The spirit of Nehanda



A Rhodesian Game Ranger's War Story

Ron Thomson

THE spirit OF NEHANDA

A novel by Ron Thomson

A RHODESIAN GAME RANGER'S WAR STORY

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DEDICATION

THIS book is dedicated to all those people – black, white and of mixed blood – on both sides of the conflict, who lost their lives during the Rhodesian Bush War (1964 to 1980).

In the end it was all for nothing. Everybody fought for what they believed was right and none of them got what they wanted.

It is particularly dedicated to all those game rangers of the Rhodesian National Parks Volunteer Tracker Combat Unit – The NPVTCU – who lost their lives in combat. May this novel be a memorial to the battles they fought because theirs was a very special kind of war. They were expert big game hunters and true conservationists at heart, and through force of circumstance they became hunters of men.

Those of us who survive remember them.

PREFACE

THIS is a story about three people: a black Mashona[i] boy, a half-black/half-Chinese Mashona girl, and a white Rhodesian boy, all of the same age. The white boy's father owned the farm on which they all grew up together. It was located in what was then the British colony of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the heart of south-central Africa.

The three friends were a close-knit threesome during their teenage years. The black boy taught the white boy about the traditions of his people and how to speak the Mzezuru[ii] language. The white boy taught the black boy how to shoot with a rifle, and he taught him, and the girl, how to speak English. The black boy and the girl became lovers when they were fourteen years old and by the time they were seventeen the girl had seduced the white boy, too. Throughout her life, she held a special place in her heart for her handsome white teenage lover. The friendship dissolved naturally when they all left school.

Fifteen years later the black man and the woman, now husband and wife, joined the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army.[iii] They became *'freedom fighters'*. They achieved high rank in ZANLA and they fought to liberate the Zimbabwe people from what they considered to be the oppressive regime of the white Rhodesian government.

The white boy grew up and achieved his dream of becoming a game warden. When war broke out he offered his big game hunting and tracking skills to the Rhodesian Security Forces. He, together with his two Bushman trackers, used their combined and extraordinary tracking abilities, and their masterful bush craft, to track down and to engage what the Rhodesians called the ZANLA *'terrorists'*. As a team, the game warden and his trackers became renowned and highly accomplished hunters of men.

The ancestor worshipping cult of the northern Mashona people permeates the story. It affected both the direction of the war and the outcome of events. The senior spirit of this religion is called *'Nehanda'*.

Inevitably, the two men come face to face in combat and the woman becomes the deciding factor in the story's conclusion.

PROLOGUE

SOUTH CENTRAL AFRICA
North Eastern Rhodesia
1975

DANIEL MOYO threaded his way through the fourteen-foot tall elephant grass, moving in the direction of the big baobab tree. The tree, growing on top of a solid and ball-like granite dome, loomed five hundred feet above the valley like a giant avenging angel. It seemed to brood over all the living things beneath it, commanding them to be still. There was no wind, so the flowering heads of the grass high above his head were undisturbed and motionless. Except for the swishing sounds that he made as he forced his body through the heavy grass-canes, everything was quiet and peaceful.

There were the sounds of birds calling in the trees on the hillsides. The monotonous *'quollop'* of a black-headed oriole… the raucous, cackling chatter of red-billed hoopoes… and overhead Daniel recognised the broad sails of a vulture floating on a very high thermal. Everything was still and tranquil in the shimmering heat.

He was exhausted. The sweat poured off his dust-begrimed brown face and his East German battle fatigues were saturated. He did not relish the thought of climbing the high steep hill ahead of him to reach the baobab, and he wondered if any of the others had arrived; or if he would be the first. He had taken his time, meticulously executing his anti-tracking activities, moving slowly and carefully; and there were still thirty minutes before the midday deadline that he had himself prescribed. He had timed his progress well.

He walked through a middle section of the grassland; a section that had collapsed under its own weight during a rainstorm several months before. For a few moments he was, and he felt, exposed.

"Whooeee… Whooeee… Whooeee."

Daniel froze.

“Whooeee … Whooeee… Whooeee.”

It was the three-toned whistling signal he and his comrades used to attract each other's attention. High up on the hillside a dark figure emerged from the sparse yellow grass amongst the rocks. The man waved his arms. Then three others stood up. They waved at him also.

‘They are all there. They are all safe. They've all made it without being seen by the Rhodesian soldiers – the mabunu[iv] *enemy’*. Daniel smiled. They had used their noggins, too. They had gathered together half way up the slope and directly below the baobab. He was the last to arrive and he was very pleased that he would not now have to climb the high hill to its summit.

“Whooeee … Whooeee … Whooeee.” Daniel returned their whistled signal. A broad smile cut across his face. Everything was going according to plan.

He stopped briefly and waved his arms too. His head and shoulders were the only parts of him that were visible above the half-flattened golden grass stalks. He then resumed ploughing through the forest of lateral grass stems that were festooned, four feet above the ground all around him like thick, dry, stiff spaghetti.

He pushed on, eager now to rejoin his ZANLA comrades.

The eight men of the tracking team were too far away to see or to hear any of this activity. But even if they had seen the man they had been tracking so relentlessly since dawn, and if they had seen him make contact with his fellow Zimbabwe freedom fighters, they could not now have reacted. They had new orders. They had been instructed to prepare an ambush and to lie in wait on the man’s back trail.

Mike Campbell and his two Bushman trackers, Julias Rothman, the seconded Selous Scout member of their tracking team, and the four black soldiers of the Rhodesian African Rifles[v] the trackers’ protection stick that day – were all lying down along the southern high-rim of a steep gully. They directed the muzzles of their self-loading FN rifles into the grass-filled depression below. From that position they had full command of the upper ravine.

Mike and Julias lay side by side listening intently to the indistinct crackling voices on their A-60 combat radio. They could feel the excitement in the soldiers' metallic communications. The tension was electric.

“One-Nine. This is Two-Three-Charlie. You'd better start winding her up Sunray.[vi] Number five has just reached the base of the hill. He'll have joined up with his muckers in about minutes five. I repeat. He will have joined up with the other gooks[vii] in minutes five. Over.”

The man who had made the report was well hidden amongst a jumble of high rocks. From that position he had a grandstand view of the entire valley and of the hillside below the baobab. He now had all five of the ZANLA fighters visual.

“Roger Two-Three-Charlie. We are already airborne. Confirm the targets are still located half way up the hillside and directly below the baobab. Over.”

“That is affirmative. One-Nine. That is affirmative. Number five is moving up the hillside towards the others as we speak. You can't miss them. Over.”

“Thank you, Two-Three-Charlie. Keep watching. Hold your position. We're on our way … ”

Julias grinned at Mike and nodded his head approvingly. He recognised the voice on the radio. *“One-Nine is the call-sign designation for the fire force commander… today's Battle Sunray,”* he explained excitedly, forgetting that Mike understood the radio jargon. “That was Captain John Houston. Your friend, the brigadier, must have transferred today's fire-force attack from Village Alpha to the baobab rendezvous.”

Incongruously, tears of emotion sparkled in the battle-hardened soldier's eyes. *“We've got him,”* Julias laughed to himself quietly. *“We've got that bastard Muliloh… at last.”* He had seen enough of Muliloh’s victims to be under any illusion about the man’s heinous soul.

Daniel Moyo, better known by his nom de guerre and high rank in ZANLA – Sectorial Commander Muliloh – strained as he pulled himself up the steep hillside. He'd missed out on one whole night's sleep and he felt as though he had been walking forever. He was dog tired. He needed a rest.

