

SAHARA ADVENTURE SERIES

16. The Silent Ruins



MEIRING FOUCHE

THE SILENT RUINS

by

MEIRING FOUCHE

and

translated, proof-read and edited by
PIETER HAASBROEK

Published by:

TREASURE CHEST BOOKS - PUBLISHERS

Strand Mews

Strand

2025

2

THE SILENT RUINS

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.

The copyright for this story is reserved and may not be reprinted or distributed in whole or in part without the publisher's written permission. Reprinting includes any electronic or mechanical form, such as e-books, photocopying, writing, tape recording, or any other way of storing or accessing information. All characters and events in this story are purely fictional and have no connection to any living or deceased individuals.

THE SILENT RUINS

by Meiring Fouche

Published by:

Treasure Chest Books - Publishers, Strand Mews, Strand 7140
South Africa

Copyright @ Pieter Haasbroek (2025)

Online Store: <https://panther-ebooks.com>

Website: <https://www.softcoverbooks.co.za>

SUMMARY

In a stifling Arabian cafe in Dini Salam, an outpost of the French Foreign Legion, Teuns Stegmann and his comrades, Fritz Mundt, Jack Ritchie, Podolski, and Petacci, sit playing cards. Teuns observes that they are being watched by a slender, bespectacled man with long hair, whom he regards as a scholarly type. The man studies a document, possibly a map, with a magnifying glass. The tension mounts when the stranger approaches them and introduces himself as Professor Lepuy from the Sorbonne University, seeking an escort to explore the Sahara. He specifically requests these five men, as well as a newcomer at the French fort Dini Salam, named Santos.

Teuns's role centres on leadership and observation. He leads the small expedition, questions Professor Lepuy's motives, and tries to make sense of the increasing oddities. Other characters, such as the powerful Fritz, the suspicious Jack, and the diminutive Italian Petacci, contribute to the atmosphere of uncertainty and growing danger. They distrust Lepuy and Santos, suspecting betrayal. The appearance of Arabs on the horizon, Santos's disappearance, and the discovery of corpses heighten the mystery, but Teuns still attempts to find rational explanations for everything, even though he intuitively senses that something is amiss. The tension escalates further as they venture deeper into the desert.

Teuns attempts to solve the riddle by challenging the professor to explain the purpose of their journey. He confronts him regarding the disappearance of Santos and the discovery of the corpses, insisting they travel to the supposed "lost city." He plans strategically, keeps watch, and even attempts to exhaust the professor to extract the truth from him. To outwit the enemy, Teuns must know what truly lies behind the professor's obsession with the ruins of Koewat, and what surprises still await in the shadows of the ancient ruins? A secret lies hidden somewhere in the dunes, and it is not within the ruins of the lost city.

EXTRACT

“There goes their last hope of escape now,” says Lepuy, and when Teuns looks at the tall, thin man, it is as though he perceives a new madness in his eyes, and while standing there, he wishes that, even if he accomplishes nothing further before he dies, he might just be granted the chance to settle accounts with this Lepuy.

They come and bind Teuns’s hands securely behind his back, make him mount the horse, and then bind his feet just as securely beneath its belly. Koebikof swings onto the back of a large dapple-grey horse and then takes the halter rope of Teuns’s horse in his own hand. The next moment, they move towards the gate of the ruins of Koewat. Far behind him, he hears them shout. “Au revoir, mon ami! Long live the Legion!”

He feels his insides tremble and his lips quiver, and while sitting there thus, he takes an oath that he will employ all his strength, all his ingenuity, and all the cunning the Sahara has taught him, to avenge this day upon Koebikof. With that cry from his comrades still ringing in his ears, Teuns’s lips move softly as he whispers. “I will avenge myself upon you, Koebikof, even if it takes a thousand years.”

Koebikof pulls away at a swift gallop and they move through the gate, enter the open and desolate desert, and behind him, Teuns hears the hoofbeats of the other ruffians, who raise a cry of victory as they ride through the gate. And when he opens his eyes again, there is only the emptiness, the desolation, and the heat-shimmer on the horizon visible. And here and there, the flashing black shadow of a vulture, as these predators of the sky pursue them, hoping they will not reach their destination.

16. RUINS OF DEATH

Chapter 1

THE STRANGER

In the hot, stifling Arabian café in Dini Salam, outpost and garrison town of the French Foreign Legion, the South African Teuns Stegmann slams the Jack of Spades onto the tabletop and then says quietly, “Don’t look now, but we’re being watched.”

His companions around the card table, the large German, Fritz Mundt, the Englishman Jack Ritchie, the Pole Podolski, and the diminutive Italian Petacci, look up questioningly at Teuns.

“I wouldn’t mind being watched by an Arabian beauty,” says the cheerful Petacci, his eyes twinkling.

“Unfortunately, it’s not an Arabian beauty,” says Teuns, taking another sip of the heavy sweet wine, the only refreshment one can buy in this dive. “The fellow sitting watching us looks more like a fox whose tail you’ve chopped off.”

