

# SAHARA ADVENTURE SERIES

## 15. Bloody Sunrise



**MEIRING FOUCHE**

# BLOODY SUNRISE

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## **BLOODY SUNRISE**

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## **BLOODY SUNRISE**

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## SUMMARY

Lieutenant Andre du Bois, commander of Fort Laval, is roused from his slumber by Boelganof, the infamous leader of a ruthless band purporting to aid the Arabs in their struggle for freedom against France. Boelganof announces that he has seized control of Fort Laval, without firing a single shot, thanks to four traitors within the fort's walls. Du Bois is stunned and bewildered, especially upon realising that Boelganof speaks the truth and the fort is indeed under his control. Captain D'Arlan and his small reinforcement column, including Teuns Stegmann, arrive shortly thereafter, completely unaware of the takeover, and are led into an ambush.

Teuns Stegmann plays a pivotal role in the subsequent events. He attempts to divert Boelganof's attention by claiming knowledge of the whereabouts of the legendary Sabre of Doetra and the rubies of Makesser. Teuns's cunning plan to bribe a guard fails tragically when Nagi, the guard, is executed. Tension escalates as Boelganof reveals his intentions to annihilate the fort, and everyone within it, using a long-range rocket. The growing desperation and the looming threat of obliteration weigh heavily upon the prisoners.

Teuns's attempts to manipulate Boelganof culminate when Sheikh Ebrahim makes an unexpected appearance. Teuns tries to broker a deal with him, but it proves unsuccessful. Ultimately, Boelganof's own treachery leads to unforeseen consequences. Boelganof himself is now on the verge of destruction. Events unfold rapidly, and the tension reaches a breaking point with mere seconds remaining. Will the legionnaires survive the rocket launch, and what role will Teuns play in the final denouement? The true test may lie not in the explosion itself, but in the revelation of an exceptionally clever scheme.

## EXTRACT

Boelganof stormed towards the small window set into the southern wall of his office. He seized the iron bars, appearing ready to wrench them from the stone edifice. “That base, insolent rabble!” exclaimed the Russian. “Has the devil taken possession of them? They are supposed to be on our side! It was Doelaks who were here, surely.”

“It was Doelaks,” affirmed the guard.

“Then what possesses them now?” With mounting bitterness, Boelganof watched as the horses were driven further and further into the desert until they eventually merged with the heat haze on the horizon.

Then he spun around, nearly knocking the guard off his feet, and stormed out of the door.

Boelganof broke into a run towards the barracks. He wrenched the heavy door open himself, and the next moment, he stood there, panting and furious.

He was so short of breath that he couldn't speak for a short while. He simply stood there, gasping and glaring, his hands pressed onto his hips. His eyes resembled two flames. His lips were ashen with rage.

Some of the men slowly rose from the floor, staring at Boelganof in astonishment. Teuns had to concentrate to suppress a smile, knowing that the Russian, in this mood, was capable of anything.

“You betrayed me!” the Russian finally gasped out. “You bribed some of my guards! You must have bribed those Arabs.”

“What are you talking about now, Boelganof?” Teuns asked.

“You know what I'm talking about, you filth!” Boelganof snarled at him, his fat hand moving instinctively towards his revolver holster. Then he flung his hand away in a southerly direction. “They are driving away our horses. But you will pay for this!”

# 15. BLOODY SUNRISE

## Chapter 1

### UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Lieutenant Andre du Bois, commander of Fort Laval, the southernmost fortress of the French Foreign Legion in the Sahara, was roused from his sleep by something tickling beneath his nose. He swatted with his hand, imagining it to be one of those irksome flies bothering him so early in the morning. He wearily opened his eyes and saw that it was barely light. Then he turned over, attempting to sleep further.

It was then that Lieutenant Du Bois heard the deep, clear voice with the strange accent echo through his bedroom. "Good morning, mon ami," said that voice.

Du Bois swung around swiftly, his eyes wide open, his entire frame suddenly very, very awake.

Then he shot upright in his bed, staring bewilderedly at the large, massive man in the strange uniform with black gaiters, leaning nonchalantly against the wall by his window.

That man, with his rugged brown face, stood there smiling at him. And while smiling, he fidgeted with a reed between his teeth.

At this moment, Du Bois was practically holding his breath. "I am sorry to disturb you so early, mon ami," said the stranger, glancing with a mocking smile at the commander of Fort Laval.

Du Bois merely stared wordlessly at his visitor.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the large stranger said abruptly. "I am Boelganof, the terror of the Sahara!"

"Boelganof!" whispered Du Bois. "No! Not Boelganof!"

"Yes, mon ami, Boelganof," said the large man, and this time there was

something hard, something menacing in his smile. “I surprised you, did I not, Lieutenant Du Bois? You are not accustomed to receiving visitors so early, are you, mon ami?”

Lieutenant Du Bois sprang out of bed and stood there trembling.

