Oloff and the spirited Jandien, a former pirate's daughter held captive by Malik. Their connection adds another layer of danger to Oloff's mission, as a jealous rival seeks to claim Jandien for himself, turning the rescue operation into a personal battle for survival and love. Can Oloff overcome the treacherous currents of greed, hatred, and desire to reclaim his people, or will he fall prey to the Predators from the East?

EXTRACT

Then the first volley thunders. Oloff sees the flashes of gunpowder and the dark clouds of smoke erupt from the gun ports before the rumbling of the shot rolls over the water and strikes hard in his ears. Through his telescope, Oloff sees beams and a piece of mast from the rightmost ship of Malik's fleet being lifted into the air. The leftmost one fares not much better.

And with sudden fear, Oloff realizes that Gerhard completely ignores the fact that there are prisoners on board the Arab ships. It seems as if he has aimed low above the waterline as his only goal is apparently to sink the ships. Of course, thinks Oloff bitterly. It would be an unparalleled feat for Gerhard to overwhelm such a large fleet with such a small force at his disposal.

Something else also strikes Oloff. Malik's ships have not answered the volley. Malik has either decided to first observe the tactics of his attackers or he is careful to act before he knows what Oloff's plan is, because by this time, he will have recognized Oloff's ships. But the explanation that appeals to Oloff the most is that Malik simply did not expect that Gerhard, if he intended to fire at them, would endanger the lives of the innocents on board. Too late, of course, he realized that the two warships had no reservations about such matters and that they did not intend, like Oloff had done, to try to damage only the masts and sails.

18. PREDATORS FROM THE EAST

Chapter 1

“What shall we play now?” Prince Mahara Jaman Malik lets the old Italian pack of ninety-seven cards slip through his fingers. He shifts slightly in position as he sits cross-legged on soft cushions beside the small, square Persian rug.

“But that’s unfair, Jaman!” cries the young Arab sitting opposite him. “You must give us the opportunity to win back our money.”

“And lose everything I have, Mesud?” Prince Malik strokes the fine moustache beneath his hooked, aristocratic nose. It is as if the thin, black line lends a refinement to his otherwise thick, sensual lips. His strong chin and broad forehead also take much of the Arabian character from his features. Even the paleness of his skin has been coloured with a slight golden sheen by the sun.

His dark eyes sparkle mischievously. His attractive face creases into the smile of a man who consorts with good friends.

“That’s why I object,” Mesud retorts. His young, lithe body is clearly outlined beneath the light satin robe that hangs loosely about him and of which he has pulled the hem up over his knees. His alert gaze rests on the Prince with a combativeness that can only be displayed by a good friend. “You know your luck cannot continue. Now you want to call a halt to the game.”

“And what does he say, Orkkan?” the Prince inquires conversationally of the young Arab sitting next to Mesud. The two are almost identically dressed, and according to their features and physique, it would seem as if they are brothers, although this is not the case.

“Of course, I agree with Mesud,” replies Orkkan disconcerted. “The winner has no right to withdraw.”

Jaman Malik raises his eyebrows slightly. He nods good-naturedly as if he wants to concede that the others have a strong case.

“And you, Aydin?” he asks nevertheless of the fourth and last man in the company.

Aydin shrugs his shoulders. His long, pointed face is sedate and serious. Above his high cheekbones, his eyes narrow.

“They behave like children,” he remarks. “For days now we have been

on the open sea. One day one wins, the next day the other. Tomorrow it will be your turn again.”

“Oh, really!” exclaims Mesud. “Now you are siding with Malik.”

“I am not taking sides,” Aydin replies calmly. “In any case, I am also tired of the game. I would prefer other entertainment.”

“If that is your attitude,” says Orkkan, “why did you come along? You knew we would be at sea for days.”

“And what would become of you three scoundrels if I didn’t accompany you to keep you slightly in check?”

“Listen now!” says Mesud. “It is easy to sit here in the safety of a thousand capable warriors and act smart. But what will all your fine words be worth when we stand before the enemy and your life depends on the power of your wrist and the strength of the steel in your sword?”

“I will still tell you from which side to attack, I will also stand beside you with a sword in my hand.”

“Well done, Aydin!” Prince Malik pats him on the shoulder. “Tell them a little. And I believe you,” he continues. Then he throws his arms out comfortably and with a proud look, he looks from one to the other. “We are the perfect foursome. I, Mahara Taman Malik, Prince of Zanzibar, son of the most powerful sultan on earth. And you, Mesud, Orkkan, the fighting blood of the highest nobility courses through your veins. Your eyes are as sharp as those of an eagle, your feet are as light as flakes of foam on the edge of a breaking, surging breaker.” He turns to Aydin. “And you, my friend, you have the wisdom of a grey scholar, the intelligence of all my father’s advisors. What more could I desire than to have you with me on my travels?”

