

# SAHARA ADVENTURE SERIES

## 13. Bloodstained Dunes



**MEIRING FOUCHE**

# **BLOODSTAINED DUNES**

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*Published by:*

**TREASURE CHEST BOOKS - PUBLISHERS**

**Strand Mews**

**Strand**

**2025**

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The cover illustration for the Sahara Adventure Series was generated by AI software, which enriches the narrative. This book is being released for the first time in English in e-book format.

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## **BLOODSTAINED DUNES**

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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

At Dini Salam, a French Foreign Legion outpost in the Sahara, radio technician Gide receives a chilling message. Oil Camp D is under attack by unidentified assailants clad in Legion uniforms. This alarming news reaches Colonel Le Clerq, already troubled by concerns over a missing patrol. Amidst this tension, Teuns Stegmann, a tall, blond South African, stands under the shower, speculating about a new recruit, Metaxas, a dark man who appears suspicious. A confrontation ensues, wherein Teuns accuses Metaxas of being a Russian, not a Greek. A fistfight breaks out, interrupted by Sergeant Zhakof, but its underlying tension lingers palpably.

Teuns plays a pivotal role in the events that subsequently unfold. He is part of the fifty-man strong expedition under the command of Captain D'Arlan, dispatched to protect Oil Camp C. Teuns's keen observation leads him to notice horse tracks near the camp, causing D'Arlan to suspect foul play. The tension mounts as they approach the deserted camp, where an ominous silence prevails. Teuns's suspicions are confirmed when they discover a trace of blood beneath a steel door, leading to a scene of horror in the workshop. Teuns's intuition regarding Metaxas is chillingly validated when they realize the camp never received the warning message. The encounter with Koebikof, a colossal Russian and Madame Bonnet's champion, reveals the extent of the conspiracy. Teuns and Fritz Mundt become hostages, while D'Arlan is sent to retrieve the rest of the patrol.

Teuns's quick thinking and bravery come to the fore when he and Fritz execute an escape attempt, but they are recaptured and brutally treated. D'Arlan, caught in a deadly dilemma, makes a desperate decision that places Teuns and Fritz's lives in jeopardy. The wind becomes an ally in a daring escape plan. D'Arlan plans to attempt a rescue of Teuns and Fritz with nearly fifty men at his disposal. The denouement is fraught with intrigue, as Teuns finds himself in a situation that will test his abilities to the absolute limit. Will the rescue attempt prove to be

Teuns's greatest challenge ever? The true nature of the enemy is unveiled in a secret yet to be unravelled...

## EXTRACT

In the dim light cast by the burning petrol, flung far across the sand by the explosions, they observe the utter chaos in Koebikof and the Arabs' camp. They witness with satisfaction how D'Arlan and his men attack from the other side, from the direction of the oil camp, pouring lead at close range into the swirling chaos of men.

The last thing the four horsemen see is the churning mass finally heading northwards, away from their attackers.

But Jack and Podolski, they have no time to behold this astonishing spectacle. They have received strict orders from D'Arlan. They must round up the mass of horses and drive them westwards, towards Dini Salam.

The four riders spread out, driving the horses from behind, shouting and yelling, and then the fleeing animals begin to streak towards the west, with Jack and his companions pursuing them like four cowboys bringing cattle home...

D'Arlan pursues the enemy only until the flames on the desert sand die down. Then he calls his men back. They move back towards the shed after gathering automatic rifles, bandoliers, ammunition clips, water canisters, and food from the small battlefield in the light of Koebikof's small captured searchlight, amidst the heaps of Arabs and bandits they have shot dead.

Back in the shed, D'Arlan immediately posts guards. Someone has procured a lantern. In its light, he and Catroux walk towards the two machine guns that Teuns and his group stealthily captured.

"Excellent, mes amis," D'Arlan says to Teuns and the few men who assisted him. "You all deserve the Croix de Guerre..."

# 13. BLOODSTAINED DUNES

## Chapter 1

### THE NEWCOMER

Private Gide is a bored man. He is a radio technician of the French Foreign Legion in Dini Salam, the principal outpost in the southern part of the Sahara. The entire afternoon he has been sitting here in the stuffy old radio room, swatting flies and wiping away sweat. Since early this morning, he has not sent or received another message. Then, he relayed the message from Colonel Le Clerq, commander of Dini Salam, through to the headquarters in Algiers. It was a short message, little more than routine. The only peculiar thing about it was that Le Clerq informed high command that a routine patrol had not yet returned and was already two days overdue.