He stopped on the hillside to catch his breath and turned to look along his back trail. From this higher elevation he could see right across the grassland and up the gully with the heavy bamboo thickets that he had just walked down. Nobody was following him. He smiled to himself. He had clearly outwitted the trackers who, he was quite certain, were still trying to decipher

his spoor amongst the many hills that he had been carefully winding his way through, assiduously hiding his tracks, all morning.

There was no hurry now. He thought about the coming afternoon's trek. From here they could easily reach the Ruya River and cross into the Nehanda war zone sector before nightfall. The river was only three hours away by his reckoning. They could rest up on the Ruya and move over the border into Mozambique after dark. In Mozambique they would be safe. They had at least another twelve hours of forced marching ahead of them, however, before they could truly relax. Nevertheless, he was looking forward to ten or fifteen minutes on his back before they began the next long haul.

While he was standing still… for just those few short moments of time to catch his breath… breathing deeply… Daniel heard the faint whistle of the helicopter's jet engine perhaps fifteen seconds before the machine came roaring over the hill-top. Despite his fatigue his reaction was lightning-quick. Those fifteen seconds provided him with just enough time to shrug off his heavy backpack and to stumble headlong down the steep hillside. He tripped… he fell… he rolled. His knees banged painfully onto the jagged rocks in his path. Other rocks thumped cruelly into his back and ribcage.

Bleeding from several head abrasions and smarting from multiple bruised muscles, and skinned knees and elbows, he had just made the edge of the heavy grassland when the first of the camouflage-painted Alouette III helicopters came zooming into view.

The machine banked steeply and swung sideways towards the bleak hillside. The group of four ZANLA fighters scattered, but the sparse grass on the rocky slope provided them with scant cover. They crouched amongst the rocks and bushes trying to hide, but they were in full view of both the pilot and the technician who was manning the helicopter's twin Browning machine-guns. The ZANLA men fired their AK-47s wildly, in panic, at the hovering, shifting, terrifying monstrosity above their heads. Stridently the helicopter's guns began to chatter.

Four more helicopters pounced over the hill top. Suddenly the air was swarming with gunships.[viii] They flew immediately to various points on the hillsides around the perimeter of the valley. And there, without even waiting to fully touch down, they each disgorged four rough, fit-looking young soldiers from their bellies.

Then the noisy machines were back overflying the valley… hovering… waiting. Their pilots and technicians mechanically watched the lead

helicopter as it methodically took out the four terrorists. And the helicopters drenched the air with the shrill whining roar of their shrieking jet engines; and with the heavy whapping beat of their rotors.

A man screamed high up on the hillside. The first helicopter was firing its guns in short, sharp, intermittent bursts. It flew from one crouching… running… scrambling… terrorist to another. Knocking one man out… moving on to the next.

The four sectorial officers of Daniel's command headquarters hadn't a hope against the superior weaponry of the hovering aircraft. The mabunu attack had caught them in a very exposed position and completely by surprise.

'How the hell did they find us?' Daniel thought but he knew the answer was academic. The fact of the matter was the mabunu soldiers were here. *'How the hell am I going to get out of this?'* Finding the answer to that question was much more important.

Daniel mentally wrote off his four men with the ease of the military pragmatist that he was. It was his own skin he had to save now. He burrowed his way quickly but cautiously, deeper and deeper into the heavy grassland. Maybe if he lay doggo the mabunu would come and go? Maybe, if he just lay quiet and let the battle rage on around him, the mabunu would not find him? He was sure the helicopter crew had not seen him.

Behind him the firing ceased, and the lead helicopter drew slowly away from the mountainside. Daniel knew then that all his men were dead.

"One-Nine. Two-Three-Charlie. One escaped into the grass below the hill. You just missed seeing him. Over." The caller, in his O.P.[ix], had a clear view of the battle ground.

Both Mike and Julias heard the communication. They frowned at each other. Neither man wanted any of the gooks to escape from this important contact. They both knew that Muliloh was one of the five terrorists in this bunch.

"Two-Three-Charlie. One-Nine. Roger that. I can see a dark green pack down there on the hillside. Did he chuck off his backpack? Over."

"Affirmative. One-Nine. Affirmative. Then he ran straight down the hill into the grass. Over."

"O.K. Two-Three-Charlie. We've got the picture. We'll go down and see if we can find him. Over."

The helicopter at first circled Daniel's position fifty feet above the ground. But the grass cover was far too tall and far too thick for the observers to see anything from that height. The aircraft edged slowly backwards towards the hill then descended directly over Daniel's back-pack. And, at grass-top level, it flew slowly along the route the ZANLA commander had taken in his flight. The down draught of the helicopter's rotors flattened the heavy and brittle-dry grass stalks, exposing everything that was hidden beneath. And as it cruised along, the crew searched for the hiding terrorist.

The pilot looked down to the right-front. The technician at the port hatchway… hanging over his hot machine-guns… looked down to the left. And Captain John Houston… sitting in the left hand co-pilot's seat next to the pilot… looked directly to the front.

"Damn. They know I'm here," Daniel muttered to himself. And he thought: *'They're looking for me. They must have someone watching. They must have known the baobab was our meeting place.'* But that was a decision that Daniel had made on the spur of the moment less than seven hours ago! *'How the hell could they have known that?'*

He did not have the luxury of time to fathom the answer to that question. The mabunu were onto him. He had a much more precipitous problem to solve. Daniel lifted himself off his back and crouched low in the tall elephant grass, his AKM at the ready. He prepared himself for fight or flight.

Looking between the heavy grass stalks, he watched the advancing helicopter with great fear and trepidation. Through the perspex of its nose bubble he could see the searching eyes of the pilot and those of the fire-force commander next to him. It would only be a matter of seconds now before they saw him.

At that moment, ZANLA's notorious Sectorial Commander, the infamous Butcher-of-Chaminuka, prepared stoically to face his maker. Daniel was surprised at how calm he felt… although his body trembled and he was acutely aware of the tentacles of fear that were writhing deep down in his bowels, probing and groping as if in search of the very core to his being. There was absolutely no doubt in his mind that death stared him in the face.

'But… dammit,' he thought. 'If the mabunu are going to kill me, I'll damn well go down fighting.'

He turned the selector of his AKM assault rifle onto the forward fully automatic position. And, almost idly, he undid the bamboo toggles that

secured the flaps on two of the four magazine pouches on his Chinese chest webbing.

The AKM had one advantage over its famous fore-runner, the AK-47. It had a scooped gas muzzle-brake that held the weapon steady when it was fired on fully automatic. It did not run away with itself like the older model did, and Daniel knew it would hold its point of aim when he held the trigger down.

The helicopter crept on slowly towards him. Above the grey-blue masks that covered both their lower faces, Daniel could see the expressions in the eyes of the two men in the forward seats. Still he waited. The machine came on. It was twenty paces away… fifteen… ten. The yellow tips of the rotors were almost over his head.

Daniel saw the eyes of the fire-force commander open wide in recognition. The man had seen him. The moment of truth had arrived. He saw the soldier's mask moving as he spoke into its facial microphone. His hand rose pointing in Daniel's direction.

The ZANLA commander stood up tall in the path of the slowly advancing helicopter. The down draught of the aircraft’s rotors blew the grass hither and thither all around him, but he stood his ground. Even as he rose to his feet Daniel brought his assault rifle to his shoulder and placed the foresight onto the point of the pilot's face-mask. It was point blank range. Just before he squeezed the trigger he saw the look of terror reflected in the white man's eyes.

The stream of bullets penetrated the forward screen, punching a tight pocket of holes through the flimsy perspex. The fractured plastic frosted in a wide arc around the punctures. And as the aircraft lifted sharply into the air, a deluge of crimson blood splashed against the inside of the windshield. Daniel… hugely elated… the adrenaline pumping wildly through his veins… eased his finger off the trigger as the bullet holes began to rake downwards across the rising canopy.

