

# **SAHARA**

## **ADVENTURE SERIES**

### **12. Curse of the Ruby**



**MEIRING FOUCHE**

# CURSE OF THE RUBY

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## **CURSE OF THE RUBY**

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## **CURSE OF THE RUBY**

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## SUMMARY

The narrative commences within a droning aircraft traversing the Sahara desert. Six men, attired in the blue uniforms of the French Foreign Legion, journey towards an undisclosed destination. Among them are Fritz Mundt, a large German, Petacci, a diminutive Italian, Jack Ritchie, an Englishman, Podolski, a Pole, and Teuns Stegmann, a tall, blond South African. They are equipped with submachine guns and carry rucksacks and water canteens. Their mission is to rescue a Canadian millionaire and his daughter, whose aircraft crashed in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. During the flight, they discuss rumours surrounding the legendary Rubies of Makesser, purportedly concealed within the Ruined Temple of Makesser.

Teuns Stegmann assumes a central role. He is calm and composed, yet possesses a sharp intellect and a keen intuition for imminent danger. He shares a newspaper clipping detailing Professor Langley's conviction regarding the existence of the rubies. Upon parachuting near the temple and eventually reaching it, Teuns experiences an inexplicable unease, a sense that they are not alone. This feeling intensifies following an incident where a stone nearly strikes him and Ritchie. Tension escalates when they discover the millionaire's abandoned aircraft and later find their own supplies stolen. Teuns' suspicion of a hidden presence within the temple proves accurate when Ritchie vanishes inexplicably.

Teuns's determination to find Ritchie propels him into a series of desperate actions, even defying Sergeant Catroux's orders. He uncovers a secret entrance within the temple but is captured by the demented Professor Oestinof. Even in captivity, Teuns remains resourceful and defiant, employing his intellect to manipulate Oestinof. At one point, he deliberately makes himself known to the Doelaks, knowing he will likely perish there, and thus whistles to attract their attention. Will Teuns's audacity and clever schemes ultimately lead him, Jack, and the millionaire's daughter out of this lethal labyrinth, or will they become victims of the temple's dark secrets and its treasures? In the heart of the

ruined city, where stones whisper secrets of ancient kings and blood-red gems lie hidden, the true peril might not lurk in the visible enemies, but in something far deeper and unknown.

## EXTRACT

“We must get away!” D’Arlan shouted to the pilot. “Some of these Doelaks have rifles. They could shoot up the engines.”

The engines roared deeply, and then, to the men’s relief, they felt the large aircraft move. It charged towards the oncoming Doelaks, appearing as if the aerial behemoth would carve a path through the horsemen. But before the aircraft reached the foremost riders, it lifted off the ground, and the pilot swiftly pulled the nose skyward, banked sharply to the right, and let it soar over the temple. The Doelaks fired a few shots at the aircraft, but without causing any noticeable damage.

As they circled over the temple, the men looked out and saw the few camels standing in the shade of one of the walls. “It’s that group we clashed with on the plateau who are now in the temple,” said Catroux. “In any case, I wouldn’t want to be in their shoes.”

The men saw a few figures lying on the highest walls, submachine guns in hand. But they paid no attention to the aircraft. Apparently, all their focus was fixed on the Doelaks who were now approaching the temple in a wide crescent, the aircraft being beyond their reach.

“I don’t see him,” said Fritz Mundt, his eyes narrowed as he concentrated, trying to spot Teuns. And as he said it, he voiced the sentiments of all the other men. They were at peace with everything else. They searched only for Teuns, but there was no sign of a tall figure in whitish trousers and the blue cloak of the Foreign Legion. “What could have become of him?” asked Podolski.

## **12. CURSE OF THE RUBY**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **DARK TEMPLE**

The aircraft droned high above the Sahara, which far below was already slowly assuming a purple hue in the nascent twilight creeping in from the east, gradually diminishing the blood-red ribbon of sunlight in the west.

On the hard benches within the belly of the droning behemoth sat six men, appearing bound for a very distant world, for each carried an immense rucksack, a colossal water canteen, and each was armed with a light submachine gun lying flat at their feet in the aircraft's hold. They wore the blue uniforms of the French Foreign Legion, their kepis starkly white in the dim light inside the plane.

