

*All
That
Glitters*

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This is an original shorty story and has
never appeared elsewhere.

Blazing! Adventures Magazine

Publishers

New York

2007

Gregory Hammond strove to slow his racing heart.

Gold and jewels glittered all around them. Glittering light beckoned from every corner and it was all that the professor could do to not drop to his knees and praise the Gods both ancient and new for allowing him to witness this.

"I knew that this temple was considered a grand and rich one, but I would have never theorized that..." Hammond trailed off. "It's simply amazing!"

"Professor?"

Hammond was shaken from his thoughts by the deep voice. Forcing a pleasant tone, Gregory answered.

"Yes Francis?"

"I think you may want to come take a look at this, I think I've found something!"

Gregory held up the torch and carefully made his way around the priceless artifacts; muttering all the way. "I swear, if that big lummoX has broken anything..."

Lost in his grumbling, the professor did not hear the odd sound that followed his footsteps; a scratching rasp that ended as soon as it began.

One Week Ago

The screams of excitement finally forced Hammond from his studies.

In the blinding African sun, Gregory Hammond looked as out of place as a donkey among thoroughbreds. Barely five and a half feet tall, the crimson-haired professor of archeology and a half-dozen other disciplines appeared more a well dressed ape than

a man of letters. Yet hidden under the stained clothing and oafish looks was a razor sharp mind; a fact that dismayed many of his colleagues who had the misfortune of facing him across a lectern.

The screams originated from the tent village, or rather from the sides of the road that ran through it. A motorcade slithered through, kicking up a wall of dust that obscured their passage. Despite this choking cloud, it did not appear that the crowd was in any danger of quieting down.

Gregory strained to read the clapboard on the sides of the motorcars. Barely visible through the cloud he could make out the caricature of a powerful black man with hands in a posture of pugilistic bent, the face painted in such a fashion as to denote both nobility and power. Below the painting there was golden lettering that read "Francis Washington, the Voyage Home!" The Professor continued to watch with morbid fascination as the makeshift parade halted and the doors of the middle vehicle flew open to reveal a heavy set man carrying a tin blow horn.

"Ladies and gentlemen of deepest, darkest... Well, ladies and gentlemen of brightest and hottest Africa! Allow me to introduce you all to the greatest traveling spectacle this world has ever seen!" Cheers answered and he paused with a wide grin.

"Francis Washington! A man of the people! A champion, of the people! Back among, his, people!" The man jumped off the running board, pointing into the crowd. "And as a special treat to you, as he travels across this continent on the way to a historic battle with that lackey of the Furerhs, Herr Something or other."

An explosion of boos.

"Francis himself will make an appearance in your town for one week only as we refuel and provision ourselves for the remainder of our trip. Get your photograph taken with the future world champion! Autographs! Personalized messages to your loved ones! All this, and more, await all of you!"

Gregory frowned as the stranger continued barking out his wares to the crowd.

**Turning his back on the spectacle the professor grumbled.
"Showboating... Bah!"**

Hammond held the torch above his head while addressing the pugilist.

"Yes Francis?"

The boxer pointed.

"What do you make of this Mr. Hammond?"

Gregory spared a quick look.

"Amazing!" Hammond squinted. "You have managed to find a scrap of cloth!"

Hammond stood. "Come now, even someone unschooled in archeology must realize that there are more wonderful things here than that to look upon."

Despite the professor's urgings Francis did not stir. "It kinda looks like a snake skin, don't it?"

"A snake skin? I assure you Francis, what you hold is nothing but a simple piece of cloth. A very well constructed piece, but cloth none the less." Hammond pointed to a pile of statues. "Now, these idols here, those are a find! Perhaps we should take one back with us to show the others?"

The large man was not impressed. After a moment a huge smile spread over his features and he held up a small object.

"If it's cloth professor," Francis said, turning the object in his hand. "Why does it have scales?"

Hammond's eyes narrowed. Momentarily at a loss for words, the professor scratched at his unruly hair and looked around.

"What is that sound?"

The rasping had returned!

6 Days Ago

"If I have told you once Azid, I have told you a thousand times. The money will be here by this Friday! You can not let your men stop working now, not when we are so close!"

The older of the pair of Arabic gentlemen weathered Hammond's angry outburst with indifference. When the professor finished, he spoke a few words in a harsh tongue to the younger.

"The great Al Azid suggests that you perhaps deal first with whatever has died in your mouth before you again address him." The Arab blushed, watching Hammond warily. As the professor began to sputter in rage, he spoke swiftly.

