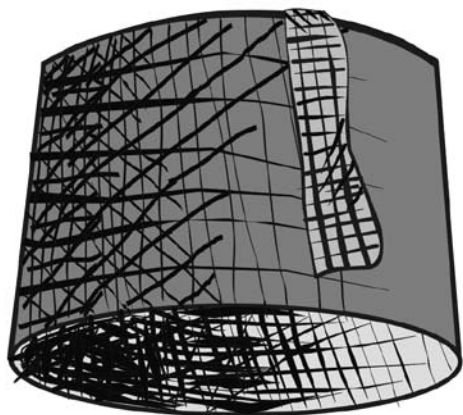


The Red Fez



Leopold
McGinnis



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

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The Red Fez

distance he turned around to watch the hunchback speak to Sylvia. She ordered him around a bit and then they got up and left.



“Ah, Habibi. My gambling tables have been closed down.” Savid sat at the table nearest the window that looked out onto the street. Early in the morning it was already hot... even shaded in the Midnight Oasis’ parlour.

“There goes your money.”

“Not quite. You see, all the money I make from the gambling tables goes to make the police to look the other way.” He sipped his coffee. “They bring me no profit.”

“Then why do you have them?”

“Because while the police are looking away I can do all the underhanded deeds I chose,” he smiled.

“Ingenious.”

“Yes. My heart is in criminal activity. It makes me feel like I truly belong to society. But still, closing down the tables will hurt my business. Now the rich buyers won’t come to gamble and I will have no one to sell to. Which is probably the reason the police chief shut down my tables... so that I won’t sell whatever it is they are looking for. But I also presume that this is why you are here.”

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“You are correct.”

“Well, I am interested.” Savid smiled a devilish grin, trying to contain his excitement over the prospect of new, underhanded and subversive business surrounding this very hot artifact. Crime was like fashion, he often thought. Other criminals recognized when you were haute couture, it was good for business, and this artifact was the seasons most sought after item – or would be when people found out about it.

“Of course.”

“I will contact buyers then. How much do you think you will sell it for?”

“That depends,” smiled Habibi, adept at playing Savid’s game, “all on who is willing to pay...and how much. And I believe there will be many willing to pay a lot.”

“Of course.”

“But I believe you will be able to outbid my other prospectors.”

“Of course.”

“But in order to make this transaction easier I require some assistance from you.”

“But of course. Anything to make the transition of this object into my hands smoother...”

“Then listen,” begun Habibi and they bent over in the heat, whispering their conversation for the next half hour. At the end they shook hands and Savid showed Habibi to the

The Red Fez

door.

“I will see what perspective buyers I can start with.”

“Good. And the grapefruit?” Habibi asked.

“I will have my best men on it.”

Habibi wiped his brow and began to head out. He was stroking his bra underneath his robe as he walked down the street. He had used up three and a half tins of wax since yesterday. He would have more than enough to carry him through his secret adventures for the next few days.

“I will see you in a day or two,” finished Savid.



“Habibi, I haven’t seen you in two days. Very unusual for you to be absent during two days of citywide panic. Or, perhaps, it is quite expected. You are a clever man...” The chief inspector began with a grin.

“Criminal! Criminal!” cawed the parrot.

“I have been out of town. I must take advantage of chaos,” claimed Habibi.

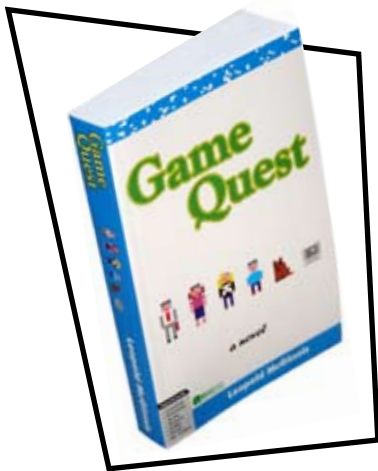
“Yes. Tell me, where did you go?”

“Nice try, but I will not divulge.”

“Ah, well, were it not for every criminal and budding criminal running around the city right now on a ‘wild goose chase,’ as the English call it, I would make a point of finding

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