“I am here to take over Fort Laval in the name of the freedom fighters of the Sahara,” Boelganof announced.

Lieutenant Du Bois felt as though he had plummeted into an icy chasm, for he stood staring at the greatest villain, the greatest brute, and the greatest shedder of blood in all of Africa. Here before him, in the flesh, stood Boelganof, the leader of an unscrupulous and bloodthirsty, well-armed band that pretended to want to help the Arabs in their fight for freedom against France. This was the same man who had already cost the lives of numerous Legionnaires, who had attacked and annihilated several oil camps here in the Sahara. This was Boelganof, who, in collaboration with the Doelak Arabs, sought to destroy French authority in North Africa and wipe out the French Foreign Legion.

Boelganof the wild dog, for he devoured and destroyed everything and everyone he encountered. Small patrols of the Foreign Legion he had already annihilated. Men, women, and children at the oil camps prospecting beneath the red wilderness of the Sahara, he had indiscriminately killed or abducted, and no one knew whither.

And here Boelganof now stood in the bedroom of the commander of Fort Laval.

Lieutenant Andre du Bois did not have a cowardly hair on his head, but at this moment, he felt like a child terrified by some strange apparition. With a deep frown creasing his brow, he looked speechlessly at the massive man with his two black gaiters.

Boelganof revelled in Du Bois’s consternation. In his thick voice, he said, “You did not guard Fort Laval very well, mon ami! Boelganof the Great entered through the open gate tonight without any difficulty!”

“You killed my guards!” cried Du Bois, taking a furious step closer.

But Boelganof merely chuckled softly, causing his belly to shake and his chin to quiver. “No,” said Boelganof, “I did not kill a single one of your guards, Lieutenant Du Bois. I do these things the proper way. I made preparations long ago for this entry into Fort Laval tonight. Not a single shot was fired, not a single drop of blood was shed, yet Boelganof is inside Fort Laval.”

“You speak utter nonsense, Boelganof,” Du Bois cried out.

“One must do things correctly, mon ami,” said Boelganof, making a delicate gesture with his two large, rough hands.

“Apparently, you did not realise that I had a few allies inside your little garrison, Lieutenant Du Bois.”

Du Bois’s eyes widened, and his face turned deathly white. “What do you mean by that, Boelganof?” he asked, his voice trembling while his fists clenched spasmodically.

Boelganof laughed deeply and merrily. “There is something you still need to learn, Lieutenant Du Bois,” said the large Russian. “And that is that any man’s loyalty can be bought. I purchased the loyalty of four of your men here in the garrison even before you came to Fort Laval.”

“You filthy dog!” Du Bois said harshly.

“There are few people who won’t do something for a good price, Du Bois,” said Boelganof, as if he hadn’t heard the man’s outburst. “I made contact with these four legionnaires back in Dini Salam. And today, when my column appeared before the gate at the appointed time, they were let in. I wanted to wake you earlier, mon ami, but then I thought, why should I wake you so early? You need not worry as everything is in order. I have posted guards at the barracks, and when your men awaken this morning, like you, they will find themselves disarmed and held at gunpoint by Boelganof’s men.”



Lieutenant Du Bois slowly sat down on the bed, suddenly feeling his legs unable to support him. Fort Laval in the hands of Boelganof! It was simply unbelievable! It was appalling! Whatever happened, this event would signify the end of his distinguished military career. To be outmanoeuvred in this manner by a brute and a ruffian like Boelganof was simply staggering. The military authorities would accept absolutely no explanation from him, Du Bois. To think that an outpost of the French Foreign Legion, and a sturdy fortress like Fort Laval at that, could fall into the hands of a gang without a fight, was just too indescribably crazy! And yet, that is precisely what had happened! Here he sat on his cot, and there stood Boelganof before him.

He glanced quickly at his wristwatch. If Boelganof hadn't been telling the truth, the bugle would have already announced the start of the new day over the Fort.

Du Bois flew off the bed and sprang towards a window overlooking the Fort's inner square, and with sweat burning saltily on his lips, he witnessed Boelganof's entire troop unsaddled within the square. There wasn't a sign of a Legionnaire. The entire square was filled with Boelganof's horses and men.

The heavy gates of the main entrance had been lowered, and Boelganof's guards moved along the ramparts.

Du Bois shook his head and closed his eyes as if he simply couldn't believe what he was seeing. It was Boelganof's voice that jolted him back to reality. "Come, mon ami," said Boelganof, "get dressed so that I may discuss the future with you."

"There is nothing I wish to discuss with you, Boelganof," Du Bois said defiantly. "I demand that you release me and my men immediately. I order you to vacate this Fort within the next half hour. Apparently, you fail to realise that a column is en route to Fort Laval."

Boelganof merely peered out from under his bushy eyebrows at the rebellious French officer. Then he laughed curtly through his nose.

