

# **OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES**

## **24. Black Sails on the Horizon**



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# BLACK SAILS ON THE HORIZON

*by*

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## **BLACK SAILS ON THE HORIZON**

by Gerrie Radlof

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## SUMMARY

The ominous sight of black sails against the African horizon heralds a storm brewing in the tranquil community of Moma. But what begins as a simple distraction for the locals soon unravels into a deadly invasion led by the ruthless pirate captain, Kromklou Moran. In the heart of this chaos stands Tier van Heerden, a seemingly ordinary miner concealing a dangerous secret. He's a loyal agent of the legendary Oloff the Pirate, dispatched to uncover the truth behind a resurgence of privateering in the Indian Ocean.

Tier's mission becomes a desperate race against time as Moma falls under the pirates' brutal reign, a relentless storm of cannon fire and cutlass clashes. He must send a warning to Oloff before Kromklou can solidify his power and unleash further terror upon the seas. But in this treacherous game, where loyalty is a currency and betrayal lurks around every corner, trust is a luxury Tier can't afford. Amidst the violence and treachery, Tier finds himself drawn into the turbulent lives of Kromklou's children, the enigmatic Petro and the introspective Daan. Bound by blood but stifled by their father's cruelty, they dream of escape, a future far removed from the barbarity of pirate life. Petro, a woman disguised as a warrior, hides a fierce spirit and yearns for a life beyond the horizon. Daan, a sensitive soul trapped in a world of steel, seeks solace in art and philosophy. As Tier navigates this tangled web of alliances and enmities, he discovers that their fates may be intertwined with his own.

But as Kromklou's paranoia rises, a sinister plot begins to form, placing Tier, Petro, and Daan in a race against time and a shocking battle. Will Oloff arrive in time and who will survive? The fate of Moma hangs in the balance. But who, if anyone, will remain unbetrayed?

## EXTRACT

The five ships are now close, barely a quarter of a mile from the river mouth. But dusk has also fallen and, as Tier had observed, the black shapes melt away into the evening shadow. Because they are difficult to see, they will be poor targets for the cannons of the battery.

Without warning, the port cannons of the foremost ships thunder. The helmsmen have thrown the helm slightly to starboard and the two full broadsides strike at the slope surrounding the battery. The red gunpowder flames illuminate the dark hulls for a moment.

The women on the waterfront shriek in fright. From the battery above, a salvo roars.

“To your homes!” yells Tier urgently. “Arm yourselves and come back so that we can try to repel them here at the water’s edge. It will give the women and children an opportunity to flee into the mountains.”

He himself dashes as fast as he is worth to the only inn in the village where he is staying. He runs up the stairs to his room and grabs two pistols from a drawer. He girds his sabre around his waist and scoops up a few pouches of bullets and gunpowder.

Then he walks to the table next to the window on which the cage with the dove is standing. He is just about to open the door when he restrains himself. A note is already fastened to the leg of the dove. But now he thinks that he might learn something about the attackers and that he could add the information to the note.

## 24. BLACK SAILS ON THE HORIZON

### Chapter 1

“Sails on the horizon!” yells the watchman on the edge of the cliffs at the tip of the isthmus that juts into the sea alongside the mouth of the Ligonja River, as if wanting to accompany the fresh water a little further.

“Sails on the horizon!” repeats the signalman, loudly conveying the tidings to the small battery against the slope of the isthmus.

“Pirates on the horizon!” mutters a young man on the crest of a hill on the opposite side of the river, where he is watching the approaching ships through a telescope. “That’s actually what they ought to be saying,” for he could hear the cry from the other side clearly in the silence before dusk.

Five three-masters are depicted statelily against the sky. The sails are as black as the hulls of the ships. The young man shakes his head uneasily and walks down the slope.

He crosses the river using the swing bridge and joins the group of people on the quay alongside the water’s edge. An excited murmur of voices echoes over the surface of the still, deep-flowing river. Although visiting ships are by no means a rare occurrence at the settlement, they nevertheless remain opportunities for distraction in the tranquil existence of the flourishing community of Moma on the east coast of Africa.

“Most likely, they are the cargo ships,” a fisherman remarks, standing among a group of young men.

“They must be,” agrees another. He is a miner and should know. “The holds are full to overflowing. It is time for the gold ore to be shipped.”

“But I heard from one of the servants at the residence that the Governor is not expecting the ships until next week,” says a third.

“But ask Tier!” exclaims the first, as he notices the young man who has just come walking over the river towards them.

“Yes, Tier should know. He and his telescope are bosom buddies.”

“You’ve probably been up there on the hill again, spying on the breakers,” teases another miner. “The kind of pastime that some people choose!”

Tier van Heerden smiles. He is large in stature and sturdily built, but his movements are as quick as those of an athlete and there are many who have already made acquaintance with his immense strength, to their regret. But his smile is friendly, open and honest. It causes his nose to wrinkle and makes creases in the large, round freckles across the bridge of his nose and alongside his eyes, the freckles that earned him the nickname of Tier.

