



## Anne Steelyard: *The Garden of Emptiness, Act III*

**Barbara Hambly**

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Move over, Indiana Jones. Gender rebel Anne Steelyard has a half-century head start in the race to prevent Germans from discovering the long-hidden secrets of the ancient world. The deadly power hidden within the lost City of Miyah—perhaps the Garden of Eden—has been protected by a powerful weapon for centuries. If the Kaiser's soldiers find it first, they will use it to wrest the crown of world domination from the British Empire.

Despite her distaste for Victorian ideology—or perhaps because of it—Anne is a proud British citizen, willing to die for her country rather than allow anything that could harm it fall into enemy hands. Determined to earn her stripes as an archaeologist, she is unaware that her flight from personal demons, inspired by an arranged marriage to a man of her dictatorial father's choosing, may very well fling her into the waiting arms of an even more deadly foe.

In *An Honorary Man*, the first book of this trilogy, Anne searches fruitlessly for the Garden of Eden. Now, in the final installment of this adventure, Anne and Lady Hester, a draconian defender of Victorian respectability, have returned to the desert sands surrounding Basra in current-day Iraq to learn the fate of Lady Hester's missing brother. Lending urgency to their mission is Anne's stark certainty that the Germans are racing to possess Miyah's secret protection: a powerful gas that drives its victims insane before killing them. After narrowly avoiding a German ambush at the only water source within three days' travel, Anne resorts to the dangerous art of psychic projection to enter the astral plane, where she has a harrowing encounter with the vengeful spirits of the Germans' most recent victims.

Tragedy lurks in deep caverns in this book as affairs of the heart vie with patriotism. Anne struggles to save herself, her friends, and the British Empire from the festering threat of German ambition, but even conquering her most challenging temptation does not ensure that she will escape unscathed.

Despite her swelling bosom, *de rigueur* for the teenage boys who are the majority of graphic fiction fans, Anne is a satisfyingly feminist protagonist whose recklessness and resiliency rise to expectations set by characters from Hermione Granger to Jane Eyre. A thrilling story of a woman making it in a man's world, this book marks another notch in Hambly's already impressive belt.

ELIZABETH BREAU (September 21, 2011)

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