"I am sure the great Al Azid meant no insult, he is just not accustomed to being spoken to in such a manner. When faced with new things the initial response can be violent, do you not agree?"

Hammond fumed. Gaining a moment's composure, he stammered out his words.

"The dig is at worst a week away from completion. I'm not asking that the work crews uncover the entire temple, just the entrance! My God man, we are so close; you can even see the top of the arc stones. You cannot seriously tell me you intend to shut down the dig just because you are going to run a few dollars short! This could finally be the key to the mystery of Egungun-Oya!"

The man translated, bowing at the end of his words. Azid shook his head, holding up two fingers before spitting out a few quick words. Without a second glance, the

labor leader retreated back to the shade of his pavilion, ignoring Hammond's glare.

"The great Al Azid wishes me to tell you that he is not a man of science, nor one of charity. His men will work as long as they are being told to by him, and he will only deign to speak to them when he is getting paid. The money you have given will last for two more working days, no more and no less." The translator bowed deeply. "Please Sahib; do not press my Master further in this matter. Many have tried to argue their way into a more favorable position with him." The translator stole a glance towards the pavilion. "And all have found themselves lacking. Myself included." The translator ran to follow his master as four muscular men lifted the litter and departed, leaving Hammond alone with his growing temper.

"Foul, uneducated, sorry excuse for men of business! The greatest archeological find in years lies almost revealed before them and they cannot extend me the slightest bit of credit!" Hammond smote his fists together, too distraught to notice the man in a dusty suit that emerged from the shadows.

"Excuse me? I couldn't help but overhear your conversation there."

Gregory frowned.

"Yes?"

The heavy-set man smiled and extended a sweaty hand.

"Frank E. Karlin, businessman and agent for the soon-to-be-world champion Francis Washington. I have a proposition for you."

Hammond's lips were reduced to a thin line as Francis surged to his feet.

"What was that? Is the temple collapsing? Oh Hell, I mean... I'm sorry, I didn't

mean to blaspheme Professor but, we should go shouldn't we? I don't want to be buried alive!"

Hammond ignored him, peering into the darkness. "This temple has withstood the ravages of time and the desert for years Francis. If it has lasted this long I am sure our presence, no matter how graceless, would not lead to its demise." The professor moved forward, searching for the source of the sound. "More than likely it is just rats or some such vermin. It is important that we find their entrance, it could lead to another chamber!"

Francis followed behind, rubbing his arms and shivering as he watched the shadows.

"I don't know Mr. Hammond, but this place sure does give me the goose pimples." Francis swallowed hard. "Don't you feel it professor? It's almost like this place just isn't... You know, right."

Hammond scoffed, turning the torch as he sought the source of the noise. "Places are neither right nor wrong my young friend, they merely exist. It is of course possible that those that call those places their own could make poor use of them, but that is neither here nor there." Hammond stopped. "Well, this is interesting."

The object of his interest rose up from the floor in two tiers, the first creating a space roughly a foot wide that ran the entire length of the artifact. From this small lip a table rose, small spikes curling inward along the edges like teeth. The surface was odd, looking to be formed of thousands of glinting sharp needles. From either end of the table half-pipes of stone, stained darker than the rest of the structure, vanished into the floor.

"This is fascinating! Simply fascinating!" Hammond climbed up the step; eyes alight. "I do not believe that there has ever been anything like this discovered in this region before." Hammond held the torch close. "Well, that is odd."

"What is it Professor?" Francis asked.

**"Well, unless I miss my guess." Gregory slid his fingers along the half-pipes.
"This is blood!"
And as if punctuating his final statement, the rough scraping sound grew louder!**

6 Days Ago

"So you see Gregory, may I call you Gregory? The way I see it, you have two options."

Hammond stared at the agent with disgust. Not a social person, he found the rotund man's boisterous nature grating. Not only that, but the agent had still not let on what his proposal was.

"Option one." Karlin continued as his face flushed from the drink. "Is that you wait to hear from this Egan fellow. Maybe he sends the money, maybe he doesn't. Maybe," Karlin held up a pale finger. "Maybe he forgot that you were down here altogether. These important business people? They can get distracted; I can tell you from personal experience."

The professor felt his limited hospitality fade. "Thomas Egan is an honorable and just man whom I have known for the bulk of my professional life." Hammond fumed.

"If he says the money will be there, it will be there. There is no consideration otherwise in my mind."