He turned his attention then to the army officer. The man's eyes were huge in his desperate fright. His hands tugged frantically at the dual control column between his knees. But learning how to fly a helicopter, with a dead pilot's feet jammed against the pedals, had not been part of the soldier's training.

The aircraft rose slowly above the grass. It tipped over gently onto its side. As it tumbled Daniel emptied the remaining bullets in the rifle's magazine

into the suspended body of Captain John Houston. They stitched a long line of holes across the windscreen as the machine turned over. Every one of them found its mark.

The helicopter roared into the ground a hundred yards from where Daniel was standing. It cart-wheeled away from him… over… and over… and over again. The ruptured metal shrieked. The screaming jet engine raced out of control. And the whirling broken rotors tore the machine apart… gouging out huge holes in the deep black soil… propelling the hapless contraption along through the grassland as though the blades were the levers of some bizarre traction engine.

The shattered aircraft came to a sudden, shuddering halt. The jet engine died. For a brief few moments there followed an eerie silence. The familiar racket from the other four helicopters nearby was still apparent, but the precipitous cessation of the screaming jet engine, so recently and so closely rampant in Daniel's ears, was striking. And through the immediate locale of sudden quiescence, the pinging sounds of cooling… contracting… shrinking… hot metal seemed strangely out of place.

From out of the hush there came the keening, whimpering calls of a seriously injured man. It was the technician who had fired the machine-guns. Daniel experienced a surge of elation at the sounds of the man’s pain and anguish. The technician’s approaching death was just retribution for his killing of the four senior freedom fighters of Daniel’s command.

Then… suddenly… the stricken machine erupted in a gigantic explosion. The violent detonation sent white sheets of vapourised fuel racing over the surrounding grassland. There was a secondary dull ‘boeuff’ as the suspended mist ignited. The blast flattened the grass all around Daniel. It lifted him off his feet and it threw him forcibly backwards just as a shower of tortured metal fragments… some whistling… some whirring… some humming… flew dangerously past his head. And in the midst of that terrible conflagration the flight technician died a horrible and gruesome death.

For several long moments Daniel lay on his back stunned. Miraculously he had survived the stupendous explosion. He shook his head to clear the ringing in his ears. It would not go away. A helicopter flew by over his head. Blankly, he looked up at its ominous dark shape… a shimmering mirage… through a pall of heavy black smoke.

Daniel suddenly realized, with horror, that he was lying completely exposed on top of the blast-flattened golden grass. It was only the screen of

dark smoke hanging in the air above him that had saved him from detection. He wriggled quickly under the levelled cover and he lay there watching the searching aircraft. His apprehension grew more and more acute as his concussed senses sluggishly returned to normal.

By some stroke of luck the AKM was still in his hands. He extracted the spent magazine and pulled a fully loaded one from a chest webbing pouch, attaching it to the weapon. With a jerky motion he cocked the mechanism and switched the firing lever to safe.

Despite the sudden loss of their aircraft and its crew, the mabunu helicopters began searching for him again. One machine was hovering directly over the wreckage looking for survivors. The other three were canvassing the grassland all around. Except for the smoke they would surely have found him earlier. The gloomy shroud in the air above continued to protect him. The ever increasing volumes of smoke at ground level, however, also started to asphyxiate him. His lungs filled up with acrid fumes and he began to cough uncontrollably.

Daniel realised that he would have to move. If he didn't… and didn't move soon… he would be roasted alive. He also knew the moment that he broke cover, eager eyes in the hovering helicopters would quickly spot him. And he felt sure that, in his next confrontation with one of them, he would not be so lucky.

The grassland all around the stricken helicopter was ablaze and the quiet crackling, popping, hissing sounds of the burning, rupturing grass stalks that he had heard before, quickly became a cacophonous roar. The up-draught of heat from the raging flames generated its own gale-force wind. Then, suddenly, the fire took on a life of its own. Like a rabid all-consuming monster its flames fanned out with a horrendous and terrifying fury… and with a thunderous, rumbling roar the hungry blaze began to race across the tall flat grassland with the speed of a galloping horse.

The helicopters all pulled away sideways and upwards from the soaring flames, from the terrible heat, and from the rising billows of brown-and-white smoke.

Daniel had embedded himself in the old grey litter of three years grass growth, and flattened over his face and over his body lay this year's moribund canes. The cover all about him was tinder-dry and highly combustible. And the heat, the wind and the boiling smoke from the approaching flames began

to race toward him.

Mike Campbell and Julias Rothman lay in their ambush position glued to their radio. The battle chatter was congested, but they had been able to unravel the frantic communications that had traversed the airwaves. And from their elevated position two hundred feet above the valley, although more than a mile away, they had had a commanding view of the faraway battle.

They had both watched, jubilantly, as the fire force commander's G-car had rapidly, and with an almost casual precision, winkled out and eliminated, one by one, the first four terrorists. The sound of the machine-gun chatter had sent their pulses racing.

They had witnessed with horror, the crashing of the helicopter and the subsequent explosion. It was the first time Mike had seen a helicopter crash. It sent ice cold shivers running up and down his spine. He and his two Bushmen flew in helicopters every day when they were here in the war zone on tracking duty.

Julias became very quiet. The Selous Scout captain who had been killed in the crash, had been his friend.

The two men lay poignantly silent as they watched the veld fire gather momentum. The unconscious thought that passed through both their minds was the hope that the fifth and last ZANLA terrorist of the group… who just might be the notorious Muliloh… the one who had shot down the cyclone[x] … would perish horribly in the flames. There was not a shred of compassion for him in their hearts.

The grassland became a raging inferno.

PART ONE

North Eastern Rhodesia
1970

Chapter 1

“THE VILLAGE OF GERA,” the driver shouted at his passenger. He *had* to shout to be heard above the roar of the battered old truck's diesel engine, and above the harsh metallic clattering sounds as the truck’s ancient chassis bore the brunt of the corrugated dirt road. With a sideways nod of his head and a raised eyebrow, he gesticulated towards the cluster of roughly thatched huts on the side of the road ahead.

Anna Moyo glanced briefly and without expression into the man's dust-begrimed black face. She registered again his filthy airtex vest. Bright white teeth shone out of a beguiling smile but his *bonhomie*, she knew, was false. There was a thinly veiled hostility in his attitude now that had not been there before.

Their eyes met… fencing! Anna had no wish to encourage the man's persistent solicitations, so she nodded silently and returned her gaze to the dusty road.

Through the dirty windscreen she watched the village draw closer, absently contemplating the untidy shamble of pole-and-dagga thatched huts. It was typical of the family homes of Rhodesia's Mashona peasantry.

“We don't stop here,” the driver continued, the violently rattling cab adding a quaver to his shout. *“Gera is the first of Chief Matsiwo's village line. The next one along is called Chidoda. I have two bags of salt and a bag of nyimo beans to deliver there. You will be getting off at the next village after that. Chireka it’s called. There is a track from Chireka which will take you directly to the chief's village. It’s not far… less than a mile. You can see the roofs of the chief's huts from Chireka.”*

“I see,” Anna said reservedly her eyes remaining fixed on the approaching village. *“Thank you.”*

The driver examined his attractive passenger with an impertinent curiosity, approving once again, the woman's regal poise. She was no spring chicken. She was in her middle to late thirties, he guessed, but she had the alluring body of a woman ten years her junior. Her smooth pale brown angular face, shrouded now in an expensive silk scarf, was decidedly beautiful beneath its veneer of fine pink dust. There was something mystical about her eyes.

Her skirt and floral blouse were both of superior quality. They fitted her like a glove, the fine fabric of her blouse clearly showing that her voluptuous breasts were encased in an expensive lace brassiere.

