

# SAHARA ADVENTURE SERIES

## 31. Desert Tomb



**MEIRING FOUCHE**

# DESERT TOMB

*by*

**MEIRING FOUCHE**

and

translated, proof-read and edited by  
**PIETER HAASBROEK**

*Published by:*

**TREASURE CHEST BOOKS - PUBLISHERS**

Strand Mews

Strand

2025

2

## DESERT TOMB

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.

DESERT TOMB  
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 unfolds in the implacable Sahara desert, where a small patrol of the French Foreign Legion, under the command of the South African Teuns Stegmann, makes an alarming discovery. Amidst a threatening sandstorm, they find a well-tended grave marked with a cross bearing the words. “Here rests Jean Pierre Verchors. His blood shall be avenged.” Nearby, they discover a slaughter of livestock, and inside a cave, a terrified young Arab boy. An encounter with an old Arab at the devastated Kedar oasis reveals a mass murder perpetrated by a “falcon of the sky,” an aeroplane. Teuns, together with his loyal companions Jack Ritchie and Podolski, becomes ensnared in a deadly confrontation.

With unwavering resolve, Teuns leads his men in a desperate struggle for survival. The discovery of the Arab boy’s sabotage of their water supply considerably worsens their situation but also fortifies their determination. Despite the mounting tension and the loss of men, Teuns’s leadership and tactical acumen drive the small group onward. He utilises the environment to their advantage, but the constant attacks and the omnipresent stench of decomposing bodies physically exhaust them. The unexpected appearance and disappearance of a mysterious aircraft, acting sometimes as saviour, other times as foe, heightens the enigmatic nature of the situation in which they find themselves.

The climax is marked by a series of intense skirmishes, first with the Arabs and later with the deranged pilot, Andre Verchors. Teuns’s tactical prowess and his ability to think under pressure are tested time and again. He formulates plans and adapts them as the situation evolves. He plans an assault on the Arabs at Verchors’s hiding place. The ultimate confrontation with Verchors, driven by madness and vengeance, leads to a dramatic dénouement thanks to the intervention of Madame Verchors. Yet, even with Verchors’s death, questions linger. Who truly was this Verchors, and what greater powers were involved in this desert conflict?

## EXTRACT

Jack Ritchie rides up alongside Teuns. “What do you think,” he asks, “who is the man who attacked with the aeroplane and the flamethrowers? Don’t you think it’s just a pilot from the French Air Force?”

“No,” says Teuns, “I don’t think so. That man can fly an aeroplane, that much is perfectly clear. But I am certain he is not a member of the French Air Force. I think he has something to do with that deserted grave. He is the one who wants to avenge the death of Jean Pierre Verchors. But who or what he is, that I do not know.”

“But from where does the man operate?” asks Jack Ritchie. “Surely he doesn’t have a base here in the desert.”

“That is part of the mystery,” answers Teuns. “It is one of those inexplicable things for which we still must seek an explanation.”

Podolski also rides up to Teuns, and the Pole, too, has a question on his mind. “Do you think,” he asks Teuns, and he asks it quietly so the few recruits cannot hear, “that the Arabs have now been definitively repulsed? Do you think they will pursue us further?”

Teuns glances sideways at the large, loyal Pole who would fight until he fell. “If you think, mon ami, that the Arabs are now going to abandon everything, then you are making a grave mistake. By now, the massacre at Kedar is known far and wide throughout the Sahara. The entire Arab populace in these parts now seeks vengeance. Those who cornered us came from the south. But the tribes to the east, west, and northwest all know by now about the bloodbath at Kedar, of that you can be absolutely certain.”

## **31. DESERT TOMB**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **CRY IN THE DARK**

In the wilderness of the southwestern Sahara, the small Foreign Legion patrol comes to a grateful halt as their leader raises his hand. For many hours now, they had trudged through the sand, utterly astonished by the strange landscapes through which they moved.”

The Sahara looks different here from how they know it. Here, it resembles a scene from a lunar landscape. Here, the endless monotony of sand is broken up by a peculiar rockiness. By strange anthill-like rocks rising from the sand, thrusting their pointed peaks towards the sky. Here and there lie large stone formations containing small black caverns. They look like giant honeycombs scattered here upon the red sand of the Sahara. It is a peculiar and terrifying scene, this, and the men do not like it at all.

The leader of the patrol of twelve legionaries is a tall, impressive, blond man with broad shoulders and the clearest blue eyes. He is a South African, likely the only South African in the entire French Foreign Legion in the Sahara. His name is Teuns Stegmann.