“They are five ships with black sails,” he replies calmly. “What kind of ships?”

“They are too far, I cannot see.”

“That’s a compliment for your telescope,” jokes a fisherman.

Tier just shrugs his shoulders. As far as these people are concerned, he is merely a miner who has come to Moma to seek work in the gold mines. He gets along well with them, for they are a pleasant, sociable bunch. Everyone lives in prosperity and therefore a mood of pleasant contentment prevails among the people in the village on the bank of the Ligonja, at the foot of the slopes from which ore is mined.

He does not inform them of his suspicions. As far as they are concerned, the visit of ships means news from abroad and a few busy days for the merchants.

“I’ll be back soon!” he calls to the group and walks along the broad footpath up the slope towards the battery.

He gets along well with everyone, and yet he is not entirely happy here in Moma. However friendly they may be, they are not yet his kind of people. Still less is he cut out to mine gold ore.

But Captain Oloff sent him here and Tier van Heerden owes his life to Oloff the Pirate, just like every other member of the crew of the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer, the two magnificent ships that make up the fleet of Oloff van Wagenaar. Captain Oloff had requested him to settle here because rumours had reached Wagenaarsrust that there was a resurgence of privateering activity around the Indian Ocean. Oloff had sent his chosen men to numerous other port cities and towns along the east coast. He desires first-hand information about the new pirate scourge.

Therefore, Tier does not grumble. Together with Oloff and all the others, he had taken an oath to dedicate his life to securing the trade

routes of the sea for peaceful shipping. The entire community of Wagenaarsrust is committed to this life task.

Tier knows Oloff the Pirate's history. A few years ago, Oloff's father, a wealthy merchant of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape of Good Hope, was brutally murdered by pirates. Oloff pursued the ruffians. He managed to seize two ships that had recently fallen into pirate hands. Oloff formed the crews from slaves whom he had freed, prisoners whom he had rescued from the dungeons of pirate camps and castaways from vessels that had been attacked by the pirates and where Oloff had arrived on the scene too late to prevent the slaughter.

Oloff made several alterations to the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer, making them among the fastest ships on the open sea.

Oloff established himself as a pirate in Deelen Bay, the largest and most infamous gathering place of pirate captains, so that he could more easily discover their plans and thwart them. Yet it often happened that he could not prevent the treacherous attacks. He arrived on the scene too late and then had to make a hasty retreat to prevent the pirates from realising that he was trying to stab them in the back. Thus it happened that many of the crimes of others were ascribed to him and the name of Oloff the Pirate became a legend, a legend of recklessness and cruelty. But ultimately, Oloff proved his innocence and he was elevated to honorary captain in the fleet of the Dutch East India Company. He succeeded in destroying Deelen Bay and dealing a paralysing blow to pirate activities on the Indian Ocean.

He and his men then built themselves a peaceful settlement at the mouth of the Kars River on the southernmost tip of Africa. There they live with their families under the capable and beloved leadership of Oloff van Wagenaar. But if news comes that pirates have been sighted in one place or another, wherever on the sea of the globe, then the men cheered and, singing and laughing, they loaded the two ships full of supplies, hoisted the sails and once more felt the roll of the deck beneath their feet and the salty spray of the breakers on their lips and never did they return to Wagenaarsrust without having tracked down and destroyed the pirates.

That is why Tier van Heerden is here now. Oloff wants to know in what area the strange pirates are committing their atrocities. And it would



appear as if Tier will be able to send a message to Wagenaarsrust tonight.

"Where do you think you are going?" calls a watchman at the battery gate to him kindly. Everyone knows and likes Tier.

"I want to have a chat with your commandant," Tier retorts laughingly. "I have a little bit of news for him."

"There are ships approaching," replies the watchman. "You miners are not allowed in our fort."

"Fort!" Tier exclaims. "Do you call this structure a fort?"

"We'll see. Just wait until someone is foolish enough to attempt an attack on Moma!"

"Anyway, where is your commandant?"

"He is inside. As usual, all the cannons are being made ready and loaded. One never knows."

"That's the trouble," says Tier dryly. "Many people never know."

"Come on, stop being clever. Hurry on through. I hope your message is not important enough. The captain doesn't like to be disturbed in the execution of his duties."

"It's precisely about his duty that I want to talk."

Tier waves. He walks through the small courtyard and through the passage into the barracks and storerooms. He climbs the stairs up to the rampart where the young commandant is shouting out quick, but clear orders. He waves when he sees Tier.

"Looking for trouble, or what?" he enquires cheerfully.

"I don't know. Trouble usually comes without one looking for it."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"Those five ships. Did you see their black sails?"

"Yes. What's wrong with that?"