“Apparently, you are under a misapprehension, Lieutenant Du Bois,” said the Russian. “You are no longer in command here. Boelganof is in command here. You can no longer give orders, mon ami. Boelganof gives the orders in Fort Laval today.”

“You are out of your mind, Boelganof,” said Du Bois. “Capitaine D’Arlan and his column are approximately another day’s journey from Fort Laval. D’Arlan will shoot you to pieces. And if you so much as touch a hair on the head of one man in this garrison, your punishment will be all the more severe.”

Boelganof had moved towards the door and leaned with utmost indifference against the doorframe.

“You remind me very much of a bantam cock, mon ami,” said Boelganof. “I am not one to be frightened by your Capitaine D’Arlan. I have clashed with him before, and it was a close call whether I caught him. This time, Boelganof will await him here behind the walls of Fort Laval. It will be amusing to see Capitaine D’Arlan’s face when he discovers that not Lieutenant Du Bois, but Boelganof, commands Fort Laval.” Then he turned and walked out. Over his shoulder, Boelganof said, “I give you five minutes to get dressed, Lieutenant Du Bois.”

That was early this morning, just after dawn.

Now dusk is settling purple over the Sahara, and the night wind has already risen, blowing stronger from the west, from the direction of the Atlas Mountains, which are slowly fading into obscurity. The precursor of the wind that will blow all night long stirs up small clouds of dust on the vast high plateau north of Fort Laval, the plateau from which one descends so abruptly to the great low plain where the fort is situated.

Captain D’Arlan, arguably the bravest and most capable officer in the French Foreign Legion, suddenly raised his hand. Behind him, the column of some thirty legionnaires came to a halt. They were grateful for this respite, as D’Arlan had pushed them hard this afternoon.

Through the dimness, they all looked almost longingly towards the soft grey walls of the fort, still faintly visible in the rapidly fading light.

“I can’t believe I’m grateful to see the walls of that pit,” said the tall blond man near the head of the column. His name was Teuns Stegmann, the South African in the French Foreign Legion.

“Even that nest of heat and flies is better than this desert with its heat and sand,” said the giant of a man next to Teuns. His accent betrayed him as a German, Fritz Mundt, arguably the strongest man in the French Foreign Legion.

Fritz and Teuns found themselves in this small column along with their few friends. There is the Englishman, Jack Ritchie, the Pole, Podolski, and the diminutive Italian, Petacci. It had made them think all along that this was a special expedition. The fact that their small group and a number of other handpicked men from the large garrison of Dini Salam had been chosen for this expedition, and under the command of D’Arlan himself, made them understand that this was not just a routine relief march.

“Tonight you can sleep soundly again in the feather beds of Fort Laval, old giant,” Petacci teased Fritz Mundt. “And tomorrow morning you can sit under the coloured parasol with a large glass of beer and think of the fair maidens of your own Germany.”

Fritz Mundt made a gesture as if to strike the little Italian down, but he didn’t get that far, because D’Arlan spoke.

“Well, mes amis,” said D’Arlan, gesturing towards Fort Laval, “there it lies. I can see the tricolour fluttering from here. Fort Laval is at least still in the possession of the French Foreign Legion.”

Then D’Arlan turned to face his men. “Now is the moment I must explain something to you, mes amis,” said the captain. “This is not a relief column. This is a reinforcement column.”

He paused for a moment, waiting for his words to sink in. He saw the

astonishment on his men's faces. Therefore, he quickly continued. "We have information," said D'Arlan, "that the ruffian Boelganof and his entire gang are moving through this region. There are indications that Boelganof will attempt to take Fort Laval and thereby deal the Foreign Legion a significant blow. Therefore, we are going to reinforce Lieutenant Du Bois's garrison. Not only that, but we have received orders to try and eliminate Boelganof and his gang once and for all. His gang continues to grow, and they are becoming bolder and more dangerous."

D'Arlan spoke no further, for he never said more than necessary. He was a man of few words and much action. "Forward!" he simply said, turned, and strode onwards. He led his small column down the plateau, and then they advanced rapidly across the level sandy plain that stretched from there to Fort Laval, which had already become just a faint smudge in the increasing twilight.

"If I get my hands on that Boelganof," said the large Fritz Mundt, "I will break his neck bit by bit."

"And I will cut his throat with a blunt knife," threatened Petacci.

But the men were tired and therefore not in the mood for banter. They marched on in silence, the only sound the crunching of their boots on the sand.

They walked for forty minutes. Then they approached the Fort.

Although it had already grown dark, D'Arlan led them straight towards the gate. The desert wind now blew stronger, and they heard it howling around the corners and over the ramparts of the fortress. They all knew this unnerving sound, for they had all served here at one time or another, relieving the garrison.

Private Nennie was an Italian devoid of heart and compassion. Private Nennie had fled to the Foreign Legion after stabbing his beloved to death with a knife in Milan because she had forsaken him. That setback