Most African women of her age were bound to their homes and fields, and their bodies had long since succumbed to excessive child bearing as well as to the manual work that was required to survive in this harsh environment. Their bodies were fat and flabby, and their dugs were by then flaccid and pendulous. There was no place in their humble lifestyle for fashion and very few wore bras.

The driver wondered once again why a Shona woman of such sophistication would want to come to this God-forsaken part of the Zambesi valley. She had told him she was visiting her husband who was working here. He doubted that story very much and the less Anna divulged the more intense became his curiosity.

Patrick Tondongwe knew this part of the country intimately. He had been born and raised here and he now served the community with his one-man one-lorry transport business. He brought essential goods into the area once a week for a handsome profit. And, for an exorbitant fee, he transported the people and their agricultural produce out to the market places in the south. Tondongwe's was a lonely lifestyle which kept him for days on end away from his large and extended family, but he had found ways to alleviate the boredom that was his ever present companion. Over the years he had befriended many of the villagers, particularly the female members of the scattered communities.

The villages in the region, even that of Chief Matsiwo, were unrelentingly primitive. The last vestige of Western civilization was at Hwata, the Gutsa irrigation scheme, now more than ten miles behind them. Except for the modern overhead irrigation equipment, and its red brick buildings with corrugated iron roofs, there was very little even at Hwata that could really be called civilised.

"Are you quite sure you want to get off at Chireka?" he asked her suddenly. *"If you've made a mistake, and it's the wrong place, you've got a long walk back to Centenary… nearly a hundred miles."*

Anna knew the man was still probing. He was hoping she would satisfy his curiosity by disclosing more information about herself and her mission here. With her head still turned away from him she ignored his question completely. Very early that morning she had decided the man could think

whatever he liked about her. *‘He is a pain-in-the-ass… a real rectal trauma’,* she thought crudely. But Patrick Tondongwe and his old lorry had been her only means of reaching her destination. She had *had* to get to Chireka, so she was forced to put up with this coarse and ill-mannered man. But now, with the end of the long journey in sight, she was eager to leave the confines of the grimy cab and it’s equally filthy driver.

Tondongwe was affronted by Anna’s silent rebuttal. He drove on sullenly, his thoughts festering. His body was crouched forward, his hands viciously gripping the steering wheel, and his eyes, half shut, fixed themselves on the road ahead.

Chireka comprised a cluster of five family modules. Each ménage was composed of an irregular complex of pole-and-mud-walled thatched huts contained within its own rough bush-pole palisade. The households were separated by a hundred yards or more, the intervening space being occupied by bare dusty ploughed fields.

There were bush-pole kraals alongside each family unit. Some were designed to corral cattle at night, others to safeguard sheep and goats, for lion, leopard and hyenas were not unknown in this neck of the woods. The stockades were empty now and the animals' dry and powdery manure had been stacked several feet high in the middle of the enclosures.

In one such kraal two men were loading a scotch-cart with the dry dung. The two tiny donkeys that were harnessed to the heavy two-wheeled cart stood patiently, their eyes half shut, their heads and ears hanging desultorily in the hot afternoon sun.

Piles of dark manure were laid out at regular intervals in the nearby bare crop-lands. In a later exercise the dung would be spread evenly over the intervening spaces on the pale grey soil. It was a slow operation and even though two hot dry months remained before the rains would break, the people hereabouts were obviously determined to have all land preparation completed well in advance of the coming new season.

Two dust devils… *chimpumpurus.*… swept across the surrounding open fields. Like whirling dervishes they whisked up the loose sand, dust, and the dry husks and chaff of last year's crops, whipping them high into the air in their spiraling vortices.

A pair of long-legged secretary birds, taking advantage of the visible thermals, broke off their terrestrial patrol and flew directly into the eye of one whirlwind. Like pieces of lightweight flotsam they were transported instantly

into the high heavens above.

Anna marveled at the big birds' ingenuity and, fascinated, she watched them ascend with the dust and the muck until they were mere specks in the pale and cloudless sky.

"This is Chireka," the driver shouted, slamming on the brakes and bringing his lorry to an abrupt halt in the middle of the road. The dust the wheels churned up swamped the vehicle in a billowing cloud of fine particles, momentarily obscuring all visibility. *"And those huts you can see over there,"* he said, pointing through the settling dust to some far-off thatched roofs, *"is where Chief Matsiwo lives."*

"Thank you for the lift," Anna said in polite response. She depressed the door handle but was checked in her bid to leave the vehicle by the strong restraining pressure of the man's hand on her arm.

"You still owe me half my fare," he said in an accusing tone.

"You shall get your money," Anna said tersely, *"when I am safely on the ground."* She wrenched her arm roughly from his tightening grasp.

"You know… You don't have to pay me at all," he said in a wheedling voice. It was a feeble last attempt to petition her. His leering eyes stared fixedly upon her bosom. *"My offer still stands. And if you sleep with me tonight, I will also repay you the first half of the fare. I will be spending the night at the Mahuwe Business Centre and can bring you back here in the morning. It is only twenty miles up the road."*

Tondongwe frequently bartered with his female passengers in this manner, knowing that many women in this impoverished community would go to any lengths to avoid paying his exorbitant fares. He was utterly without scruples. To him soliciting his female passengers was not just a business arrangement. It also relieved his boredom and served his somewhat rampant physical needs.

This captivating passenger, however, was unlike any he had known. The moment she stepped up into the cab early that morning, he recognized that she was a prize to be pursued and it irked him that, in spite of his dogged persistence, she had refused all his overtures.

Anna looked at him malevolently. Then, silently, she climbed out of the cab. He'd been at her constantly like this ever since they had left the white man's village of Centenary at seven o'clock that morning. Now, her patience had come to an end and she was anxious to get as far away from this obnoxious man as she possibly could.

"Pass me my suitcase," she instructed the driver's assistant imperiously.

A grime-covered young man rose from amongst the conglomeration of goods on the back of the truck. He handed a battered and dusty red suitcase down to her.

"*Thank you,"* she said more graciously.

The youth jumped down from the back of the lorry and climbed into the now vacant passenger seat in the cab. He slammed the door shut behind him.

Anna opened the moon-pouch on her belt and extracted a small bundle of folded bank notes. She peeled off the balance of her fare and handed the money to the young man whose outstretched hand was already extended down towards her. He immediately passed the money to the driver.

Patrick Tondongwe stretched across the cab then, his head appearing alongside that of his young assistant.

"Are you quite sure this is the right place?"

*"If that village over there belongs to Chief Matsiwo, and if this is the Dande Tribal Trust Land, then yes, this is the right place," s*he said, looking up at him coldly.

"*This is the Dande. And that's the chief's village, all right."*

"Well then… this is the right place."

"*That track in front of you,"* Tondongwe said more helpfully, pointing to twin wheel ruts that ran obliquely away from the main road, *"will take you right to the chief's village. You can't miss it.*

"And remember… I come past here every Tuesday afternoon at this time of the year," Tondongwe continued. *"If you need a lift back to Centenary I'll be here at Chireka this time next week. Same price. Same alternative."*

Anna glared at him silently. The man grinned down at her like an impudent school boy. *'He is depraved'*, Anna thought, *'and incorrigible'*. But he had served her purpose.

Tondongwe's face disappeared. The lorry's engine revved, its gears grated and the vehicle lurched off down the road. It gathered speed quickly, leaving Anna standing in a cloud of choking dust.

For a moment Anna experienced a swaying sensation as her body re-attuned itself to the unmoving road beneath her feet. It was strange to be standing still and quiet again after what had seemed endless hours of being noisily buffeted about.