"They don't like to be seen in the dark."

"What are you implying, Tier?"

"I'm just saying. They are coming in so openly and at their ease, but I think they know that we are expecting a few cargo ships soon to remove a large consignment of gold ore."

"And why can't these be the cargo ships?"

"I didn't say they couldn't be. All I did say was that they might not be the cargo ships."

The commandant frowns slightly. Then he clicks his tongue and nods approvingly to Tier.

“We’ll be on our guard. Thank you for the good thought, Tier.”

“It’s a pleasure!” Tier calls back over his shoulder. “I’m sorry that I had to come and bother you.”

After a brief exchange with the watchman at the gate, he walks down the slope towards the quay. Perhaps he would not have paid so much attention to the five ships either, but he is, after all, here precisely because Oloff is of the opinion that pirates are active in the vicinity.

The crowd on the quay has grown. Tier joins a small group of friends. He would like to advise them to leave the waterfront and to go and get ready in case they have to defend themselves. But perhaps he is just scaring them unnecessarily. Perhaps his suspicion is unfounded. His duty is only to send the message to Oloff. After that, if they are indeed attacked, he will cast his lot in with the inhabitants of Moma and fight alongside them.

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thinks that he might learn something about the attackers and that he could add the information to the note.

He will just have to be careful and make sure that he is not injured, for then he will not be able to carry out his task. He storms down the stairs again. He is among the first back out on the street, but at many doors, women are gushing out with bundles of the essentials on their backs. He calls encouraging remarks to them and runs down the street to the quay. The men of Moma are joining him.

Meanwhile, he has heard a second and a third volley being fired and, to his dismay, he notices that there are large gaps in the row of flashes from the rampart as the battery returns the heavy artillery fire.

The next moment, he shouts a warning and throws himself flat on the ground. The first ship is here diagonally in front of them and before the thunder of the shots falls on their ears, the gunpowder flames flash out of the gunports. The bullets sing over their heads and strike and scrape against the houses. A few plough into the streets and among the fleeing women and children.

Tier looks anxiously over his shoulder. The inn may be hit and then the dove will be gone with it. A building on the opposite side of the inn bursts into flames.

He jumps up. He hesitates for a moment and then the bullets from small arms and pistols whistle around him. With barbaric war cries, the pirates jump over the side of the ship and flounder towards the shallow water. The handful of defenders advance to meet them. He does not utter a sound and their jaws are clamped together resolutely.

But at first glance, Tier realises that it is a hopeless fight. Four of the pirates are storming towards him. Tier pulls the trigger of the pistol in his left hand. One of them falls, but the other three keep charging without the slightest hesitation. With a few powerful blows of his long sword arm, Tier makes them freeze in their tracks. Apparently, they had not expected to come up against such a formidable opponent.

Tier, however, does not hesitate. He spins around and dashes up the street. It was foolish, after all, not to have released the dove immediately.

The noise behind him is deafening. Another volley of heavy artillery whistles into the village. Then it ceases, for the pirates are forcing their

way between the houses and they would therefore be hit themselves. There is a group of them right on Tier's heels. He runs away from under them and kicks the front door of the inn closed behind him. He leaps up the stairs, but scarcely does he reach his room door when he hears the front door bursting open. There is a light burning in the vestibule and the pirates spot him immediately. Like a pack of wolves, they storm after him.

He bolts the room door. With two strides, he reaches the window. His hand trembles as he opens the door of the cage and reaches for the dove inside. The bird, however, has become startled. He jumps around the corners of the cage and flaps his wings anxiously.

As Tier's groping fingers seize him by one wing, the door behind him breaks and cracks under the weight of a few men who are throwing themselves against it. Hastily, Tier pulls the mute bird out of the cage and the dove peeps shrilly in fear.

But then he is out. Tier swings his arm to throw the dove through the window when the shot cracks and a blow strikes him like a punch against his left shoulder. It hurls him against the wall where he slowly collapses.

The pirates yell with satisfaction and are about to pounce on him when one of them notices the dove. The poor little bird has broken free from Tier's limp grasp, but has unfortunately flown into one of the windowpanes. He is now flapping directionless around against the ceiling.

"Well! Well!" the pirate exclaims cheerfully. "And what do we discover here? A new-fashioned kind of postal service. Catch the bird, lads!"

He is the first mate of one of the pirates, thus an officer with authority. They spring to obey. It does not take long before the panting dove, with wildly beating heart, is held in the palm of one of them. The first mate steps closer and, unconcerned, but with a measure of interest, he unties the piece of paper around the bird's leg. He unfolds it.

"Listen here men!" he exclaims and begins to read.

Captain Oloff, pirates have invaded Moma. If there is an opportunity, I will add who they are and where they come from. Tier.

The first mate purses his lips. "Well, well," he remarks. "A prepared note for a certain Captain Oloff, just to inform him of our foray as soon