But radio technician Gide finds this not at all peculiar, seeing as it surely isn't the first time a patrol has returned late from the Sahara. It is as little peculiar to him as the wretched desert flies swirling around his face.

He has already tried various wavelengths a few times and listened briefly to the chatter of amateur radiographers talking about everything under the sun. He gives a long yawn, reaches out his hand, and begins turning a black knob. He's going to listen a bit more to what the amateurs have to say. Perhaps they'll say something about Algiers.

Algiers... When will he be in that glorious city again? He thinks of the light-blond French girl he met when he was last there on leave. His hand stills on the black radio knob as he thinks of her. Those eyes! That waist! Those hips... and that little gate! Gide turns cold and then hot again as he thinks of her. He closes his eyes and calculates when he will get leave again. Another full nine long months! Good heavens, by the time he arrives there again, she might have already forgotten him.

The radio receiver crackles and grinds under Gide's fingers. He turns the knob slowly, absently. He is so lost in the memory of this lovely

creature, with whom he spent such delightful evenings in the boulevards and restaurants of Algiers, that initially, he doesn't hear what is coming towards him over the radio.

He yawns another long yawn, but then his sweaty head shoots forward, his eyes narrow, and he frantically turns the knob to try and hear better.

Over the warm Sahara air, someone is sending out a message, an urgent, anxious message...

Gide practically crawls into the device, constantly adjusting to try and improve the sound, and now he has completely forgotten about the flies congregating on his sweaty cheeks.

“Attention... Attention... Attention,” the terrified voice comes softly and gratingly over the ether. “This is Oil Camp D... This is Oil Camp D... We are being attacked by unknowns. We are being attacked by unknowns... More than half the camp already wiped out.”

Gide snatches his pencil and notebook closer, feverishly writing down the words.

“Attention. Oil Camp D under attack by unknowns... Cannot understand it. They are wearing the uniforms of the Foreign Legion... They...”

Gide frantically adjusts the receiver, turning the knob back and forth. But that voice is silent. There isn't another sound.

Suddenly, it is as if Gide knows that nothing more will be said. He hastily writes down the message and springs so quickly towards the door of his little radio room that he tumbles over a chair.

In the long bathroom of the Dini Salam fortress, Teuns Stegmann, the tall, blond South African, stands sputtering under the lukewarm shower water. The men had been drilling the entire afternoon in the fortress courtyard, and it felt as though the Sahara sun would burn them to death. That is why this water is so refreshing.

“This Catroux will kill us yet,” Teuns sighs under the shower water.



“Three solid hours of drilling on an afternoon like this. The man is going senile.”

“He just wants to make good soldiers of us, mon ami,” says the German, winking at Teuns, who is now also standing towelling himself dry.

They suddenly fall silent. A colossal dark soldier, his jet-black hair gleaming with water, walks past them. Fritz nudges Teuns in the side with his elbow. “What do you think of this new recruit?” asks Fritz. “Why is he always so aloof, like a solitary bull?”

“I understand he is a radio technician,” Teuns replies. “Metaxas, so he claims is his surname.”

“Then he belongs to the wise Greek people, does he not?” Fritz asks-says as he drapes the towel over his broad shoulders.

“He’s as much a Greek as I am,” says Teuns, watching the big dark man walk away. He sees Fritz looking at him questioningly. “That fellow would fit better on the Russian steppes than in the hills of Greece,” says Teuns.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I have such a feeling.”

“Do you think he’s hiding something?”

“I think he’s hiding more than we imagine...”

“We’ll soon see,” Fritz answers quickly. He whistles. “Here... Metaxas,” calls the big German. And when the dark soldier looks around, Fritz beckons him closer. Metaxas already has his trousers on. He turns halfway and looks sideways at Teuns and Fritz. He glares at them with his jet-black eyes, his thick eyebrows knitted together in a frown.

“Come here, Metaxas,” orders Fritz. “We want to talk to you.”

“I see no rank insignia on you,” Metaxas replies sullenly. “Or did you

swallow them?”

“Rather impertinent too,” interjects Petacci, the small Italian who stands here with Teuns and Fritz, dancing about as he tries to pull his trousers over his wet legs.

“Rank or no rank, come here!” commands Teuns.

“I have only one rank, and that is that I am the best fist-fighter in the Foreign Legion,” bellows Fritz Mundt. “Come here, before we turn you inside out like a sausage casing.”