“An Arab?” asks Ritchie.

Teuns shakes his head. “No, he looks to me like one of these scholarly types. Slouching shoulders, thin face, spectacles on his nose, and long hair.”

“Perhaps he’s an imbecile who’s escaped from the asylum,” says the big Fritz Mundt, laughing heartily. “Any European with long hair who shows up here in Dini Salam must certainly have a screw loose.”

“He keeps glancing our way,” says Teuns.

“Keep an eye on the old louse,” warns Podolski. “Perhaps he’s another Arab agent.”

“He looks completely harmless to me,” says Teuns.

“You can never tell, brother,” answers Ritchie, throwing a card onto the table.

“It wouldn’t be bad if we had a bit of excitement again,” opines Fritz Mundt. “Since we last clashed with Koebikof’s bunch, we’ve had nothing to do but swat flies.”

“I think I’m getting old,” yawns Petacci. “I prefer swatting flies in Dini Salam to trekking through the Sahara in this heat of the past month.”

“What’s that creature doing now?” asks Fritz Mundt.

“Looks like he’s truly off his rocker,” says Teuns. “He has a magnifying glass or something, and with it, he sits contemplating a piece of paper on the table. From here, it almost looks like a map.”

“Perhaps the old fellow is searching for the Sabre of Doetra,” Jack Ritchie interjects, sipping his wine. “Is he white?”

“He is white, yes,” says Teuns. “Anyway, forget about the fellow. He’s not even worth a damn.”

“Just note whether he has contact with Arabs,” says Podolski.

“Come, come, fellows,” urges Petacci. “Let’s rather concentrate on the cards. I want to win enough money tonight for my upcoming leave in Algiers.”

Petacci’s words bring them back to reality, and they begin to concentrate on their cards.

They continue playing in silence for a while, concentrating on the cards. But after a while, Teuns cannot help talking about the strange character again. “Odd creature, that one,” says Teuns, the tall, blond South African with his broad shoulders and powerful hands, who is in the French Foreign Legion because Arabs killed his pilot brother during the Second World War.

“It seems to me the fellow is getting on your nerves,” says Fritz Mundt,

who is considered the strongest man in the French Foreign Legion.

“He’s so peculiar,” says Teuns. “I can’t stop looking at the fellow. And he’s nothing to look at. As thin as a crow, with those peculiar spectacles on his nose and two enormous jug ears. And then he even has a beard. But it seems to me as though he doesn’t even have a weapon on him.”

“He’ll surely have a weapon in his inside pocket,” says Jack Ritchie.

“I’m watching him,” says Teuns. “He’s fumbled in his inside pockets a few times, but all that comes out are papers. Then the fellow reads something, then he writes something. And he has an enormous briefcase with him.”

“Perhaps that briefcase is full of dynamite instead of documents,” says Podolski.

“And time and again he glances this way, Fritz,” says Teuns. “What business does the fellow have with us?”

Fritz Mundt can no longer contain his curiosity. He turns around and peers over his shoulder. “Surely not that old scarecrow at the fourth table?” asks Fritz.

“The very same,” says Teuns. “You shouldn’t have looked now, Big Man. Now that fellow knows we’re talking about him.”

“He can know, as far as I’m concerned,” answers Fritz, turning back to the table. “I’d kill him with a wine bottle.”

“Has he spoken to an Arab or made a sign to one?” asks Petacci.

“He hasn’t looked left or right, except at us,” says Teuns. “There the fellow is busy with his magnifying glass again. I wish I knew what is written on that paper in front of him.”

“Perhaps he’s also one of these mad types searching for treasure in the Sahara,” says Jack Ritchie.

“Or for a lost city,” adds Petacci, gathering the money he has just won

in this round.

“The Sahara sun will burn him to a crisp within two hours,” says Fritz Mundt. “He’s already dried out like a piece of jerky.”

“If the fellow interests you so much,” says Petacci, “why don’t you go ask him who and what he is and why he’s sitting watching us?”

“Let’s play cards,” says Teuns Stegmann. “Petacci is the only one concentrating, and he’s busy cleaning us out.”

But as they play on, Teuns cannot keep his thoughts off this strange foreigner. He is one of those people who immediately capture one’s interest. He is as ugly as the night, as unremarkable as a mouse, and yet there is something about the man that seems mysterious and interesting to Teuns. He is different from other strangers, and Teuns himself cannot explain why. It is just something about the man, perhaps something in the expression in his eyes, or the shape of his hands, that affects you. Teuns is not sure what it is, but of one thing he is certain. That tall, thin, unremarkable fellow is no ordinary man.

And it is not for nothing that he sits in this Arabian café. His surroundings seem lost on him. He apparently does not even realize that it is extremely dangerous for an individual to simply come and sit here in an Arabian café. No man of the Foreign Legion would ever dare to sit here alone and unarmed. Teuns has his four companions with him. And each of them has some weapon under his clothes, perhaps a piece of chain, perhaps a knife or a dagger or whatever, because they have become thoroughly acquainted many times over with the Arab lurkers who frequent these kinds of wine bars and are constantly lying in wait to assault white men.

