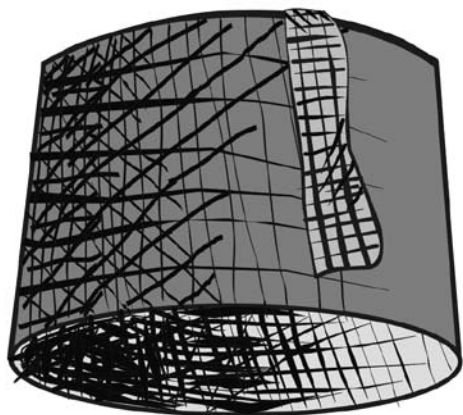


The Red Fez



Leopold
McGinnis



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

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The Red Fez

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Habibi was down at the police headquarters at three. The police station with its typical Arab architecture of masonry and plaster, stretching long and wide with gloriously perfect arcs, had been converted from a mosque by the French - a cunning imperialist trick making it clear who was the new deity in town. It was bustling as usual, but perhaps even a bit more today. A small squad of beige suited policemen stepped out of the front entrance and moved out to patrol the street as Habibi approached. Already they had stepped up their numbers, he noticed. And Habibi had a good idea what it was all about. Climbing the stone steps he slipped out of the humid street and into the less humid station. Passing the oaken and unoccupied secretary's desk he knocked on the door where a golden plaque labeled "Pierre Rensoir, Chief of Police" was placed. It shone brilliantly as if just polished.

"Come in," came a voice. Habibi entered and closed the wooden door behind him. The chief of police, a short, black-haired man in a little French mustache similar to Habibi's, lay back in his chair fanning himself with a document, a very important document. One of the very many important documents that, at this instant, cluttered his desk.

"Criminal! Criminal!" cried the parrot from its cage in the corner of the room. It was the name Pierre had taught

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the parrot to refer to Habibi by. A joke among friends. Pierre smiled.

“A perfect day for the devil,” Pierre started, referring to the heat, “I don’t know how you Algerians can run around in those robes of yours.”

Habibi went over to the bird’s cage and poked his finger in at the parrot. “Better to be a criminal at large than to be caged,” he said. The parrot lurched for his finger but Habibi pulled away just in time and the parrot’s beak came crunching down on the bar of the cage.

“It seems busy today,” said Habibi.

“Yes, it is,” laughed Pierre, “But if you want to know why, that’s police information and you can’t have any of it. Nice try though.”

“I was merely observing,” Habibi began to stroke his mustache.

“But of course,” grinned Rensoir, “Regardless, it is too busy in this city without the current troubles. Too much going on and it adds to the heat.” Pierre got up and went to the window, “Look outside Habibi, on every street there is a merchant. Even the loneliest streets are hot with the pressure to buy and to sell. It’s all so hot. Who would want such a place?”

“The French,” retorted Habibi, grinning slightly.

Pierre grinned back. “And how does the day find you?” he asked settling back into his chair.

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“Well...” Habibi continued to stroke his mustache which Pierre eyed suspiciously.

Then Pierre looked back at his desk piled high with forms and papers. “I’m sorry my friend, but I won’t have time for our usual visit today.”

“That is unfortunate.”

“Yes. Turning away friends for paperwork... Perhaps you could join me for dinner tonight?”

“I would be most honoured.”

“Excellent! Come meet me here at six and we shall walk home together.”

“Until then,” said Habibi.

“Until then,” returned the chief of police as Habibi headed out the door.

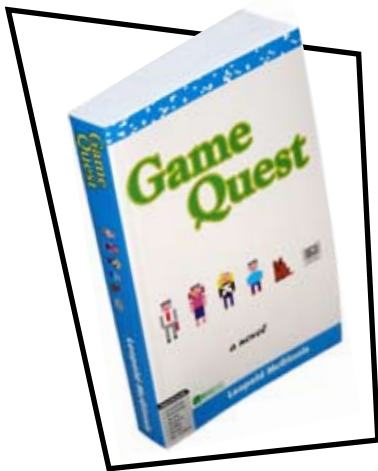
“Criminal!” squawked the parrot. Pierre smiled and, taking his fan, put it down on the desk, pulled out a pen and began to fill it out.



The police station was even busier when Habibi returned at six...after he had made and hid his purchase. Almost as busy as he had been all afternoon. Though the sun had cooled down, the inside of the police station had heated up. Two officers were arguing in one corner and paper was all over

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