

SAHARA ADVENTURE SERIES

19. Flames in the Temple



MEIRING FOUCHE

FLAMES IN THE TEMPLE

by

MEIRING FOUCHE

and

translated, proof-read and edited by
PIETER HAASBROEK

Published by:

TREASURE CHEST BOOKS - PUBLISHERS

Strand Mews

Strand

2025

FLAMES IN THE TEMPLE

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.

FLAMES IN THE TEMPLE

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

The narrative commences in the Southern Sahara, where an elderly professor and his daughter, Marie, find themselves lost. Their guide has abandoned them, and they have lost their compass. Utterly exhausted, with dwindling water supplies, they consequently face the prospect of death. While resting upon a high dune, hoping to be sighted, a mysterious rider and his entourage appear. The rider refuses to provide them with water or show them the way. Moreover, he steals their camels, thereby extinguishing their last hope of survival. The professor and his daughter are now entirely lost and helpless, surrendered to the unforgiving Sahara desert.

Teuns Stegmann, a legionnaire in the French Foreign Legion, becomes central to the story when Marie, having been rescued by the legion, mentions his name. She claims her father possesses news concerning Teuns's missing brother. Driven by the hope of finding his brother, Teuns leads a rescue mission. They locate the professor but are then lured into an ambush by Costello, a deserter from the legion, who intends to use Teuns to guide them through the desert to the coast. Costello threatens to kill everyone except Teuns, whom he requires for his knowledge of the desert.

The situation grows increasingly tense, compounded by the looming danger of a Touareg attack. Teuns's attempts to outwit Costello lead to a series of confrontations and desperate manoeuvres. Through ingenuity, bravery, and the unforeseen assistance of other characters, Teuns endeavours to save himself, his comrades, and the professor and his daughter from Costello and the Touaregs. The story culminates with the revelation of a lost treasure and a shocking truth about the sheikh of the Touaregs. What will be the full significance of the map that Professor Lesseps so carefully guarded, and how will it influence Teuns's own quest?

EXTRACT

With a ghastly cry that echoed from pillar to pillar, from wall to wall, and high into the dome, one of the deserters attempts to turn and flee, for the scene before him has utterly overwhelmed him. But two Touareg guards seize him before he has advanced five paces and drag him forcibly back to where the others wait.

Two individuals, resembling priests or similar figures, approach from somewhere, each bearing a large copper jug. They ascend the steps to the rim of the sacrificial fire altar, and with swift movements, they hurl the contents of the jugs over the flames. It is like a suppressed explosion as the flames shoot upwards with renewed intensity, burning almost three times higher than before.

“Oil,” whispers Petacci. “They hurled oil over the flames.”

And then they become aware of a colossal eruption of cheering from before the temple where the crowd waits. They turn their heads to see what is transpiring. Then they see the great white stallion slowly entering through the gate. The animal glitters like a huge white diamond, and upon its back sits the sheikh of the Touaregs. He rides very slowly across the marble floor, and on either side of the horse’s head walk two gigantic guards with their curved sabres held aloft, glinting. And before the horse walks the man who appears to Fritz and the others like a high priest or someone of that nature. Entranced, the prisoners watch the strange spectacle. The sheikh wears a purple cloak about his shoulders, and upon his snow-white head covering gleams a large ruby that resembles an enormous drop of blood.

19. FLAMES IN THE TEMPLE

Chapter 1

THE TRAVELLERS

In the vast, shimmering desolation of the Southern Sahara, where sand dunes rise like immense, glittering mountain ranges from the level plains, the tall sand peaks with their rippled flanks and sharp manes resembling the backs of dragons, only the two camels move.

These two camels do not move at a comfortable trot or a jog, as camels usually do when far from water.

These two mounts proceed nonchalantly, almost on their own accord. Without haste and without direction. They are now moving along the crest of a high dune. Then they halt, then they move on again. But even their movement carries an air of desperation.

The beautiful dark eyes of the young woman, which usually flash and sparkle, which usually laugh, are now dull and expressionless. There is a sharp red glow on her lovely face beneath the shadow of her large sun helmet. Her lips are swollen and cracked. Her hands lie limply on the pommel of the camel saddle. Her body is slumped forward, and it seems as though she might fall from the camel's back at any moment.

Suddenly, she brings her camel to a halt, turns in the saddle, and looks back at the rider behind her. And as she looks at him, large, glistening tears well up in her eyes. "Father, where are we going?"

The elderly man on the second camel lifts his bowed head slightly, looks out from under his bushy grey eyebrows at his beautiful daughter, and again his heart contracts within him. There is a lump in his throat as he answers. "The gods know, Marie." He shrugs his shoulders defeatedly. Defeatedly and with the appearance of surrender. "Only the gods know where we are riding. I do not know. I no longer even know if we are travelling south or north."