Fritz Mundt, the large blond German, crossed his legs and adjusted his rucksack. He looked at the small man sitting directly opposite him, Petacci, the cunning little Italian who could catch a sand flea like no other man in the Foreign Legion.

"You probably imagine you're Mussolini now that you get to ride in an aircraft, eh?" Mundt asked Petacci tauntingly.

"I am accustomed to flying," Petacci recounted, and the others burst into laughter.

"You sewer rat!" yelled the blond Englishman, Jack Ritchie, above the roar of the powerful aircraft engines. "You look like someone accustomed to an aircraft."

"Be that as it may," said Podolski, the large Pole, "it's far better to be sitting in this aircraft than slogging it out down there..." He glanced down at the vastness of the Sahara where they had trodden so many tracks in the glowing sand, where they had so often been tormented by thirst and hunger, and where they had so frequently turned back from

the brink of death.

“Or what do you say, Afrikaner?” Podolski asked the tall, blond South African, Teuns Stegmann, who sat completely at ease, legs crossed.

“I say nothing,” answered the powerful blond man with broad shoulders and bright blue eyes, “I’m still enjoying the ride.”

They glanced in turn at the rather short, stocky Sergeant Catroux, who sat leaning back asleep, his mouth wide open.

“The sergeant must be dreaming of the Seine and the Arc de Triomphe,” jested Jack Ritchie, watching the sleeping man.

“What on earth were this Canadian millionaire and his daughter doing here in the Sahara?” inquired Podolski, yawning. “Did they have nothing better to do than fly around here and then let their plane crash?”

“A millionaire can go wherever he pleases,” opined Fritz Mundt, gazing out at the sandy desert slowly darkening below them.

“I wonder what that daughter looks like?” said Ritchie, shifting his large rucksack slightly.

“She probably has a matchstick neck and wears glasses,” concluded Fritz Mundt.

“Who says she doesn’t look like someone from Hollywood?” Podolski wanted to know. “Some millionaires have beautiful daughters, so I hear.”

“If she’s anything worth looking at, Teuns Stegmann will probably break his legs again playing the gentleman,” said Fritz, snorting and rolling the quid of tobacco around in his cheek.

Teuns stretched comfortably, a smile in his blue eyes. “In this hostile desert, one must be charming towards a lady when given the chance,” said the South African.

“But why fly over this part of the Sahara to Dakar? That’s just asking



for trouble,” said Ritchie.

“Yes, and now we have to fetch them from the foothills of the Atlas Mountains and return them to civilisation,” complained Petacci. “Why couldn’t they have gotten hold of a camel or two and made their own way out?”

“This millionaire is an important man,” said Teuns without any obvious interest. “Besides, he’s Canadian, and the Canadians probably buy dates from Morocco. We need to stay on good terms with them.”

“And the millionaire and his daughter crashed in Doelak territory, don’t forget that,” Fritz Mundt added gravely. “I wonder if the Doelaks haven’t already carved them up. The Doelaks supposedly fancy blonde women...”

“Who says she’s blonde?” Petacci asked suddenly.

“I just assumed,” Fritz replied, shrugging his colossal shoulders.

They fell silent for a while, and Teuns Stegmann stared thoughtfully at the tips of his heavy desert boots. He squinted one eye as if taking aim at something, and then said distractedly, “Who knows, perhaps the millionaire and his daughter came looking for the rubies of Makesser...”

“The rubies of Makesser...” Jack Ritchie echoed with a dismissive laugh. “Every two years, that story gets dredged up again. Then everyone forgets about it, and then someone comes along and spouts a load of nonsense about it.”

“This time it truly seems as though the rubies of Makesser must exist,” said Teuns, slowly unbuttoning the breast pocket of his uniform and taking out a worn newspaper clipping. He lazily spread it open between his slender, sturdy fingers and read aloud in the dim light.

“Professor Langley, the renowned researcher from the British Museum, is now firmly convinced that the fabulous Rubies of Makesser do indeed exist and that they are hidden in the Ruined Temple of Makesser in the

foothills of the Atlas Mountains.

“The professor estimates the value of these rubies at many hundreds of thousands of Rand and is convinced that the rubies were hidden by the last Makesser king in the main temple of the Makessers when this people was wiped out by the Doelaks two centuries ago.”

Teuns carefully folded the piece of paper again, put it back in his pocket, and looked at the others in turn. “What do you think of that?”