Teuns Stegmann looks somewhat apprehensively at the map he has spread out on the sand before him. In this wilderness, he knows, the small oasis of Kedar must be located. He is anxious to find it now, for to the west they have already spotted the dangerous yellow-red band that always signals a fierce sandstorm. He wants them to reach the shelter of the small oasis before the sandstorm hits them. He is responsible for the twelve men. He holds their lives in his hands. They are still inexperienced. He was specifically sent out from Fort Laval with this small group to acclimatise them to the demands the desert makes on one. To condition them in the searing sun and the cold nights of the Sahara. To teach them how to use the stars as a guide when they

must march. He must teach them endurance here in the chastening wilderness of sand and sun. Besides himself, there are only two other experienced men in the patrol. Jack Ritchie, the blond Englishman, and Podolski, a large and sturdy Pole who has been in the Foreign Legion even longer than Teuns Stegmann.

Furthermore, the South African is eager to bring his patrol to the oasis because their water has become very scarce. The flasks are almost empty. Besides, these men are exhausted to the point of death. They are not yet accustomed to the high demands the Sahara places on you. He knows it is crucial that they rest now.

After consulting the map, he looks around uneasily. This scene inspires fear even in the most hardened man. It is a godforsaken world. He prefers the smooth plains and the high, rounded backs of the sand desert. These rocky protrusions, which in some cases culminate in high ridges, are just too much for him. It is a dreadful sight. He turns and looks westward. He sees the sandstorm boiling up out of the desert. And because he knows what a sandstorm means in the desert when you lack any form of shelter, he looks impatiently eastward again. Where is the oasis of Kedar then? It must surely be in this vicinity. For a moment, the bitter fear grips him that he might have led the men astray. Perhaps taken the wrong direction. Maybe passed the oasis by a few miles. He can hardly believe this, however, for he has extensive experience in the Sahara, and he does not make mistakes easily.

Teuns becomes aware that Jack Ritchie and Podolski, his two good friends, have come to stand beside him. Neither of them speaks. All three stare at something ahead of them on the desert floor at the foot of one of these black rock formations, which lifts its point skyward like a Transvaal anthill.

“Do you spot something?” Podolski finally asks. “Don’t you see any signs of the oasis yet?”

Teuns does not answer initially. His face looks taut with concentration.

“Do you see what I see?” he asks finally.

Jack Ritchie looks at the tall South African and then gazes out across the desert again, eastward.

“I see something too,” says Jack. “I don’t know if we are both seeing the same thing.”

“What I see,” says Teuns, “looks like a grave, with a cross at its head.”

“A grave?” laughs Podolski. “Don’t be absurd,” he says. “Who would bury someone here and then even plant a cross, here in this godforsaken mess? Is it really necessary for us to visit this wretched region?”

Teuns Stegmann takes a few steps forward. He shields his eyes with his hand, as if to see better. There is a deep frown on his forehead.

“I tell you, that is a grave,” the tall South African says finally. “Let’s go and see. The oasis must be nearby in any case.”

The men, who had meanwhile sat and lain down on the sand, get up at Teuns’s command, and he immediately leads them towards the rock formation where he saw the strange phenomenon. A grave in this world? That is indeed a question one might ask, he thinks. Who on earth would lie buried here? And who would plant a cross here?

When they reach the scene, Teuns sees that his suspicion was correct. Before them, right at the foot of the pointed, round rock, lies a neatly tended grave. It is evenly built up from the desert floor, neatly covered with stones, and at the head stands a sturdy wooden cross.

What ultimately interests Teuns and the others more than anything else is the fact that this grave has evidently been made very recently.

A simple inscription is burned into the wooden cross. Simple, yet also exceptionally unusual, so that the men stand looking at it long and attentively.

Apparently, the inscription was burned into the hard wood with a hot



wire or something similar.

“Here rests Jean Pierre Verchors,” reads the inscription on the cross. “His blood shall be avenged.”

Teuns Stegmann reads the words several times and then repeats them aloud.

“Here rests Jean Pierre Verchors. His blood shall be avenged.”

Completely dumbfounded, he looks first at Jack Ritchie and then at Podolski. “What on earth can this mean?” This is the question reflected in everyone’s eyes. Who is he whose blood shall be avenged, and who issued this threat? And how is it that a man who is clearly French lies buried here, in this remote, desolate corner of the Sahara?

Upon closer inspection, they see that the grave is even neater than they initially thought. With the utmost care and devotion, someone buried Jean Pierre Verchors here. Smoothed the sand and then carried stones and stacked them with the greatest precision over the mound of sand. It has been done so thoroughly that this stone grave, lost as it is in the solitude, will defy the elements here in the sun-scorched Sahara for many years.

But above all, as they stare at it, utterly aghast, the men realize that this was a labour of love. That it was a task performed with beautiful devotion and powerful love. And clearly, it was done by a Frenchman, because the inscription is in French.

“Perhaps a family member came here to bury him,” says Jack Ritchie.

“It must be so,” answers Teuns, “but how on earth do you think a family member would have gotten out here? This is miles and miles from the nearest caravan route. It is in the vicinity of the Kedar oasis. And the Arabs of Kedar are notorious for not having much sympathy for a white man, especially not a Frenchman. I don’t know. It seems unlikely to me that someone would come specially out here to tend this grave.”