“But we shall die, Father. Our water is nearly gone. A few more hours and we shall be without water.”

“I know it. I know it, my Marie.” He scans the sand dunes searchingly. With a powerless yearning, he gazes out over the wasteland of sand upon which the consuming Sahara sun blazes down. His breathing becomes deeper and more agitated. “Yes, only a few more hours, then the water is finished,” he concurs. Through his hot, sweat-drenched body, he feels the cold wave of fear sweep over him. He feels the tremor in his hands, and tears burn in his eyes. She is his only one, this exquisite child, still so young and so vulnerable, and now they are victims of the relentless Sahara. A few more hours, he thinks. Then their water will be gone, and then they will have to die. He closes his eyes against the harsh sunlight and wonders which of them will go first. He, because of his age, or she, because of her youth?

“If only we had a compass,” she sighs.

“Yes,” replies her father, “if only we could determine whether we are moving west or east. Or north or south. But now we have no compass.” The light of bitterness glows again in his eyes.

“What use is it to move further?” she asks. “We might as well stay here and die.”

It is then that a faint gleam enters his eyes. “You have just given me an idea, my dearest Marie,” says the elderly man. “What use is it to move if you do not know where? Why do we not rather stay in one place? It will prevent us from wandering even further astray. It will conserve our strength. It might perhaps help us to be seen by someone, even if it be Arabs.”

In her dark, wine-coloured eyes, interest flickers for a moment. “Then we must seek out the highest point,” she says.

“Precisely.” With his old bony hand, he indicates the high crest of a dune not far from them. “There is the place,” he says. “There we must

go and wait. If you are there, they will be able to spot you for miles.”

Without further delay, the girl turns her camel down the dune, and with a great shifting of loose sand, the animal slides down the side of the dune. Her father follows her.

It is already shortly before sunset when they finally reach the crest of the high dune. Exhausted, afraid, defeated, and tormented by thirst. Once again, they search with yearning eyes for the slightest sign of deliverance, but all they see is the vast emptiness of the desert. One dune mass after another, stretching hither and thither as if recklessly flung about by the hand of a giant. They can see far from here. They are now on the highest dune in the vicinity.

When they see nothing, they make their camels lie down and dismount. They eat the last crumbs of food they still possess. They drink the last drops of water. And the drinking of the water becomes a tragic game between them.

First the father takes a sip, then the girl takes a sip. Thus they pass the flask back and forth to each other, because neither wants to drink more than the other. But finally, it is empty. Then they look each other in the eyes and know that they must now simply await the moment when they must die. This little water has not even quenched half their thirst. And this is the last they have drunk. The very last. They know it well, and therefore neither can conceal the fear in their eyes. When the Sahara grips you, your eyes are different from how they usually are.

The old man’s lips tremble as he speaks. Yet there is a strange smile on his face. “Marie,” he says, “we must be brave. You and I must be brave. There are so many who have died more terribly than we shall.”

When she smiles back at him, her lip splits and begins to bleed again. With an almost greedy movement, she licks the blood with her tongue. He quickly looks away. Looks away so as not to witness it.

“We shall be brave, Father. We simply shall not think about it. We shall

just be silent and accept and wait.”

He extends his old hand tremblingly and touches her youthful cheek. “We have had a good life together, my Marie, since your Mother went ahead of us,” he says. “Now we can accept death, can we not? The love we had for each other, no one can take that from us. There are those who say that death is a release.”

“We must not talk, Father,” she says, trying to keep her voice calm. “They say it makes one even thirstier.”

“What does it matter?” And now she sees for the first time in his eyes that he has fully accepted that they are going to die. Sees that there is no hope left in him, and it makes her insides clench.

They smile at each other again, and then they lie on their backs in the shadow of the sharp-maned dune where they had sat down to eat and drink together for the last time. She reaches out her hand and takes his old hand in hers. They close their eyes to the world and lie there as if waiting for death to come and deliver them. He presses her hand fervently. “Thank you for all the days together, my Marie.”

And without looking at him, she replies. “Thank you for your love, Father. You have always been a good father to me. Let us rest now, for the night is near.”

They lie there and watch the sun disappear. Watch how the desert becomes soft and friendly, and they feel the first touch of the evening wind. Later still, they witness the arrival of the moon. With admiration, Marie sees how the silver light burnishes everything, making it pure. She is the only one who sees it, for she can hear her father sleeping. He sleeps because he is old and exhausted.