“Then we should take advantage of this little excursion to get our hands on these so-called fabulous rubies,” Ritchie suggested. “We are going to make the Makesser temple our headquarters to rescue the millionaire and his daughter, aren’t we?”

“Brilliant!” exclaimed Podolski. “I’m going to buy myself a villa in East Prussia, and Petacci here will make enough money to start a nice dagga-smuggling operation, right, Italian?”

“It’s all nonsense,” said Fritz Mundt, spitting. “How old is that newspaper clipping? It was probably on the Ark with Noah, if you ask me.”

“This clipping is two months old,” Teuns Stegmann informed them.

“Then the whole world will probably descend on this poor temple again to search for the rubies,” said Petacci. “We just need to make sure we get away before Doelak fortune hunters possibly appear on the scene.”

“Doelaks don’t read newspapers,” scoffed Ritchie, looking out and seeing the rugged terrain of the foothills now sliding past below them. “We’re above the foothills,” the Englishman said. “It won’t be long now.”

“I don’t like this business,” said Fritz Mundt, feeling his parachute pack.

“Don’t worry, German, with that paunch of yours, you’ll float down to earth like a balloon,” teased Podolski. “And if your parachute happens

not to open, just make sure you land on your stomach. You'll land as softly as if you'd landed on a feather bed."

"You Poles only know sabres and blockhead horses," Fritz retorted mockingly. "I'll laugh myself silly if your parachute doesn't open and you make a wet spot of yourself down on the hard ground of the Atlas region."

Suddenly, the co-pilot emerged from the cockpit. "We are approaching the Temple of Makesser," he called out. "Please prepare."

Sergeant Catroux jerked upright and got to his feet. "Prepare to jump," he commanded, still half asleep, quickly bending down and picking up his light submachine gun.

"Sergeant Catroux," said the pilot, "in two days, we will land approximately thirty kilometres due east of the Makesser Temple. We expect you to be there then with the Canadian millionaire and his daughter. We will pick you all up there. Please do not keep us waiting. This is Doelak territory, and we cannot afford to sit indefinitely in the open desert. If you are not yet there, we will wait as long as we deem it safe. If you do not arrive, we will depart and land again later."

"We will be there," promised Catroux, adjusting his heavy rucksack and checking his own parachute pack.

The other men peered out of the window, and far ahead and far below them, against the last red glow of the day, they saw the massive black ruins of the Makesser Temple. It looked like a black monster that had kept watch here through all the centuries, menacing, ominous, and oppressive.

"There lies the temple with its fabulous rubies," whispered Petacci. "Perhaps we'll all be millionaires when we return..."

The men paid no attention to Petacci's frivolity. Following Catroux's instructions, they carefully checked each other's parachute packs. They picked up the extra water canteens, slung their submachine guns over

their shoulders, and then stood ready, waiting for the pilot's command to jump.

"You know our orders," Catroux said in his relaxed, almost intimate manner. "We have been sent to take this Canadian millionaire and his daughter from these foothills to the flat desert where they can be rescued by aircraft. Nothing must go wrong. At a specific time, we must be waiting for the aircraft in the desert. We are deliberately jumping late in the evening because we must not be seen here if we can help it. This is, as you know, Doelak territory. We will use the Temple of Makesser as a base and first fetch the millionaire and his daughter there. I expect each of you to do his duty. When we reach the ground, I will hoot like an owl. You will all come to me so that we can proceed immediately to the temple. We move on tomorrow morning to the place where the aircraft is supposed to have made the emergency landing... That is all."

"Aren't we going to look for the rubies of Makesser, Sergeant?" inquired Petacci with that mocking smile of his.

"That is not part of our task, Private Petacci," Catroux answered sternly. "We are soldiers of the French Foreign Legion on a rescue mission, not prospectors and fortune hunters."

"A few rubies wouldn't be bad, though," interjected Fritz Mundt, merely to shield Petacci slightly from the sergeant.

"Ready," said the co-pilot before anyone could say anything further.

"We are ready," Catroux replied, moving to stand by the aircraft door.

"All the best," said the pilot laughingly as he slid the door open, "and... do try to be at the designated place at the appointed time, otherwise things could become very difficult for all of us."

The wind struck furiously through the open door, causing the collar of Catroux's kepi to flap wildly. The sergeant stood in the doorway, holding onto both sides.