It is then that one of the new recruits in the patrol draws Teuns's attention to something else. A few paces from the grave, the young man has kicked something open in the sand.

"Look here, mon Sergent," says the recruit, because for the purpose of this patrol, Teuns Stegmann has been temporarily assigned the rank of sergeant.

Teuns steps closer and immediately bends down to see better. Protruding from the sand is a piece of leather strap, with a sturdy loop at the end. Teuns looks at it for a moment, then begins digging enthusiastically, and after a few minutes, they have uncovered something from the sand that sheds new light on the grave of Jean Pierre Verchors. In the sand stand four sturdy wooden pegs, and attached to each peg is a short piece of strap, each with a loop at the end.

"Now it's clear," says Teuns as he straightens up with a shudder. "Whoever this Jean Pierre is, he was tortured to death here by the Arabs. They tied him down here and left him thus to the Sahara, to the heat of the day, the cold of the night, and the vultures. Now we understand at least how the unfortunate Jean Pierre died. It is the traditional punishment of certain Arabs to stake a man out like this on the desert and then leave him there. They never even visit him again, for they know that when they return, they will only see his bones." Teuns relates this particularly for the young recruits to impress upon them the horrific torment the Sahara often inflicts upon a person.

For a long time, they stand there, gazing at the four pieces of strap, the four pegs, and the desolate grave.

Only when the vanguard wind of the storm begins to sing around the wooden cross do they come to their senses again, are they brought back to reality, and realize they had better seek shelter.

When they look westward, they see the wind skipping across the sand, see the long streaks of dust scurrying like red feathers in the late afternoon. See the sand boiling high into the blue sky.

With a strange feeling in their hearts, with a peculiar tingling deep inside, they take leave of the forgotten grave of Jean Pierre Verchors. Teuns quickly leads them towards one of the high stone ridges that rises from the sand like a black mane. He leads them directly towards a black spot that looks like a sizeable cavern. They hurry now, for the wind is catching up with them, driving small pebbles against their hands, making it feel as if they are being struck by pellets of fire. The last stretch they jog slowly through the sand. Their weary bodies are pushed one last time to reach shelter before the sandstorm strikes with full force.

The wind howls and sings around them. The dust cloud is already suffocating, although this is merely the prelude to the dark violence born upon the Sahara.

It is when they almost reach the stone mane that they come upon the peculiar slaughter. It is a flock of livestock that has been destroyed here. Sheep, goats, lambs lie scattered across the sand. The hides have been torn by vultures. Bones lie strewn about, and only here and there is a carcass still reasonably intact. They halt amidst the stinking chaos and marvel at the fantastic scene. It looks as if the animals were deliberately trapped here before the stone ridge and then systematically killed. From the smallest to the largest. Through the rising wind, the men look at each other, and in everyone's eyes there is a new question. The grave of an unknown Frenchman and a slaughter among a flock of livestock. What could be the connection between them? And what could be the reason for it? The hardened legionaries know well that the Arabs of these regions are very attached to their animals. They guard them like gold, for if a pestilence strikes the animals in these remote parts, it can lead to famine. Every lamb is cherished until it is grown. Every day the small flocks are watched over with the greatest care and taken to the oasis in the evening.

Teuns Stegmann finds one consolation as he surveys the slaughter. The fact that the animals lie dead here means, in any case, that they cannot

be too far from the Kedar oasis anymore.

Once more, he looks at the horrific scene around them, then quickly leads his men towards the opening of the cavern in the rock mane.

They reach it, panting and breathless. It is one of those peculiar hollows in the solid rock that one often finds in the Sahara. Hollows that no one can explain. Hollows eroded away as if by water or wind-driven sand over centuries. Hollows that offer a welcome refuge to the terrified and exhausted traveller.

They enter it and look around gratefully. The rock is solid around and above them, and at the entrance, the Sahara wind wails as if disappointed that it could not torment this small group of men in the open. The men snatch off their caps, sling their rifles from their shoulders, drop their backpacks, suck at the little water remaining in their flasks, and then stretch out on the cavern floor.

Outside, the wind picks up harder. A dark curtain is flung across the world, causing twilight to descend prematurely upon them.

They sit there wordlessly. Each with his own thoughts. Each thinking of a grave in the open. Each thinking of the mystery of a slaughtered flock of livestock. And each wondering what strange events are unfolding here in the desert. With the howling of the wind in their ears, they sense something, something ominous, something sorrowful, and something threatening...

Teuns Stegmann walks to the mouth of the cavern, looks out at the raging storm, and returns to his men. He feels satisfied that he has gotten them under shelter here, but he is also driven by an inexplicable unease.

When Teuns sits down again, he peers deeper into the dark cavern. It is a long, deep cavity that penetrates towards the heart of the rock formation.

For a moment, he imagines he saw movement deep in the back of the cave. He saw it so clearly that he instinctively reaches for his pistol. But