Metaxas slowly walks back, his muscles rippling and shifting as he moves. His chest is powerful and broad, but his hips and legs are remarkably slender for such a large man.

“You’ll have to watch out for that one,” warns Podolski the Pole, who has come to stand with the others. Jack Ritchie, the English member of this group of men who are always together, also draws closer, as do some of the other men interested in what is about to happen.

Metaxas comes to stand right in front of Teuns, his hands pressed onto his hips, his eyes very narrow and piercing.

“You presume a great deal, old Dutchman,” says Metaxas in broken French. “I don’t much care for being ordered around. Especially not on a hot afternoon like this.” In the man’s dark eyes glows an astonishing and menacing anger. His large jaws move slowly, and his fists tremble slightly at his sides.

Teuns wipes his chin with the towel, smiling condescendingly at the man who has seemingly become so enraged for no reason. “You’re quick to get on your high horse, old darkie,” says Teuns tauntingly. “Where did you inherit that short temper?”

“You should count your words,” threatens Metaxas. “Your kind I press into a tin can and put the lid on.”

“And this tall man will hit you so your jaws sit backwards,” Fritz Mundt

informs the dark fellow.

“Why don’t you try?” inquires Metaxas. “There’s nothing stopping him.”

“We’ve just bathed,” pipes up Petacci from one side. “We wouldn’t like to get dirty again now.”

Metaxas doesn’t even glance at the little Italian. He just glares at Teuns. “What is it you want to know?” he asks the South African curtly. “Why did you call me back here?”

“You’re rather cocky for a newcomer in Dini Salam,” replies the South African. “In any case, I just wanted to tell you I think you’re as much Metaxas as I am Metaxas. I think if you’d said you were Bulganin, you’d have been closer to the truth. You see, we don’t think you’re a Greek, but a Russian, and we don’t like men who pretend to be what they are not.”

Teuns realizes full well that he is just talking nonsense, but ever since this newcomer arrived two weeks ago with reinforcements for the garrison, he has interested the other men, and because he always keeps so much to himself, they have always wondered who and what he is. That is why they are standing here challenging him now.

Metaxas’s two eyes look like fiery coals.

His black fist shoots out so quickly that it leaves everyone shocked and stunned. The blow catches the unsuspecting Teuns on the jawbone, sending him reeling backwards so that he falls with a hard crack of his head against the bathroom wall.

Fritz Mundt wants to charge Metaxas immediately, but the South African’s voice restrains him. “Wait,” calls Teuns. “Leave him to me. This little score is between me and Bulganin...”

Teuns slowly gets up and, still a little unsteady on his feet, walks back to where Metaxas stands quite calmly, slightly stooped, his fists half-

closed.

“You hit easily, don’t you, Bulganin,” says Teuns challengingly. “And you strike when another man doesn’t expect it, eh?” He runs his fist over his mouth. “Now you must ready yourself, Metaxas... I’m going to hit you between the eyes, and I’m warning you beforehand, but this will be the first and only time I will warn you.”

Teuns lunges forward, aims low with his left hand, and as Metaxas instinctively lowers his fists, Teuns’s right fist connects with a hard smack between his eyes, causing him to stagger backwards from the punishing blow. And before Metaxas can recover, Teuns hits him with a short left and a short right hook. Metaxas’s heavy head jerks back and forth, and he tries desperately to block, but the South African drives him relentlessly through the men against the wall with swinging fists.

But Metaxas stays on his feet. The men, who have witnessed many fights of this kind, suddenly know that he is not a cat to be handled without gloves. He suddenly ducks low under Teuns’s swinging fists, grabs the tall man around the waist, and the next moment flings Teuns over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, so that the South African hits the ground with a gasp amongst the men. And before Teuns has recovered his senses, Metaxas flies through the air like a heavy leopard. Teuns catches him with his feet and kicks him away at an angle.

Before Metaxas can kick again, a whistle blows shrilly, and both Teuns and Metaxas are instantly on their feet, the fight forgotten.

“What nonsense is going on here?” It is the bellowing voice of Sergeant Zhakof.

“They were just wrestling a bit, Sergeant,” says Jack Ritchie, gesturing towards Teuns and Metaxas.

“This is no time for wrestling,” bellows the red-haired Russian sergeant. “Get out of here, you crawling creatures, or I’ll give you a wrestling lesson or two.”