

# VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

**SYNOPSIS:** Bombelli, a curious wanderer who has money although enlisted in the Foreign Legion, tries to induce Otho Belléme to desert and, failing that, hints of great benefits if he will fall in with the plans of Major Ricco. Ricco, his Napoleonic ambitions barred by the Sage of the French Secret Service, has been forced out of the French army, and has risen to the rank of major after enlisting in the Foreign Legion. At his baking post near Mekness Ricco dreams of ruling a Sahara empire. Then a dirty Arab approaches Otho on entry duty, and asks to him one word only, "Yelverbury."

Chapter 8  
**"YES, MY COMMANDANT!"**  
MECHANICALLY the astounded Otho resumed the position of attention, and then stood himself properly at ease.

"Yelverbury" with just that peculiar pronunciation and intonation. Of course! The interview with the officer... The Parade-ground at Mellerat... The first day that he was able to go on duty again after his fight with M'Bongu. The messenger who had hidden him come with him forthwith, to where Monsieur le Colonel and a strange officer—another Colonel—demanded his immediate attendance.

He remembered every incident, every word of the interview that had followed. Saluting and standing smartly at attention in that little room... speculating regarding the officer, a big powerful man, strong-faced and iron-jawed, who sat at the table and stared at him with hard appraising eyes...

"Le Légionnaire Otho Belléme?"  
"Oui, mon Commandant."  
"Your real name?"  
"Oui, mon Commandant."  
"You are English?"  
"Oui, mon Commandant."  
"The name is French."  
"Norman. A thousand years in England."

The officer smiled. "Educated?"  
"Oui, mon Commandant."  
"Where?"  
"At home, at Yelverbury Grammar School, and at Oxford."  
"Profession?"  
"Pugilist."

The officer smiled. He had watched the defeat of M'Bongu the invincible. "Father's profession?"  
"Gentleman."  
The officer raised his eyebrows. "Sir Belléme, then?"  
"Sir Otho Robert Mandeville-Belléme."

The officer reflected, as he scrutinized Otho's strong and handsome, if somewhat disfigured face. Yes, this was his man... a tool to his hand... Obviously—in view of that awful fight—as brave as a lion, strong as an ox, determined and tenacious as one of his own British bulldogs... Well born, too, well educated; probably quite clever; and, by report, amenable to discipline and of excellent character.

Character? Then what should such a man be doing in the Foreign Legion? A woman, no doubt. Or perhaps merely one of those mad romantics who live for adventure, warning their brave hearts in the glow of glamorous dreams. Yes, this man would do.

"How would you like to leave the ranks and come with me?" asked the strange Colonel suddenly.  
"Pardon, mon Commandant?" replied Otho in some bewilderment.  
"Do you speak Arabic as well as you do French and English?"  
"As well as I do French, but not as well as I do English, mon Commandant," smiled Otho.

"How would like to be seconded and come with me, study Arabic, become an Arab, in fact; until I can use you as one. How, in short, would you like to join the Secret Service, if you satisfied me during your apprenticeship, and passed my tests? A hard and dangerous life—for a brave man; with a brave man's rewards, if he succeeds."

"I should love it, mon Commandant. Better than anything on earth... But I cannot leave my company."  
"Why not?"  
"My friends. They joined the Legion because I did. I couldn't..."  
"What type of men are these, your friends? Englishmen? Educated men? Gentlemen?"  
"Two of them are pugilists like myself, mon Commandant. All three were sailors."

"Not educated?"  
"No, mon Commandant."  
"Any of them naturally clever? Good at disguise... good linguists... good actors?"  
Otho shook his head.  
"No, mon Commandant. Splendid."  
"No, mon Commandant."  
"And you would not leave them?"  
Again Otho shook his head.  
"Well, mon enfant, you are a fool. A silly fool, an Englishman, in fact."

The "Moor" and Major Riccoil have a strange encounter, tomorrow.