She suddenly felt very alone. The heat of the midday sun beat up at her from the hard parched ground, burning into her cheeks. She could feel the

descending fieriness of it, too, through the thin scarf on her head and through the light cotton fabric of the blouse across her shoulders. Divorced now from the constant breeze that had come through the open window of the moving truck, she began to sweat profusely, the wet beads carving shining pathways through the dust on her face as they trickled down her forehead and her cheeks.

She looked around her at the unfamiliar huts and at the desolate bare fields that disappeared in all directions into the shimmering distance. The chief's village was beyond the far tree-line. It was a mile away to the south the driver had said. And whereas she had seen the village roofs clearly from the lorry, now that she was on the ground she was no longer able to see any sign of them.

Ten miles beyond the chief's village rose the hazy east-west line of the Mavuradonha mountains. They looked soft, a veiled violet-blue, in the afternoon heat. She absorbed their beauty and she sighed. She was here at last. This was the first time in her life that Anna Moyo had been in the Zambesi valley.

Anna looked down at the old wagon road she had been instructed to follow.

The track to the chief's village was flanked on either side by a flimsy brush fence constructed of dry and untrimmed branches. The rickety screen was more of a guide than a barrier. It was designed to channel the villagers' domestic stock through the crop-lands when the animals were driven from their kraals each morning to their distant grazing lands and to water, and to return them to their safe stockades in the evenings. It was a very old fence to which a few new branches had been added each year. Many self-seeded trees and saplings were now growing through the matrix of its protective cover.

Anna set off resolutely down the track.

She carried her suitcase by the handle as Westerners do, not on her head in the traditional fashion of her people. It had been a long time since she had carried such burdens on her head and she was not sure she could still accomplish that balancing act. The conventional way she carried her suitcase, and her sophisticated attire, were noted by the people who stared at her silently from the doorways of the village huts all around. They immediately marked her down as a city woman.

The chief's home was little different from the other villages the lorry had passed except that it was larger. The walls of the round huts were constructed

of the same straight mopani poles and they were plastered with the same cracked grey mud that had been used on the huts at Gera, Chidoda and Chireka. The untidy, powdery thatch was equally old and sparse.

There was, in fact, nothing unusual or resplendent about Chief Matsiwo's village. There was no indication that the man who lived here was the traditional leader of all the Mashona tribespeople in this part of the country.

Outside the village fence there were a number of scrawny cattle, ribs corrugating their staring flanks, and some equally emaciated goats. Several of the animals were lying down chewing the cud whilst others were foraging for tidbits amongst the drifts of dry leaves on the dry and dusty earth. There was a host of brown and white-speckled chickens, some with vulturine bare necks, fossicking about in the detritus that had been swept up against the palisade. The ground inside the fence was compact, bare and clean. There was a thin veneer of loose sand across its surface.

When Anna reached the gap in the poles that served as the village entrance, a pack of scrawny dogs ran out barking. She stopped there, ignoring the yapping hounds, and looked searchingly amongst the huts.

There was a fat woman kneeling on the ground at the far end of the village. She was dressed in a nondescript faded floral dress and had a blue rag wrapped around her head. She was grinding dark red sorghum grain on a broad flat rock that had become hollow from years of repeated use. Her pestle was a round stone that must have been tumbled for aeons by storm waters in a rocky riverbed. It was so large and so heavy the woman had to hold it in both her hands.

She had a small baby bound to her back with a shawl, the corners of which were tied together in two places; at her waist and above her expansive bosom.

The barking of the dogs alerted the woman to Anna's presence. She leant back from her chore, resting her heavy buttocks on her bare heels, and she silently examined her unknown visitor across the intervening space. The woman made no move to rise. Annoyed, she shouted sharply at the mangy dogs. They broke off their barking and slunk away with tails between their legs, to lie down in the shade under the eaves of the huts.

"Ti-pindehwoh, Amai." I have arrived, mother. Anna called out the customary pronouncement clearly. She was asking for permission to enter the village and she appended the word Amai (mother) out of respect. It was the traditional Shona way for a person to acknowledge a married woman's status.

"Svikayi," the woman responded affirmatively. You may enter.

There were no other people evident in the village so Anna went directly to the woman who remained squatting, her hands resting on the tops of her ample thighs.

As Anna drew closer, the woman noticed the dust on her visitor's face and on her clothes. From this she concluded that Anna had been dropped off at Chireka by the lorry from Centenary. She had heard the vehicle's engine about half-an-hour before.

Anna placed her suitcase on the ground and she knelt down in the dust in front of the buxom woman. And, like her, she too settled her rump on the heels of her canvas shoes. Anna hombera-ed silently, gently clapping her cupped hands together. The woman responded by doing likewise.

The woman of the village was not yet old but she was already one of the matron class. *'She must be one of the chief's wives,'* Anna thought, openly examining the woman's rotund figure. She had an arrogant and superior, but not obnoxious, demeanour.

"Masikati." Good day. Anna began the introduction ritual politely.

"Masikati."

"Maswerah hereh?" Have you spent the day well?

"Ndaswerah kana maswerahwoh." The woman responded. I have spent the day well if you have done so also.

"Ndaswerah." Anna answered. I have spent the day well.

The traditional pleasantries thus concluded, the two women were now free to discuss the matter which had brought Anna to Chief Matsiwo's village. Immediately the woman asked, with an impish, knowing, smile, *"What can I do for you, Amai?"*

"This is the village of Chief Matsiwo?" Anna asked.

"Yes." The woman said nodding her head. She had a pleasant, friendly smile.

"Then I am, indeed, fortunate… I have come a long way these last few days and I have at last arrived at the right place."

"And what business have you with the chief, Amai?"

"I have no business with the chief," Anna stated the fact honestly. "I received a message to meet a man at this village… a man who calls himself Muliloh. This man says he knows my husband and that he knows where I can find him. I have not seen my husband for over two years, Amai. I have not heard from him, nor have I heard anything about him, in all that time. I have not known if he is alive or dead."

“He is of the ‘vakomana’… this husband of yours?”

“The ‘vakomana’, Amai? I do not understand.”

“He is one of ‘The Boys’*? One of* ‘The Boys from the Bush’?”

“Amai… l do not understand! I have not heard of these ‘Boys from the Bush’.”

“Does your husband belong to ZANLA?” the woman then asked her more directly. “Is he one of the soldiers of Zimbabwe, Amai?”

“I do not know anything about that, Amai. As I said, I have not seen nor heard of my husband for over two years.”

Anna was being cautious. She well knew that her husband had left home to join ZANLA. And she knew that ZANLA was the military wing of the black-nationalist political party, ZANU[xi] which had been banned by the white Rhodesian government. But she was not about to make such a dangerous admission to a complete stranger.

The woman smiled. She understood Anna's reticence. It was wise to be prudent.

“What is your name, Amai?”

“My name is Anna. The message I received said that I was to use no other name.”

“And where have you come from, Anna?”

“That, too, I cannot tell you, Amai. I was told to tell no one anything other than that my name was Anna, and that I was not to mention the name Muliloh until I reached this village. But I have come from a long way off, Amai. It has taken me three days of travelling by bus and by lorry to get here. I am now anxious to speak with this man, Muliloh. I want to be re-united with my husband.”

The woman's face had softened as Anna had been speaking. She smiled at her visitor with compassion and understanding.

“Comrade Muliloh is here. He has been expecting your arrival for some days now.”

“Muliloh is here? Now? In this village!” Anna’s eyes darted around the chief's humble huts expectantly, her sudden excitement leaving her short of breath. But the village was devoid of all other human life.

“There is no one in the village at the moment except me… and you, Anna. But Comrade Muliloh is not far away. He is down at the river fishing with Comrade Mbudzi.”

