As French empire builders confronted Saharan contestations of colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, they intended to remake the land and people of the desert through images and policies variously at odds with earlier representations of the land of thirst and fear. At the same time, however, denizens of the Sahara countered with a more intimate, immediate, and secret knowledge of their natural environment. That environment loomed as a battleground where colonial pretensions to knowledge and Saharan rejections of them played out, with long-lasting consequences for the ecological world of the desert.