Karlin continued as if Hammond had never spoken. "Option two. You let me fund the remainder of your dig."

The professor nearly dropped his glass. "You?" He asked. "Why would you wish

to fund an archeological expedition?"

The agent leaned over, eyes hidden in pudgy folds. "It's simple Gregory." He whispered a single word with near orgasmic pleasure. "Publicity!"

Hammond swore, stomping his foot.

"Whatever that is I swear I will find its source and make it be still for at least ten minutes so I can survey these artifacts in peace!"

The boxer stood with eyes like saucers, surveying the darkness. No coward was he but the young man began sweat. The sound seemed familiar, almost as if some part of him had heard it before. He searched his memory but could not place it.

"Let's go back out now Professor, what do you say?" Francis asked as he wiped his bald head. "Surely we have seen enough on our own?"

"Nonsense!" Hammond roared. "I will not have one of the most important archeological finds of the century trampled upon by the untalented and unlearned feet of the common laborer! Who knows what they would destroy before I have a chance to at least make a few sketches in situ."

The boxer saw his chance. "Sketches Mr. Professor? How do you intend to make sketches sir? It's so dark and all. I know! We could run out and get some more torches!"

Hammond moved the torch back and forth as he searched the room. "Firstly, there is no reason to call me Mr. Professor, as I believe that to be a redundant title. In the second," Hammond grinned, stabbing the air with a forefinger. "We will not need any further torches. Rest your eyes upon one of the greatest inventions ever crafted by man!"

Francis squinted. "A bowl?"

Hammond held the light out to Francis, quickly running his fingers along the interior of the strange object. "No, not a bowl Francis. A brazier! Here, give me the torch."

Francis reluctantly handed it over. "How do you expect something that old to still burn?"

In answer, the professor plunged the torch into the bowl. The entire chamber plunged into complete darkness and Francis yelped in surprise. Yet a moment later the artifact leapt into flaming life, reflecting off of polished metal and filling the treasure chamber with light! Speechless, the two men stood and gawked, lost in the immensity of the sight before them.

Hisssss

Hammond slowly turned at the sound. He gasped, drawing Francis' attention, as he saw the nightmare that stood before them; eyes black and forked tongue lashing the air.

6 Hours Ago

Hammond pushed the tent flap open and stopped dead.

Throngs of people clogged the way to the site. As the sun assaulted his eyes, Gregory strove to pick out individual features among the masses. Yet for every familiar face there were two others that were totally out of place.

"Fantastic turnout, don't you think Gregory?"

The professor barely recognized the businessman as he grasped his hand.

"Took a little bit of doing, but once the word that the dig was to be completed got out, I managed to get some of the neighboring villages to send spectators out to watch." Karl whispered. "I hope you don't mind me saying this, but I really rather hope that whatever you find in that temple is worth it to you. Just getting the journalists here cost me a small fortune. Ah, speaking of which, don't look now. It's that Christiansen fellow from the Times, you stay here."

Karlin swept away towards a thin man holding a stained notepad. Unsure what to make of what was happening; Hammond was giving definitive thought to escaping back into his tent when a deep voice cut through the cacophony.

"They can get kind of loud, can't they?"

The deep voice caused Hammond to turn, eyes growing wide at the speaker. Sun glinted off his shaved head, illuminating the roadmap of veins that ran under the skin. Underneath the linen of the shirt and pants that strained to contain his massive size, Hammond could see bulging muscles and scarred flesh.

Noticing the confused look, the giant offered his hand. "Sorry about that, I forget my manner's sometimes. I'm Francis Washington, the boxer?" A self-conscious smile.

"Maybe you have heard of me?"

The world fell back into focus. Suddenly, the cheering crowds and the scampering of the fat little business man made sense. A week after shaking the agent's moist hand, the day had finally arrived. The temple entrance was cleared! Hammond absently shook the boxer's hand, mind racing.

"Yes, yes, yes. The pugilist. Quite excellent to meet you." Hammond let go.

"Now, if you will excuse me, I have to be going. Very busy day ahead, exploring and such."

However, Washington would not be so easily side stepped.

"Excuse me Professor, but I think you are mistaking." The boxer smiled and

spread his arms. "I'm ready to go exploring!"

Hammond sighed as he remembered the Faustian deal he had been forced to make with Karlin. Muttering, the professor rubbed his face.

"Damn."