“‘Comrade’, Amai?”

“It is the name that ZANLA uses for its freedom fighters, Anna. Muliloh is one of the vakomana of ZANLA.” The woman was now exuding an infectious friendliness. Finally introducing herself properly, she said suddenly “My name is Rachel, Anna. I am Chief Matsiwo's senior wife.”

Rachel placed the knuckles of her right hand on the ground and, with her left hand pushing against her raised left knee, she arose ponderously to her feet. Standing she appeared no less fat than she had seemed when squatting on her knees. She looked down at herself. One hand smoothed the creases on her well-soiled dress while the other pulled the back of the cloth down from the ledge of her enormous buttocks.

Anna climbed to her feet, too, but with much less effort.

“Now… Let me show you where you will be sleeping,” the chief's wife continued affably. She positively waddled as she walked along. Her legs splayed out from her knees and her bare feet dragged along the ground. She paused to hitch up the sleeping child on her back, and to re-tie the shawl above her bosoms.

“We have already prepared a bed for you in one of the huts. You can leave your suitcase there. It will be safe. And I will bring you some water to wash the dust of your journey from your face. Then, perhaps, you would like something to eat? If you came on Tondongwe's lorry from Centenary you probably have not eaten since early this morning?”

“I have not eaten since last night, Rachel,” Anna said honestly. “But I would rather first meet with Muliloh. I could not eat anything at all right now knowing that he is so close at hand. I am really desperate to get word of my husband.”

“Then after you have washed your face I shall take you directly to the river where you will find your friend.”

“He is not my friend,” Anna said hurriedly. “I do not know this man Muliloh. But, as I said, I have been told he can tell me where my husband is. That is why I have come all this way to see him.”

“He is a friend, Anna. Be quite sure of that. If Comrade Muliloh can help you find your husband he is, indeed, a friend.” The woman's soft smile spread now right across her pudgy face, and she looked long and searchingly into Anna's troubled eyes. “Do not fret, Anna. I am sure you will be reunited with your husband very soon.”

‘This woman,’ Anna thought, ‘obviously understands the anxiety that a

wife is forced to endure when her husband is absent and away from home for so long… and without any word. Especially during these troubled times. When a country is at war, when good young men on both sides have been killed and maimed indiscriminately like so many flies squashed by a casual hand slammed against a wall, no news normally meant bad news.'

For a long time now Anna had come to accept that if she ever again heard anything about her husband, it would not be good news. Then, out of the blue, came the unexpected, strange and secretive message from a man calling himself Muliloh.

'Yes,' Anna thought. 'Rachel, is right. If Muliloh can reunite me with Daniel then he is indeed a friend.'

Anna washed her face quickly. Then Rachel escorted her through a rear exit in the village fence and they followed a well worn path that led towards the unseen river.

Just outside the village they passed a small pole fence that encompassed a squat and gnarled old tree. The barrier was neatly built and had been well maintained. The bare ground within the enclosure was groomed. It had that very morning been swept clean. Several earthenware pots, plates, mugs and eating utensils had been carefully laid out in front of the tree.

"This is our midzimu shrine," Rachel explained. "The tree is a mahacha. It is sacred to the Makorekore Shona. But you would not know that, Anna. You are a Zezuru."

"How do you know that?"

"I can tell from your dialect and your accent. I have met many Zezuru Shona."

"I see. And what is the significance of the mahacha tree to the Makorekore, Rachel?"

"It is where the chiefs and the village headmen, the sabookus, speak to their midzimus."

"Their midzimus?"

Rachel laughed softly to herself.

They continued to converse as they walked down the dusty pathway towards the river. All the cooking and drinking water used in the village was carried up this pathway in a variety of containers, all perched on the women's and children's heads. Their weight was cushioned by rings of twisted grass. So well worn was the trail by human and animal traffic, as well as by erosion, that it was more of a rut in the earth than a path. Rachel's huge and splayed

bare feet negotiated the sometimes hazardous route with ease but Anna, in her tennis shoes, had to watch her footing for fear of tripping.

"You know nothing of the Makorekore… the northern Mashona… Anna?"

"A little… but I have not heard of a midzimu before."

"Our current village midzimu is the spirit of Matsiwo's dead father, Anna," Rachel explained earnestly.

'A ghost! A midzimu is a ghost? They speak to GHOSTS!' Anna was incredulous.

"He lives in the spirit world now," Rachel continued solemnly, "and he looks after the needs of all the people of Chief Matsiwo's village line… from Gera to Kawandira… seventy-two different families."

"And when Chief Matsiwo dies, because he is the most senior personage in the village line, he will become the next midzimu. His spirit will replace the spirit of his dead father as our new midzimu."

"And the chief speaks to the spirit of his dead father under the sacred mahacha tree?" It took little intelligence to piece together the simple picture. Anna could not really believe what she was hearing… or saying.

Yet Rachel was deadly serious. *"You learn quickly Anna."*

"And what does the chief say to the midzimu, Rachel? And what does the midzimu do for the people?"

Recognising the doubt… even a twinge of ridicule… in Anna's voice Rachel glanced back forbiddingly at her guest. *"Do not mock the spirits, Anna,"* she said sternly.

"I do not mock your spirits Rachel," Anna responded hastily. "I am sorry if it sounded that way. I just wish to understand your beliefs."

"It will take too long to explain everything now," Rachel said with reduced enthusiasm. "But, briefly, the chief asks the midzimu to intercede with other spirits… with the great mhondoro spirits… to bring rain when drought comes to the land. He asks for fertility for childless couples. And he asks for deliverance when disease ravages our cattle. That sort of thing is how our midzimu looks after the needs of the people."

Anna felt contrite. She had unintentionally offended her hostess. Even so she dropped her eyes and raised her eyebrows skeptically. She did not have to believe what Rachel had told her… and she didn't. Nevertheless, Anna was pleased that Rachel was leading the way because she did not want to further offend the chief's wife and she could feel the look of cynicism that was rampant on her face. She remained silent. And she became mesmerized by

the extraordinary sight of the vast rotund buttocks in front of her, pitching and rolling like a ship on rough seas, as Rachel led the way down the path.

“We do not expect outsiders to understand,” Rachel continued a few minutes later, sensing the reason for Anna's silence. “What matters to us Makorekore is that we ourselves truly do believe in our ancestral spirits.”

At that point the two women entered a narrow strip of tall forest that clothed the bank of a dry riverbed. Their conversation petered out quite naturally. The temperature under the canopy of the trees was blissfully cool after the unchecked heat of the Zambesi sun. Anna welcomed the change and she savoured the cooling, pinching, sensation on her skin as the breeze dried her sweat.

The forest was very different to the leafless mopani woodland through which they had been walking. The trees here were very big. Many of them were evergreens and there was a cacophony of bird chatter from the tree tops. The mTondo trees were in flower and the long-tailed glossy starlings, barbets, parrots, lovebirds and loeries were busy squabbling with each other as they gobbled down the brush-like orange blossoms. The birds were also heartily eating the abundant ripe fruits in the high canopies of the ebony trees, giant sycamore figs and the mNyees. And from the thick cover of dark leaves there came the churring yurrr-liet calls of the secretive green pigeons.

There were enormous baobab trees here too, devoid of leaves in the dry summer heat. Their branches looked like a matrix of aerial roots as if God had planted the trees upside down by mistake.

The muVewe… the sausage trees… still carried their last year's fruit. Huge grey sausages, six inches wide and four feet long, dangled from spindly vine-like stalks. This was the tree the Africans irreverently called The Virgin's Hope. The muVewes were in bloom and their flowers were festooned in long trailing clusters of giant wine-coloured cups amongst the hoary old fruit. The exquisite blooms looked like faerie damsels amongst a phalanx of hideous beasts.

