



SAHARA ADVENTURE SERIES

7. THUNDERING HOOVES

Meiring Fouche

Translated by Andelene Brits

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by Meiring Fouche and translated by Andelene Brits

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ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

“Andelene Brits was born in Paarl in 1966, the youngest of three daughters. I attended Paarl Gymnasium and matriculated there in 1983. After that, I worked in financial institutions. I got married in 1989, and I have three sons. I do not have grandchildren yet, only a lot of dogs! For the last twenty years, I have been a housewife. I have written many stories over the years but have never published anything, although writing is my passion. I love books and have a whole library in my house. I go and browse second-hand bookstores for treasures. My other passion is people, and I do charity work for those in need. There is not much more I can say about myself, just that what I am doing now is something I have been waiting for all my life to do. Deal with the written word. Words are power. Thank you.”

SUMMARY

“Thundering Hooves” is the 7th thrilling installment of the “Sahara Adventure series”, where danger always lurks in the scorching Sahara sands. After a daring escape from the fortress stronghold of the Dulac tribe, Teuns Stegmann and his fellow French Foreign Legion soldiers find themselves embroiled in yet another perilous mission.

When they bring word to the Legion outpost at Dini Salam that the vengeful Dulac princess Brigitte Bonnet plans to unleash deadly gas weapons on Legion forts, tactics must be swiftly devised. Adding to the turmoil, the legendary sword of Dutra has been stolen from Legion headquarters, igniting rebellion amongst Arab tribes across the desert. With hordes amassing under Bonnet’s command, Captain D’Arlan proposes a covert counterstrike. Accompanied by only two hundred men, he ventures into the swirling sands.

Meanwhile, at Fort Laval, Bonnet’s initial attack meets an unexpected twist. All but deserted, the fort holds but a single soldier too drunk to flee. His outrageous tale of the garrison’s departure for Libya leaves the princess reeling. After securing the seemingly abandoned fort, she turns her sights on Fort Petain. Yet Fort Laval holds lethal secrets. When one Dulac warrior escapes the carnage within, Teuns, Fritz and Jack are dispatched to prevent him from alerting Bonnet’s main force, fast approaching

Dini Salam. But the trio are swiftly captured by mercenaries in Legion uniforms, deserters who possess the stolen sword. With Teuns as their guide, the deserters seek Bonnet's army to sell her the sword.

Ever resourceful, Teuns seizes an opportunity to recapture the blade and lead the princess into a trap. But Bonnet is cunning, and the desert holds endless perils. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Legion's garrison clings desperately to a bold strategy as a massive Arab army swarms around Dini Salam. With Dini Salam's position seeming hopeless, Le Clerq takes a big risk before dawn's arrival. A red flare shoots into the sky behind the Arab forces. It is a sign Le Clerq has been waiting for. The action swiftly builds to a dramatic and thrilling climax as Le Clerq and D'Arlan's forces launch a daring surprise counterattack on Bonnet's unsuspecting army.

Swashbuckling adventure, chilling suspense, and courage in the face of impossible odds propel this sand-swept tale. Fouche's vivid prose thrusts the reader headlong into the Sahara's harsh beauty. Filled with captivating characters, dramatic twists and battle action, and meticulous historical detail, "Thundering Hooves" immerses you in its spellbinding world that will keep readers hooked to the very last page. Will D'Arlan's daring gamble pay off and which faction will ultimately wield the legendary sword? The answers await within the pages of this edge-of-your-

seat tale. “Thundering Hooves” is a mesmerizing adventure not to be missed, full of action and intrigue. Its cliffhanger ending leaves you impatient for the next gripping installment in the “Sahara Adventure series”. Don’t just stand in the blistering heat, step into the whirling sands of danger with Teuns Stegmann today!

EXTRACT

“We have to shoot,” Jack Richie says, out of breath.

“Let them come closer, Teuns,” says Fritz. “We are going to have some fun now. Do not be hasty, and in the meantime, choose one. How many volleys?”

“We shoot three quick volleys,” says Teuns, “but do not miss them, chaps.”

When the Arabs are nearly a hundred paces away, Teuns says. “Now!” Warm lead starts flying into the ranks of the Arabs. The foremost three tumble out of their saddles, then another three further to the back, and then two more. “You have missed, Englishman,” Fritz says hoarsely. “Why do not you shoot to kill?”

“Could have been you that had missed the shot,” Jack says intently.

The deadly volleys of the three refugees here on the top of the dune bring confusion in the ranks of the advancing men. They stop dead in their tracks, which is a mistake because Teuns and the other let fly with three more volleys. This time nobody misses, and every bullet hits its target. The next moment, the Arabs and the deserters are out of their saddles and flat on the ground.

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7. THUNDERING HOOVES

Chapter 1 NEW WEAPON

Fritz Mundt, the huge German in the French Foreign Legion, is lying on his bed. He moves his toes, changes the position of his hands underneath his head, and looks up at the ceiling at the flies milling there. He decides there and then to ask the question that he has been meaning to. He swats quickly at an irritating fly with his big hand, turns onto his side, and looks at the tall, blonde man lying on the bed beside his. He notices the man's muscular, naked torso, athletic, powerful legs, and tousled blonde head. The afternoon is so hot that it feels like all the moisture is being sucked out of your body.

Fritz moves the chew of tobacco in his cheek and asks. "South African, do you think we will be sent back to that hot place in Fort Laval?"