She sits upright and lets the wind caress her cheeks. She looks at him where he lies. Looks at him through her tears, and then she looks again at the moonlit landscape.

It is then that Marie sees it.

A black shadow, narrow and dark and distinct against the slope of the dune. She feels her neck first turn cold and then warm again. There is a tingling throughout her entire body. She is afraid to look towards the crest of the dune where the two camels lie.

But finally, she forces herself to look around. And when she looks, Marie suppresses a scream in her throat. Her hand flies to her sore mouth, and her eyes are large and bright in the soft moonlight.

For there on the crest, silent and black like a statue, utterly motionless like something petrified, sits the rider on his camel.

Marie turns and rises to her knees. Her whole body trembles, and her teeth chatter. She herself does not know whether it is from fear or relief.

The rider apparently does not stir a muscle. He wears an Arab robe that gleams white in the moonlight. But his face is in the shadow of his hood.

When she becomes aware of herself again, Marie is moving through the cool sand towards the crest of the dune. And when she finally straightens up beneath the sharp mane, she stands directly before the rider and tries to make out his face. But that face is hidden in the hood, and only where the eyes are, there are soft patches of light.

“We are friends,” she says tremblingly in Arabic. “We are not enemies. We need water. Water and food.” With her hand, she gestures towards the still figure lower down the dune. “That is my father lying there,” says Marie. “He is old.”

When she finishes speaking, she waits for the stranger to say something, but he just sits there, completely motionless. Then she explains further. “Our guide deserted us. He is an Arab. He is superstitious. That must be why he left.” But then she restrains herself just in time before saying why she and her father are travelling through the desert.

She is startled when the deep, clear voice of the stranger comes distinctly through the moonlit evening. “What are you and your father seeking in the desert?”

And that question is asked not in Arabic but in perfect French.

“You speak French!” she exclaims with relief. Takes a step or two closer.

But he does not respond to that. He merely repeats his question. “What are you and your father seeking in the desert?”

It flashes through her mind that she must say something, but she herself does not know what. She will have to provide some explanation. But the reason for their wanderings here through the desert, she is not going to furnish to this stranger. Therefore, Marie simply says. “My father is a scholar. He is a professor at the Sorbonne in Paris. We are travelling here to gain knowledge about the Sahara.”

“Anyone who travels through this part of the Sahara is a fool,” says the stranger.

“But we had a guide,” says Marie. “An Arab who led us. However, he abandoned us, and we got lost. He also stole my father’s compass. We came here to die. We chose this high dune because we believed someone would spot us. And indeed, you did spot us.”

Then there is silence, for he does not reply to that. There is only the soft sucking sound of a camel.

“May I ask who you are?” Marie says finally when it begins to feel as if there is something ominous in the silence. “Are you Arab?”

“I am no one,” he replies. “I am merely a traveller through the Sahara.”

“Will you not tell me who you are?”

“You are not being honest with me, mademoiselle,” answers the stranger with a short laugh. “Why should I be honest with you? I asked you what you are seeking in the Sahara. Do you think I am a child? Do you think I would believe that a professor from the Sorbonne and his daughter would travel through this part of the Sahara without good reason? This is one of the most desolate and one of the most dangerous

parts of the entire Southern Sahara. And now I am told that a professor and his daughter are merely travelling through here out of sheer interest.” He snorts a short laugh. “I am older than twelve, mademoiselle,” he says. “But I am not interested in your secret. You can keep your secrets, and I shall keep mine.”

“But can you not just let us have a little water?” she asks, and she asks it pleadingly. “Can you not just give us an indication of where we are and where we must travel to reach civilization again?”

“Our water is scarce,” he answers, and it surprises her, for she had imagined him to be alone. But when she steps forward and looks over the dune’s crest, she sees several more camels lying down, their riders having dismounted. There are a few more men in Arab attire standing and sitting around there.

“Our water is scarce, and our journey is long.” Then he gestures with his hand. “There lies the Southern Cross. Now you will know where to travel.”

With that, he turns and rides back to where his companions wait.

“You must give us water!” Marie cries out. “You cannot leave us here to die of thirst. Have you no heart?”

But the tall stranger who had descended upon her and her father so silently and unexpectedly out of the moonlit night does not respond. He lets her question and her accusation pass him by. He speaks a few words to his followers, and then she sees their camels get to their feet again.

And she sees something else, something that initially bewilders her so much that she cannot believe her own eyes. Two men have approached and are making her father’s camel and her own stand up too. Leading them back to where the small caravan waits. Without another word, the stranger begins to move. He lets his camel slide down the dune and leads his small procession away in an easterly direction.

“Our camels!” cries Marie, her voice sounding high and distorted in the