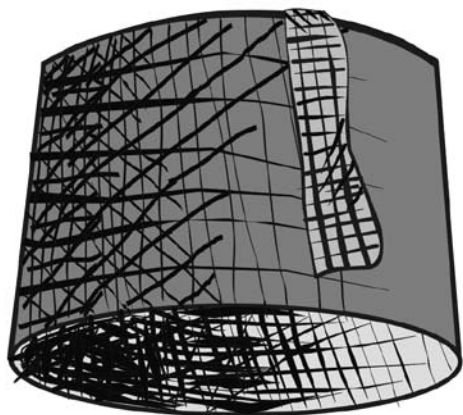


The Red Fez



Leopold
McGinnis



Many rare treasures you will find, my friend...

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The Renault truck jerked to a stop suddenly lurching Pierre forward. But instead of slapping the driver across the back of the head with his hat as he desired, the Inspector instead dismounted and looked at the two individuals his officers were holding. The ones his officers had claimed they caught carrying the artifact. He knew as soon as he saw the two standing there that he had been beaten. That Habibi had somehow finished the game. This was all some calculated part in his nefarious plan. Pierre sighed.

“Well, well, well. What have we here?” he began, trying to sound enthusiastic.

“They came into town not five minutes ago, monsieur.”

“I see. And they were carrying suspicious goods I presume?” It was hot near the edge of town. No buildings to provide shade...and a strange airiness that gave the impression of a dry desert heat rather than the humid one of the inner city.

“Yes sir,” The officer motioned behind him and another handed him a stone sculpture. “This.”

“Well, well.” Pierre said with astonishment, “The key of Sargos! I’ve been looking all over for this.”

Sylvia sneered at him but stood straight and maintained her dignity. Her forehead was sweaty. They both had their

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hands tied behind their backs.

“Hoping to get this out of your hands today before the imperious police groups arrive, mm? Bring this...and them...to the station.” Pierre handed it casually back to the officer.

“We also found this, monsieur.” The officer handed the captain a small revolver. “It was on the hunchback.”

“Ooh-la-la. A pistol. Now, now, you’ve got to be careful. You could put somebody’s eye out with this. Did you meet the height requirement for this thing?”

The hunchback spat at the captain’s shoe.

“Very well,” take them away. They were put into the back of a truck and driven away. Pierre sighed and crumpled his hat in his hands.

“Any sign of Habibi?” Pierre asked.

“No sir,” his officer reported.

“Very well, you might as well take down all the stops along the city’s edge. Then get down to the port and tell the officers there that we’ve recovered the artifact and the embargo has been lifted.”

“But sir, what about the Red Fez? Perhaps this is just a ruse...”

“Yes, Henri, indeed it is. But I have a feeling by this time we have already been duped.”

“I see.”

“Besides, in twenty minutes I will have to tell the main

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office that we have found the artifact...or at least something that looks like the artifact...which will be good enough for them. They will want the embargo lifted immediately...the lost trade has almost cost more than the supposed value of the artifact.” Pierre sighed.

“Yes. But shouldn’t we wait and see if the Red Fez tries to re-enter? We could catch him too.”

“Not likely, Philippe. We’ve blown our cover arresting these two. He can slip through any crack now.”

Philippe stared down at his boots. He was disappointed.

“There there. Come. Let us get back to base.” They hopped back into the truck and headed off down the street.

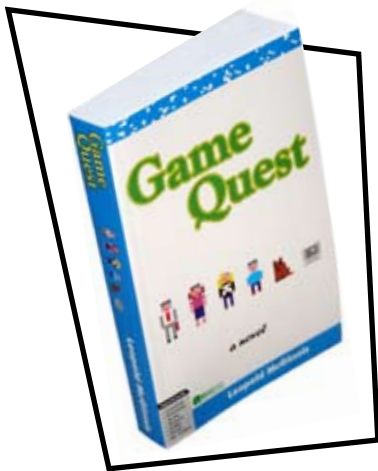


The lights were dim in Savid’s as Habibi and Savid once again sat in the corner of the darkened lounge area. Savid’s employees had spent the early evening dusting and making sure everything was ready for reopening. As Savid had said earlier, no doubt, now with the artifact officially gone, he would be allowed to open his gambling tables quite soon. The speed at which the embargo had been lifted was a testament to that.

“I have something for you, my partner,” Savid grinned from out under his purple fez. He wiped his brow from the

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