Teuns Stegmann, the athletic South African, opens his eyes, turns his head slowly, and looks slightly puzzled. He enquires about the German. "Why are you not sleeping, big guy? Why all these nonsense questions on an afternoon like this?"

"Do you think they will send us back to that fly-infested place?"

"How should I know?" Teuns answers. "They probably will because we are supposed to relieve the men there for the next three months. The last time we were there, it was only for three or four days before fate intervened. Yes, I

think they will send us back, big guy..."

"After all we have been through? No, they cannot! If they send us back to that horrible place, I will rebel! I have had more than enough of that lonely place!"

"This is not a country club," says Teuns, yawning and swatting at the flies. "This is the French Foreign Legion, and here you have to obey orders. Do not you know that yet?"

"But we nearly died! They cannot send us back there so soon!"

"Why do not you tell the colonel that you refuse to return to Fort Laval? Then, maybe he will promote you to sergeant..."

The South African turns onto his side and looks at the German from underneath his eyelashes.

"You only want to stay here in Dini Salam to indulge in the wine," he teases the German, who is disgusted.

Suddenly Fritz Mundt rises onto his elbow and says. "There are other men here that they can send! Some of this rubble here has not been in Fort Laval for nearly a year now!"

"Maybe they are sending us specifically because of our bravery. They might think that the other men would be unable to do the work as well as we can."

Teuns bends down, picks up his cigarette butt from the floor, and lights it. He takes a deep pull from it and looks around the big room. Nearly all the beds are empty, and just a couple of the guys are resting here this afternoon in the oppressive heat. It is himself, Fritz Mundt, Podolski,

the Pole, Jack Ritchie, the blonde Englishman, and Petacci, the little Italian, whose snores vibrate through the room.

After arriving here just before the afternoon, they managed to get the rest of the day off to rest. Slightly pleased, Teuns listens to how the rest of the men of the garrison of Dini Salam are being drilled outside by the sergeant in the hot courtyard.

“I am going to rebel if they send us back to Fort Laval,” Fritz complains again, but the South African ignores him.

* * *

In the office of the commanding officer of the garrison, Colonel Paul Le Clerq snorts through his grey mustache. “Now then, Sergeant Catroux,” says the colonel. “Please tell us how it came about that a patrol of the French Foreign Legion that was supposed to relieve the men in Fort Laval ended up using a foreign plane out of Dutra. At ease!”

Sergeant Catroux, a small, swarthy man, relaxes and folds his hands behind his back. He looks respectively at Colonel Le Clerq and Captain D’Arlan, who is also seated at the desk. He notices an amused gleam in the captain’s eyes, but the eyes of the colonel are cold and earnest. Then Catroux looks at the old Arab also seated here and sees a sign of victory in his dark eyes.

“*Mon Colonel,*” Catroux explains. “Us men who had returned here by plane today were members of Lieutenant Juin’s relieve unit that was sent to Fort Laval. But, with Lieutenant Rosseau’s soldiers that we were supposed to

relieve, we were overpowered there by a woman with her foreign soldiers. She is *Madame Bonnet*, sister of the late El Karima...”

“Yes, yes, that we already know,” Le Clerq says impatiently. “She has some delusional plan to try and drive out the French Foreign Legion with gas weapons out of Morocco...”

“That is affirmative, *mon Colonel*. We have managed to get the upper hand, and she and Professor Benesj have escaped with a jeep. Lieutenant Juin had sent me, together with Privates Stegmann, Mundt, Podolski, Ritchie, Petacci, and Jorgensen, to try and find out where she had fled to. We encountered a sand storm in the desert and made our way to a small, desolate oasis, where we met up with the *madame* and the Professor again. We have tried to take them back to Fort Laval, but then one morning, a plane arrived, and they overpowered us again...”

“Who had overpowered you there? Was it the *madame* and the Professor?” There is a flicker of amusement in the colonel’s sharp eyes.

“The plane was full of foreign soldiers, armed with semi-automatic rifles, *mon Colonel*,” Catroux tries to defend himself.

“I see...”

“They have taken us to Dutra, and if it had not been for the intervention by sheik El Dota here, we would have died there. With his help, we reached the plane, and we escaped. Luckily for us, Private Ritchie used to be a pilot during the Second World War, and that is how we

managed to arrive here by plane, *mon Colonel*.”

“A most interesting tale, *mon Sergent*,” says the old colonel and pulls at his mustache, apparently lost in thought.

“Any questions, *mon Capitaine*?”

“El Dota here is under the impression that this woman was quite serious when she said that she wants to destroy the French Foreign Legion with gas in Morocco,” says Captain D’Arlan. He is not called the Houdini of the desert for nothing because he has always managed to escape death in the most remarkable ways when the war-like Arabs have succeeded in capturing him.

“Is that also your impression, *mon Sergent*?”

“Without a doubt, *mon Capitaine*,” Catroux answers. “I think this woman is quite insane. She wants to avenge the death of her sister, El Karima, and she wants to do it through a war with gas.”

“Is the gas in any way dangerous?”

“The gas they use is deadly, *mon Capitaine*, absolutely lethal, and it can be used over great distances. We have nothing to protect ourselves from it.”

“Do they have a lot of stock?”

“They have left quite a lot of equipment and gas weapons in Fort Laval, and I am certain that the bomber plane was full of stock when we were taken to Dutra.”

“I assume that they use gas bullets then?”

“Exactly, *mon Capitaine*. They use powerful rifles to fire off the bullets, detonating as soon as it hits a target. It will be deadly against our garrisons in the forts.”