Mesud and Orkkan say nothing. It is Aydin who remarks just as dryly.

“If people are confined to each other’s company for so long, you tend to become sentimental later. Naturally, we are also very happy about your presence, and to continue with the flattery, then I would like to add that our dear Prince is the personification of all the virtues that he has ascribed to us. In him are fused the qualities that are merely divided amongst us.”

“Thank you.” The Prince bows just as courteously. Mesud and Orkkan cheer him on and Aydin continues.

“Isn’t it you, Prince Malik, who designed the six ships of this fleet? Do

they not possess a speed that cannot be matched by any other vessel? And isn't it you, dear Prince, who has for years observed the clumsy, cumbersome, dangerous, and expensive operations of the slave traders? Did you not then decide that you would make the slave market of Zanzibar the gathering place of buyers from all parts of the world by offering white slaves cheaply? The coffers of your royal father will overflow. The..."

"Excuse me, Aydin," the Prince interrupts him. "But do you perhaps find fault with my plans?"

"Not at all," Aydin assures him. "It is almost ridiculous to think that no one has ever before had such a brilliant idea..."

"You are mocking me, aren't you?" Malik interrupts him again, slightly suspiciously. "If you have any objections, speak up. As far as I am concerned, it's a long-winded, unprofitable system on which the lot are operating. For weeks and months, they have to wander around in the wilderness and the treacherous forests to capture a few primitive natives and put them on the market at ridiculous prices. What we are going to do is faster and hopefully without much bloodshed. We overload the market with educated, intelligent, and physically strong Europeans."

"But that's exactly what I'm saying, Malik!" exclaims Aydin. "Here on the south coast of Africa are many small settlements. The inhabitants of the Cape Colony live in peace and tranquility along the sea. It is in the interior where they sleep at night with weapons under their pillows. We simply go ashore and invite them on board."

"Now, why are you talking as if you...?"

"You started with your high-flown eulogies," Aydin retorts.

Malik shrugs his shoulders. He laughs.

"I just suddenly felt that I had to tell you how grateful I am that you have come along." He spreads the cards open on the small rug between them. "But come, your talk has given me a plan, Aydin. In a few weeks, we will be overflowing with lovely slaves and slave girls. Let's each draw a card. The one who turns up the highest will get the first turn to pick out the most beautiful of them all for himself."

"Excellent!" Mesud concedes, and he snatches a card from the pack. "I am always willing to talk about beautiful young ladies."

"And scarcely three weeks out of Zanzibar?" Orkkan clicks his tongue,

but also turns a card over. "I know what promises you made to a certain lady there. And," he swings to Malik, feignedly accusingly. "It applies to you too, Malik. Don't think we don't know why you suddenly launched this expedition. You couldn't properly look a certain court lady in the eye, could you?"

"Nonsense!" Malik retorts. "In any case, when we return one day, everything will be forgotten."

"You carry your sins with you," Aydin adds just as sedately. "You can never escape them."

"Come now, old man," Malik grumbles. "You are becoming too serious. Perhaps I will get annoyed. Draw a card."

"I would like to see that annoyance," Aydin mutters.

"Come on, man," Malik urges him. "Here's mine."

"If I must participate in your childish games then." And Aydin also turns over a card.

"I win!" exclaims Mesud. "You are all witnesses."

"Just remember," and Orkkan's voice is honey-sweet, "I am your best friend."

"We..." Malik holds up his hand. He listens.

"Land ahead, starboard side!" the watch sings out loudly and joyfully from the crow's nest.

"Aha!" The Prince jumps up and his friends follow him. "It's possibly Algoa Bay. We are sailing even faster than I expected."

They walk out from under the multicolored awning with the golden fringes to the gilded railing of the long, narrow afterdeck. In front of them stretches the narrow, slender middle deck uninterrupted to the pointed bow. Six graceful masts proudly pierce the blue sky, groaning under the weight of the massive, triangular sails.

And on either side of the flagship, five sister ships slice through the swells. Like a long, black line just below the gunwales, a single row of gun ports is close together. Malik smiles cheerfully and delights in the fresh, salty breeze against his face. With these six ships, he will take on any fleet, because if he can't overwhelm them, he can at least get away without them ever catching up to him again.

From the middle mast, an officer walks briskly closer. Glittering stones on his turban indicate his rank as that of admiral. He bows deeply before

the Prince.

“It is Algoa Bay, Prince Malik,” he announces.

“I guessed as much, Ramath,” replies Malik. “Are we sailing straight for land?”

“Yes, Your Highness,” replies the admiral matter-of-factly and with confidence. “It’s just a small settlement.”

“That’s good. You know the coast and should know. I have full confidence in your judgment.”

Ramath bows deeply. Behind him, the sailors and soldiers throng together at the railing and stare at the haziness on the horizon where the lines of the beach and the hills and the mountains will eventually take shape. They last saw land a few weeks ago. Malik deliberately sailed in the deep sea alongside to avoid unnecessary encounters with merchant vessels on the recognised routes.