This was the Africa of the story books.

The pathway turned to run downstream. Still in silence Rachel and Anna walked parallel to the dry golden sand of a wide river bed on their right hand side. There was no sign of water. Anna followed close behind Rachel, still registering with some amusement, the rhythmic undulations of her guide's enormous buttocks. And all the while the sleeping child bounced along, contentedly, on its mother's back, its head bobbing in time with Rachel’s

laboured footsteps. The baby hadn't uttered a sound since Anna's arrival.

The earth beneath their feet was devoid of all vegetation inside the forest. The black alluvial soil of the river bank was powdery, having been pummeled by the myriad hooves of the cattle, goats and sheep that had grazed here throughout the long winter months. Everything that had been green, edible and which was within reach of the domestic stock, had been eaten down to ground level. But there were no animals anywhere in evidence now as the two women passed through the cool shade beneath the trees.

Gradually the gradient steepened and the big trees thinned out. The pathway was now strewn with large boulders. The river bed became more rocky and convoluted. Descending stone barriers stretched from bank to bank as the river's course became steeper and steeper. And below what would obviously be a short sharp waterfall when the river flooded, there appeared deep pools of clear water in the river's sandy bottom.

"Sometimes the fishing is good," Rachel broke her prolonged silence. "The big fish swim upstream from the Zambesi during the floods and they get trapped in the pools here when the storm waters subside."

"Your friend Muliloh and Comrade Mbudzi have been very lucky this last week. Nearly every night we have eaten the fish they have caught."

The two women reverted to silence as they descended down the now steep and rocky pathway. Rachel walked ahead not looking back. Anna followed close behind, perceiving a subtle change in Rachel's demeanour. The woman's breathing had become labored and stertorous with the effort of the descent.

Anna was breathing hard, too. She was not used to such strenuous exercise. She was also becoming excited in eager anticipation of what might lie at the end of their walk. They stopped on a broad rocky step near the bottom end of the pathway. There the chief's wife pointed wordlessly ahead.

Anna looked down the gorge onto a sparkling river pool. On the near-side rocks she saw the robust shapes of two thickset men. Even from this distance the home made nature of their fishing poles was obvious.

"There is your Comrade Muliloh, Anna. He is the one in the brown jacket. The other man is Comrade Mbudzi."

Rachel turned to Anna then, and smiling, she said. "I shall leave you now. I must return to the village. I cannot leave it unattended for too long."

Anna only vaguely heard what Rachel was saying. She was staring at the two men squatting together a hundred yards away at the river's edge. They were both clad in khaki slacks and they both wore the same short denim-type

jackets over their shirts. One jacket was dark blue, the other brown.

The men had their backs to Anna so she could not see their faces. She could, however, make out that the man with the pale brown jacket was shorter than the other and that he was very broad across the shoulders. He was built, in fact, exactly like her Daniel. Could it be that Comrade Muliloh was…?

"Daniel." Anna's voice was a hushed whisper. Her heart began to flutter. *"It's Daniel,"* she said again, this time a little louder.

She glanced questioningly at Rachel. The older women nodded, smiling knowingly and happily. Anna gave Rachel a brief hug. There were already tears welling up in her eyes.

She looked back at the two men, bursting at the seams with excitement. Suddenly she understood what Rachel had known all along. Muliloh and Daniel were one and the same.

A sudden elation gripped her heart. Overwhelmed by wild and exuberant emotions, Anna abandoned Rachel on the pathway. In a state of euphoric intoxication she began to hurry, stumbling frequently, down the steep and boulder strewn river bank.

Inside her breast Anna's heart was beating fiercely. Inside her head the thumping of her pulse sounded like a five stamp hammer mill. And in her throat, in her ears and at her temples, she could feel the fierce pressure of her pounding heart throbbing a clamorous tattoo.

"DANIEL!" Anna screamed out his name. It rang loudly and excitedly in her ears.

Her descent gathered momentum.

In her haste she lost her footing. She fell to her knees, sending a cascade of loose pebbles rolling, bouncing and tumbling down the slope.

"DANIEL!" she shouted again, much louder this time.

She regained her feet and once more recklessly launched herself down the steep incline, completely unaware of the droplets of blood that were oozing from a graze on one of her knees.

The two men heard Anna's unexpected and noisy advance. They spun round to face her… alarmed. Both their right hands flew towards the concealed pistols that snuggled in soft leather holsters beneath their armpits. Then, instantly realizing there was no threat, their hands froze for a split second before coming away empty from the open jacket fronts.

Anna hesitated only momentarily in her tumbling flight. Gasping for

breath, she stared down unbelievingly into the now upturned face of the man in the brown jacket… into the face of Muliloh… into the face of Daniel.

Daniel now recognised her, too. His face broke out into a wide grin and, abandoning his fishing pole, he scrambled quickly to his feet,

"Daniel. It really is you," Anna said under her breath. Then, panting wildly and with arms flailing, she continued her ungainly descent with all the speed that she could muster. The smile on her face was now an aching grimace.

"ANNA!"

It was as if he had heard the last soft whisper of his name as it crossed her trembling lips.

"DANIEL!" She answered him loudly, instinctively… stumbling all the time down the precipitous slope towards him.

Then, with her heart pounding in her throat, and tears of joy flowing down her cheeks, she was racing across the last flat stretch of golden sand towards him.

They collided in a huge and staggering embrace not far from the water's edge.

Chapter 2

A HUNDRED miles due east of Chief Matsiwo's village, two khaki-clad brown-skinned Bushmen wound their way slowly up the gentle slope of a rocky hillside. Their mongoloid eyes were glued to the gravelly ground as they followed the faint sign left by the hooves of a black rhinoceros that had walked this same route during the night.

The Bushmen worked silently side by side. The tracking was not easy. They frequently lost the spoor for the rhino had wound its way erratically through the scrubby bushes and the ground was very hard. Nevertheless, it had moved determinedly in one direction. So, by flowing with the trend of its progress, and by instinctively taking the line of least resistance through the bush, the men repeatedly relocated the tracks and moved forwards.

When they completely lost sign they split up and searched for tracks independently. And when the one or the other found a confirmatory mark, he would attract the other's attention with a gentle hand-slap on his thigh. Then, with a flick of the wrist, he would silently indicate the direction of the rhino's passage.

The larger of the two trackers balanced a heavy .458 Magnum rifle across his shoulders. He hung his wrists limply over the weapon on either side of his head. The other carried a short stick which he used as a pointer, working it with lateral movements – left and right – to indicate to himself the signs that he perceived.

As with so many Bushmen, this man’s uncanny tracking ability was inherent. His skills could not be taught. When tracking like this, so deep was his concentration he appeared to be in a trance. His eyes were focused on the ground following the movement of the stick in his hand. Occasionally he uttered a barely audible mumble. Incredibly, he was at the same time acutely aware of all his surroundings.

A few short yards behind the trackers trailed a tall broad-shouldered white man. He wore the same black light-weight canvas boots, without socks, that the trackers did. He was dressed in the same brief khaki shorts and shirt. The floppy brown bush hat on his head completely obscured his blonde sun-bleached hair. His arms, legs and face were deeply tanned and his eyes, all screwed up in the bright sunlight, were a piercing blue.

He was Michael Campbell, a senior game warden in the Department of

National Parks and Wildlife Management. Over his shoulder he carried what appeared to be a single-barrelled elephant gun with a Farquharson falling-block action. Indeed, that is what the weapon had once been. Mike, however, had had the .400/450 calibre weapon converted into a dart gun which he used to capture rhinos. It now fired drug-loaded darts instead of steel-jacketed bullets. The purpose of the day's hunt, therefore, was not to kill the rhino they were following, but to catch it.