"Oui, mon Commandant."  
"I'm very fond of the English," said the officer, and rising to his feet, extended a huge hand, the grip of which caused poignant but agreeable pain to Otho's damaged fist.  
"Now listen, and pay close attention. Give me some word—we'll have an English word, I think—that will instantly recall me to you, should I utter it in your hearing. A kind of password, in effect, that will be private and peculiar to you and me."  
"Oh, I should never forget you, mon Commandant, especially after your kindness."  
"Perhaps not, mon enfant, but I trust that, although you may not forget me, you won't know me the next time we meet... A little humiliating for me, you know, if I accosted you in the guise of a starving leper, and instead of giving me a son, you saluted me and stood to attention... I sincerely hope a password will be necessary before you recognize me."  
Otho smiled.  
"I beg your pardon, mon Commandant. I did not understand... What about 'Yelverbury' where my home is?"  
"Excellent. It is hardly likely that any Arab, Moor, Bedouin, Touareg or other Berber will introduce himself to you with that particular word," smiled the officer as, with a friendly hand upon Otho's shoulder, he bade him think well upon what he had heard, while remembering that a still tongue runs in a wise head.

And now, long after the curious little incident had faded from his mind, a typical hill Arab, bearded, brown and dirty, with turban, sandals, and staff complete, had quietly but distinctly and unmistakably, uttered the word "Yelverbury" as he passed.

That officer! The strange Colonel, disguised as a Moor of the Southern Atlas, and so completely disguised that, but for the password, Otho would never have dreamed that the Arab was other than he seemed.

Wheeling about, as though changing his mind and deciding to return to the little extra-mural market, the Arab approached the sentry, content that the word which he had uttered guaranteed him against prohibitive challenge.

"Yelverbury!" he said again. "I must see Major Riccoil before he leaves this post. Don't recognize me. Know nothing."  
Yes, this was certainly the Secret Service Colonel, and Otho's superior officer. But what was going to happen to the sentry who allowed an Arab to hang about the gate of the post?

Would the Colonel exculpate him when he was put under arrest for so grave a dereliction of duty, an action so flatly contravening his clear instructions? Any Arab, attempting to behave like this, would be regarded as a spy, and a complacent sentry as his bribed accomplice.

However, orders were orders and—luckily—any Colonel was certainly senior to Major Riccoil, and was it not French military law that, in any circumstances, any member of the French naval or military forces must obey the order of the senior officer on the spot, no matter to what branch of the Service he might belong?

As those thoughts flashed through Otho's mind the Arab produced from beneath his cloak a folded piece of coarse paper, tumbled and filthy, on which was scrawled:  
"Moni-ur le Commandant le Major Riccoil."  
"Get this to Major Riccoil somehow," he said. "If the sergeant of the Guard refuses, speak to your Officer yourself. If nothing happens, come and look for me in the market there, selling almonds."

And the speaker, retiring a few paces, squatted beside the road or track that led from the gate of the post.

Otho perpended. Clearly he must let Major Riccoil know, as soon as possible, that a tribesman demanded speech with him. Would Sergeant-Major Vittorelli take the message and the scrap of paper, or curse him for a fool and punish him for allowing an Arab to approach so close that he might have stabbed the sentry, snatched his rifle and fled; or have dashed into the fort and died slaying—perhaps succeeding in killing the Commandant himself, or even Sergeant-Major Vittorelli?

Had he better march boldly into the stone hut that was the Commandant's quarters, trusting that the scrap of paper would be his passport to forgiveness for such presumption?

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A large group of local employees of the California Oregon Power company enjoyed an interesting program at the regular meeting of the Copco Forum Thursday noon. R. S. Daniels presided as chairman of the meeting and introduced J. C. Boyle, who gave

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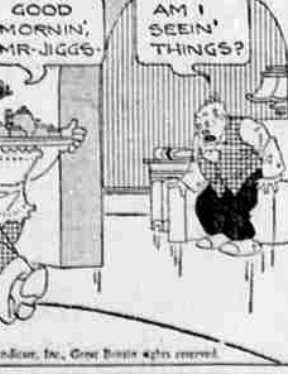
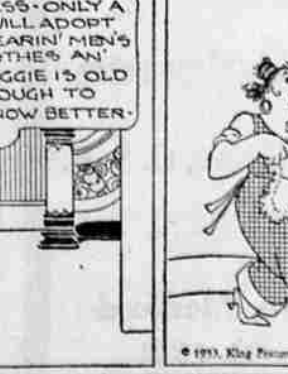
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PORTLAND, Ore., Feb. 16.—(AP)—Rudolph J. Schults and Emil E. Isakson were sentenced to seven years each in federal prison when they pleaded guilty in federal court here yesterday to charges of counterfeiting. The government accused them of making and possessing plates for making five-dollar United States notes and ten-dollar federal reserve notes.

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