“We will proceed according to our intended plan,” says Ramath, questioningly.

“But of course, my faithful Ramath. It is for you to decide.”

“Then we will just send a boat with a few men ashore,” continues the admiral. “They will assure the settlers of our peaceful visit and scout the area. After dark, we will round up the herd into the kraal.”

“That’s good.”

“Will Your Highness personally go ashore, with the first boatload, or later?”

“Later, Ramath. We will leave the preliminary reconnaissance work to you.”

The admiral bows and departs to make arrangements. Malik puts his arms around the shoulders of Mesud and Orkkan, and they return to the cool shade under the tent.

“Like lambs that lie dozing lazily in the sun, we will catch them!” exclaims Malik cheerfully.

“Adders also lie dozing lazily in the sun and can also be caught unexpectedly!” Aydin retorts sedately. “But adders can bite fatally if they are startled.”

“Pessimist!” Mesud snaps at him. “Let’s go get ready for the slaughter.”

“I hope there are a few who resist,” says Orkkan longingly. “I need practice.”

“You are fools,” Aydin lets them hear! “We are looking for slaves and you want to kill them. What are they worth to us unless they are alive, healthy, strong, and undamaged?”

“Aydin is right,” confirms Malik. “Capture them alive.”

One by one the large sails are hauled in. Like long stumps, the six ships bob in the sheltered bay.

A ship’s boat is lowered. A few of the crew and two officers take their places in it. Hassan, Malik’s personal valet, also goes along. For a long time now Malik has realised that he can fully trust Hassan and that the intelligent, loyal fellow devotes his life to the service of his master.

In any case, Hassan will bring him first-hand information. Malik wishes them good fortune.

It is twilight when the boat returns. During the late afternoon, Malik and his friends had spied on the coast through binoculars. There is a small fort on the highest point, close to the water’s edge. He counts only about four cannons on the parapet. Otherwise, they see a few clay outbuildings and one or two larger buildings that are probably storerooms or inns.

Hassan bows slightly as he comes aboard and reaches Malik. Since he is in close contact with the Prince daily, he does not pay much attention to formalities.

“Friendly, like a sunny spring morning, Prince,” he informs him. “Too grateful that they get the opportunity to trade. They regard the unexpected arrival of such a large fleet, which is practically completely without meat and vegetables, as a great blessing.”

“Wonderful!” exclaims Malik. “You say he managed well with your Dutch and English, Hassan?”

“Easily, Prince.”

“Luck is on our side,” continues Malik. “How wonderful to think that we find the people here in such happy circumstances.”

“You should rather say, the poor things,” Aydin interrupts him. “How awful to come and disturb their rest and deprive them of their freedom.”

“And how tragic that there are people who think deeply,” laughs Malik.

“You are the kind who wants to reform the world.”

“And how do the girls look, Hassan?” inquires Mesud, who is also standing there.

“Strong and healthy, Sheik Mesud,” replies Hassan with a smile.

“High prices,” remarks Malik dryly.

“Pleasant prospects,” smiles Mesud narrowly.

Two hours later, the four friends are sitting in the stern of the foremost boat, which is pulled over the calm water surface with powerful strokes. It is dark, and in the starlight, the beach is not even visible until they are carried onto the sand on the crest of a breaker.

Most of the houses still have lights burning. The inhabitants of the small settlement are perhaps still chatting cheerfully about the unexpected luck that has befallen them.

Soundlessly, four hundred men rush across the beach. There is an outcry near the fort, but it is suddenly interrupted, and shortly afterwards the cries of women and the surprised, uncomprehending shouts of men, which gradually turn to impotent rage, echo in the still evening. With their feet, the Arabs kick open the doors of the houses or smash the windows. The settlers are herded together on a heap next to the water’s edge.

Malik, with Mesud and the others on his heels, had rushed to the fort. On the way, they encountered a pedestrian, and shortly after, reached the closed door of the square stone building. Immediately Malik ordered his men to fall back and seek shelter if they were fired upon. But to his surprise, after a while, he realised that the fort was unmanned.

“They probably felt completely safe because six friendly warships are anchored in the bay,” he remarks contentedly as they walk closer to view the “catch”. The Arabs stand back to let the Prince pass.

For a moment, Malik looks silently over the group in the darkness before him. They stand distraught, like broken reeds at the realisation of the disaster that has befallen them.

“We’ll just look them over tomorrow,” says Malik to Ramath, who has fallen in beside him. “I must congratulate you. Not a single shot was fired.”

“It was your planning, Your Highness.”

“Inhuman... heathen...!” The words burst from the throat of a young man here on the edge of the group of prisoners. Malik can speak Dutch and several other languages well. He realises that the fellow must have realised that he is the leader of the Arabs and the words are therefore