The fellows begin to concentrate more and more on the card game, and soon the stranger is almost forgotten.

Until they hear a shuffling nearby and look up, surprised.

Standing beside them is the stranger. He is thin and slightly stooped,

and he has lively blue eyes behind those thick spectacle lenses, for apparently he is as short-sighted as a mole. Apparently, he also has some defect, for when he shifted his foot, they saw that he limped.

“What is it, old fellow? What do you want from us?” asks Fritz Mundt challengingly. “Why have you been watching us all evening?”

The stranger smiles and then says in a thin voice and in perfect French, “Pardon, legionnaires. I see you are busy with a hand of cards. I regret that I must interrupt.”

“Well, why don’t you clear off then?” asks Podolski.

But it seems as if the man simply shrugs off both Fritz Mundt’s and Podolski’s insults.

“I just came to ask for advice,” he says. “I would like to go into the Sahara, but I need an escort. I wondered if the French Foreign Legion would be willing to help me.”

“Who are you, indeed, to want an escort?” asks Jack Ritchie. “Are you perhaps the King of Albania?”

“No, Monsieur, I am not the King of Albania. I am a French scholar, Professor Lepuy, from the Sorbonne University.”

“Old tomcat,” says Fritz Mundt disparagingly. “And what might you be seeking in the Sahara?”

“That question I shall answer later, Monsieur,” replies the slender stranger.

“Professor Lepuy?” asks Teuns Stegmann with interest.

“Oui, mon ami, Professor Jacques Lepuy, from the Sorbonne University, as I have already said. An archaeologist.”

“Oh, I thought you were a dentist,” mocks Jack Ritchie, bursting into laughter.

“What can we do for you, Professor?” asks Podolski, barely able to contain his laughter at this man who blinks his eyes so incessantly behind the thick spectacle lenses.

“As I say, mon ami,” says the stranger just as amiably, “I would like an escort into the Sahara.”

“Well, why are you bothering us, Professor?” asks Teuns sternly. “You ought to know better than to come asking ordinary legionnaires for help. Why don’t you do things the proper way? Why don’t you go to the commander of Dini Salam?”

“That is what I would like to do,” says Lepuy, shifting his leg again. “All I came to ask you is where I can find the commanding officer and what would be the most convenient time for him.”

“The commander of Dini Salam is Colonel Le Clerq,” informs Petacci. “And the best time to see him is before he’s knocked back his fourth glass of cognac. That is to say, early in the morning, mon Professeur.”

Teuns glares sharply at Petacci for this lack of respect for Colonel Le Clerq. But he can see that the little Italian’s cheeks are red from the wine he has already put away.

“I think it would be best if you speak to Colonel Le Clerq anytime in the forenoon,” says Teuns. “He is the only man who can decide whether he will grant you an escort, yes or no.”

“Merci, mon ami,” says Lepuy, bows to the fellows at the table, and then turns and walks away, limping along with the heavy briefcase in his right hand.

The five watch him until he disappears through the door of the café, into the night.

Petacci is the first to speak. “Hmm,” he says, “that old crayfish is as much a professor as I am.”

“How can you say that?” Jack Ritchie wants to know.

Fritz Mundt wipes his gleaming bald head. "Yes indeed," he says, "I trust him about as far as my shadow reaches. He has the shiftest eyes I've ever seen on a human being. And if he's a professor, I'll eat my kepi. He looks much more like an Arab shepherd who's run away."

"But you fellows are awfully suspicious tonight," says Teuns. "Almost seems like you're afraid of the chap."

Fritz throws his large head back and laughs so hard his ample belly shakes. "Afraid of him?" And he gestures with his thumb back over his shoulder. "His sort I'd kill with a plug of tobacco. If he bothers me, I'll just catch a sand viper and put it in his jacket pocket. By the time he finds it, he'll be lying stone-dead stiff in the Sahara."

"You talk big, Big Man," says Petacci. "It's these funny little shrimps that sometimes outsmart a man best."

"Yes, don't forget that," warns Podolski. "Where would you find a less impressive specimen of a fellow than Koebikof, the Russian? And look how he's made fools of us thirteen times over."

"How about," says Jack Ritchie with a sigh, "we concentrate on the cards for a change? I couldn't care less who he is or what he is or what he plans to do. For all I care, he could have run away from the moon."

Fritz shuffles the cards, cuts, and then Teuns deals. They now start playing with concentration, but this stranger lingers in each of their thoughts. None is willing to admit it to the others, but they cannot get the image of this peculiar little man out of their minds. For caution and suspicion are practically a sixth sense for a man in the Foreign Legion. These men have all learned through bitter experience that the man who often looks the most innocent is usually the cruelest, the most unpredictable, and the most dangerous.

The next day, shortly before noon, the fellows lie with bare torsos, swatting flies in the large barracks of the fort of Dini Salam. Sweat rolls off them, because Sergeant Catroux had made them jump ropes again