Within the nightmare's hypnotic gaze time lost all meaning. Seconds bled into minutes and ever onward, slipping away like sand. For the two existence was reduced to those shining points of reflected light. Reduced, that is, until a pile of artifacts - disturbed by prior exploration - tumbled to the ground with an ear piercing jumble of sounds. The creature broke its gaze, hissing angrily at the interruption.

Hammond recovered first, digging his fingers hard into Francis' shoulder.

"Listen." Hammond whispered, insides quaking as the powerful creature circled the fallen treasures. "I will try to distract the creature. You run for the entrance, tell them what we have seen, keep others from entering." The gigantic snake creature turned at the sound of Hammond's voice, tongue slashing the air angrily.

"GO!"

Francis stumbled as Hammond shoved him with strength born of absolute terror. "I can't leave you to-"

The serpent snapped forward and Hammond stood his ground. Gregory let out a wail of terror and whipped the torch into the monster's eyes! The creature drew back, hissing before plunging into the shadows. Unable to believe his luck Hammond bolted, pushing Francis before him.

"RUN!"

Five Hours Ago

The sounds of the crowd reverberated inside the corridor as the two men crept into darkness. The air was stale and bitter, both men coughing as a musky scent rose from every footstep.

"What do you think we will find Mr. Professor?" Francis' voice filled the tunnel.

"No one is very sure what exactly these treasure temples contain, outside of treasure that is." Hammond moved slowly, intelligent eyes scouring the tunnel walls. "I do have, some, experience with these places." Pride entered his voice. "However they are rarely the same."

The boxer gazed around warily. "These temples? You mean there are more of these things?"

"Yes, several. They vary in construction and purpose yet they do all have two important facts tying them all together." Hammond paused. "One? They are all built in honor of someone or something known as Egungun-Oya, which has often been represented as a many headed creature much like the Greek Medusa. Some writings tell us that this creature was even older than the commonly known Gods of Egypt. Secondly," Hammond continued on. "They all contain incredible amounts of treasure."

"Treasure like this?"

"No! Don't!"

Francis snatched his hand back from a pile of golden statues. "I wasn't going to take it Mr. Professor, honest. I was just looking."

"I didn't think you were going to steal Mr. Washington." Hammond eyed the objects with disdain. "Those who worshipped this, Oya, personage, enjoyed their little traps and tricks. I can assure you that even touching those statues may unleash a trap unlike any you could comprehend."

Francis drew back. "Traps? What kind of traps?"

The professor continued into the temple.

"The fatal kind."

The snake exploded through the wall to the treasure chamber in an eruption of stone. Stumbling along by memory, the two men raced down the corridor. Behind them the rasping slide of the great beast came ever closer and their tenuous grip on sanity weakened.

"The entrance!" Hammond cried out as he glimpsed the dim light of salvation. His elation was short lived however, as with a painful shriek he pitched forward, tumbling head over heels to come to a stop with the snap of bone.

"My ankle!"

The boxer skidded to a halt. With strength born of terror he grabbed him, struggling to lift him up.

"Come on Mr. Professor, we gotta get going!"

Hammond swore at the fighter. "What are you doing? Run man! Run! This damned thing will kill us both! RUN!"

Francis looked towards the entrance while biting his lip. Sweat poured off him as his mind raced. The hissing filled air, ripe with dark promise as he turned away from the exit, face blank with determination. Nothing, not the scraping slide of the creature's approach or Hammond's increasingly crazed demands for Francis to run, had any effect. Instead the boxer set his feet firmly into the ground, putting his back to the light of salvation.

And raised his hands into guard.

Three Hours Ago

**Francis dropped his backpack, wincing at the crack of broken glass
Hammond gritted his teeth. Even without investigating, the professor knew the source.**

"Congratulations Mr. Washington, you just managed to break either a specimen jar or a magnifying glass. I am sure you can understand the difficulty in replacing either of those items in the middle of a desert."

Francis mumbled out an apology. "Sorry Mr. Professor, I didn't mean to. I'm just well... Bored! All we have been doing is walking down this little stretch of corridor like two blind men with you checking the ground every few steps."

"It's called archeology Mr. Washington." Hammond paused. "And sometimes, when you least expect it." He hurried on. "You are rewarded with the grandest of prizes."

Francis' eyes grew wide, watching as Hammond's torchlight exposed his find. The corridor ended in an immense room, covered from floor to walls in treasure.

"Golly!"

Hammond smiled.

"Golly indeed Mr. Washington."

Hammond cursed as he watched the serpent slid towards them. Even as his brain struggled to come to grips with the beast, the professor maintained enough reason to be thankful that the shadows hid it from full view. Shivering, the professor shut his eyes

and waited for the end.

Only to open them a moment later, as a heavy thunk reverberated through the corridor!

The snake reared back as blood spewed blackly in the darkness. The creature screamed as it thrashed about, shattering stone and kicking up dust. Hammond was still watching as Francis grabbed his collar and pulled.

"No offense Mr. Professor, but if you can get off your rear end, I'd surely appreciate it."

The professor managed to pull himself up, limping as he leaned on the boxer's shoulder. The tiny distance which had so frustrated Francis before now seemed insurmountable. Yet with every painful step, they drew closer to salvation.

"We're almost there Mr. Professor, don't give up yet!"

Hammond started to reply but was cut off as the hideous hissing gurgled wetly towards them. Gregory strove to move faster, casting his gaze about for some sign of salvation.

And found it.

"Francis! The altar!" The boxer looked at Hammond blankly, pulling him along as he tried to run. Undaunted, Gregory pointed at the vague outline of the altar which Hammond had chastised Francis for touching earlier.

"Knock over the altar, do it!"

"I don't," Francis panted.

The serpent hissed again, close enough for them to feel its breath.

"DO IT!"

Francis lashed out with his boot, knocking over the altar. Immediately a deep rumbling began, shaking the ground beneath their feet.

Hammond leapt towards the square of sunshine, grabbing Francis by the arm as he went. The walls crumbled, bouncing off their exposed flesh to leave bloody trails.

The serpent let out a high-pitched cry of nearly human frustration...

And the world went dark.

"Did you see that?"

"A cave-in!"

"Are they ok?"

"Did they make it?"

"Someone get a camera!"

"Francis! Francis! Goddamnit! Francis!"

Frank Karlin pushed aside the watchers and dropped to his knees, pawing through the debris. Be it in actual worry or concern for his meal ticket, none could tell.

Luckily for Karlin's mental health, hacking coughs answered from the swirling dust. After a few moments the squat professor and the boxer emerged, covered in filth and leaning on each other for support.

"Mr. Washington!"

"Over here Mr. Washington!"

"What happened in there?"

"What the hell do you think you are doing!" Karlin stormed forward, grabbing Hammond by the front of his shirt. "Do you have any idea of what you could have done? You could have gotten him injured! Or killed! He has a fight in a few weeks, do you have any idea what might have happened? What are you? An idiot?"

"Hey, look at that! Francis saved that weird professor guy too! I bet he even managed to grab a look at the insides of this place while keeping the professor from wrecking the place."

The journalist's words cut Karlin off mid-sentence. Releasing Hammond he faced the crowd, bellowing out his words.

"Yes... Yes that's right gentlemen! Look what we have here my friends. Not only is Francis Washington the greatest pugilist in the world. Not only is Francis Washington the next heavyweight champion of the world, but he is a man of science and of compassion! Knowing in his heart of hearts that only a man of his iron like nerves and steely disposition could handle a catastrophe such as is possible in the bowels of the earth, Francis Washington begged me to allow him to go down into that stygian pit with the poor professor. Begged me to help him help the knowledge spread." The journalists scribbled away. "And yet, even in the face of utmost danger his reflexes stayed as sharp as they will be in the ring in one month's time; allowing him to save the professor!"

The crowd erupted into cheers, the Africans thrusting hands into the air. Francis looked at Hammond and shrugged, his posture a study in helplessness as Karlin launched into another tirade about his bravery. Yet Hammond did not pay attention to the riotous crowd. Instead his eyes were fixed on the spot of their escape, alert for any sign of disturbance. Moments later, when there were no signs of immediate danger, the professor turned at the call of his name.

"Professor Hammond? That's your name, right?"

Gregory nodded.

"Jeremy Christiansen, New York Times. What do you have to say about Mr. Washington here?"

The crowd fell silent. Gregory looked around, seeing Karlin mouth something to him, watching the crowd wait breathlessly for his words. Setting his jaw he turned finally to Francis, considering him before speaking.

"Francis Washington may not be the greatest archeologist I have had the pleasure to work with." Hammond intoned, ignoring Karlin's angry look. Then, a smile. "But I do know that I will personally be placing a bet on him against that ratzi bastard!" Hammond lifted Francis' arm, basking in the flashbulbs as the journalists joined him in celebrating the man who had faced antiquity's horror----with only a strong left hook.



The End