Immediately behind the game warden strode Richard Poole, a young white game ranger. He had only recently joined the department and was learning the ropes from his experienced colleague. He too, carried a .458 Magnum rifle.

Some distance behind Richard followed the rear guard; three local Mashona men supervised by a uniformed black game scout. Between the four of them they carried a number of important pieces of equipment. One carried a back-pack TR-48 S.S.B. (single-side-band) radio and a spare nicad battery. Its purpose was to call up the four-wheel-drive Mercedes recovery lorry when the rhino had been darted. Another carried a heavy canvas field pack on a broad shoulder strap. It was full of powerful immobilizing drugs and a number of spare darts. Distributed amongst them all was enough food for the entire tracking team for the day. And they each carried a canvas water bag.

The tail-end-Charlies had been instructed to follow at a safe distance to ensure they did not interfere with the tracking, and to reduce the noise factor up front. Whenever the forward team came to a halt, those trailing behind stopped, too.

The trackers stalled on the crest of a small hill. In front of them the ground had been churned and trampled. There were rhino tracks everywhere.

“Kanjhaan?” What's up? Mike enquired laconically.

“Hondo!” War! Ben said with characteristic brevity. He was the more accomplished of the two trackers and the least talkative. It was Ben who carried the stick.

“Hondo?” War? Puzzled, Mike himself examined the tracks.

The Bushmen ignored Mike's counter. They silently walked about the disturbed area, slowly and carefully examining the yesterday’s, today’s and tomorrow’s sign at their feet.

Mike did not demand a reply. He knew one would be forthcoming when his men had an appropriate answer. Instead, he too concentrated on trying to unravel the story that lay behind the contorted tracks.

"The rhino we have been following is a female, Nkosi[xii]*,"* Mbuyotsi, the second tracker, volunteered. He spoke in his Masili Bushman tongue with its many peculiar clicks. Mike understood the language quite well but he had not yet learnt to speak it fluently. It was not an easy language to master.

"She hid her little calf here during the night when she went down to the water," Mbuyotsi explained. "She came back to pick it up and met another rhino. The tracks tell us it is not a fully mature rhino so it is probably her previous calf. She has chased it all over the place…"

"What's going on, Mr. Campbell?" Richard came up alongside the game warden. He too looked down at the myriad tracks on the ground.

Mike was not a pretentious man. He had encouraged Richard to call him Mike. But the young ranger, out of respect, always referred to him as mister. Some people Richard could call by their first names. Others he could not. Mike Campbell was one of them.

Mike took a deep breath. He let it out slowly without replying. He removed his cloth bush hat and carefully extracted the half-inch thick drug-loaded dart that was stuck into a front loop of the hat's narrow headband. The dart was a three-inch-long aluminium cylinder with red, white and blue dyed goose feather flights set into a reduced section at the tail. The sharp two-and-a-half inch long needle at the front end had been turned from steel diesel-injector tubing. It was three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter.

Mike wiped the sweat from his face with the hat. "Mbuyotsi says we've been following a rhino cow," he told Richard. "It has just picked up its new calf. And all these tracks tell us it has been chasing away its previous calf. Its previous calf is now independent and it has to look after itself now."

"Picked up its calf?"

Mike smiled at Richard. *'He has so much still to learn this one!'* He replaced the dart in its loop and put the hat back on his head.

"Yes… Mother rhinos hide their new tiny babies in the bush when they go to the waterholes at night," Mike explained patiently. "They leave them a mile or so from the water… it saves the babies from being attacked by hyenas."

"Do hyenas attack black rhinos?" Richard asked. There was a ring of incredulity in his voice.

Mike smirked. "Baby rhinos… They knock the shit out of them," Mike explained coarsely. "More black rhinos… more baby black rhinos, that is… are killed by hyenas than by anything else." Mike turned his attention back to

the tracks at his feet. The Bushmen were casting about further afield now.

"Huhhh", Mike grunted softly to attract Richard's attention. Silently he pointed the toe of his boot towards the clear three-toed imprint of a baby rhino's foot. It had been impressed on top of the freshly disturbed soil and was no bigger than the palm of his hand.

"A tiny baby rhino," Richard said in wonderment. The thought of a new born black rhino standing on this very spot just a few short hours before, brought an inane smile to the young man's face.

Mike continued to examine the tracks. He was looking for a hoof print that would confirm the size of the third rhino that Mbuyotsi had mentioned.

"Mr. Campbell…?" Richard began hesitantly, puzzlement clear in his voice. "Surely if the mother rhino leaves her baby all alone in the bush at night, without her protection, it would be even more vulnerable to attack?"

"Richard I can't explain all this to you in the middle of a hunt. Ask me these questions some other time… tonight… around the camp fire. Right now we've got more important things to do."

It was not long before Ben whistled. He mimicked the call of the lost guineafowl: *'Whu-whooo-eee… whu-whooo-eee… whu-whooo-eee'*.

This was a perfectly natural sound in the bush which did not alarm any of its denizens. It was a common signal that told Mike he had relocated the lost tracks.

Just past midday, when the sun was beating down mercilessly onto the hunters' shoulders, they found the rhinos. They were lying down in the shade of a small jackal-berry tree inside an extensive pocket of jesse; the notoriously dense thicket of the Zambesi valley. The rank covert was devoid of leaves so visibility was fairly good. The dry leaves, shed during the winter months, however, now lay in a close-packed brown carpet across the ground. Their presence in the jesse always made stalking a rhino doubly difficult.

Although she was some sixty yards away they could all see the big rhino cow quite clearly. She was just within darting range but the matrix of intervening branches and twigs could not be penetrated by an immobilising dart. A dart was not like a bullet. If it hit even a tiny twig it would deflect or it would tumble. A perfectly clear shot at the target, therefore, was imperative. That meant Mike would have to get a whole lot closer.

The rhino had entered the thicket obliquely, following a route prescribed entirely by the breeze. She had kept the wind blowing directly into her nose.

Upon reaching the tree she had turned right around, placing her broad buttocks squarely into the wind. Then she had settled down into a well-used dusty hollow under the low tree canopy, facing back the way she had come in.

This was standard procedure for the black rhino. When they went into siesta mode they always lay down with their rear ends facing into the wind. This enabled them to detect danger approaching from behind, by scent alone. And, in that position, their ears were best aligned to listen for approaching danger from the front.

The old rhino cow lay on the ground in an upright position with her legs folded beneath her body. From that state of repose, inside one second, she could erupt into a full blown charge.

When at rest, therefore, black rhinos have all the danger bases covered.

This was a resting site the rhino had occupied many times in the past ten years. She felt secure in its familiar surroundings. The tiny calf, no bigger than its mother's head, lay in the loose sand at her shoulder.

Mike stood on the edge of the thicket and looked with satisfaction at her supine grey hulk. Her long, thin, darkly polished front horn and the tall secondary horn just behind it, advertised the animal's sex just as much as did any other feature. Bulls' horns are very much thicker.

Looking at his quarry now, despite his great experience, Mike's excitement began to mount.

Finding a rhino before it had become aware of the hunters was always a good omen. It meant it would not be acutely alert. That fact would reduce the danger which always accompanied the final close approach to place a dart into the animal’s thick hide.

Those game wardens that lived long enough to become experts at darting black rhinos are always conscious of the danger element. They make realistic allowances for it by not taking what they consider to be unnecessary risks; but they never allow the constant peril they face to dominate their minds. Fear is never permitted to control their emotions, or their actions, because whatever the danger, the rhinos still had to be caught.

Mike drew a small linen pouch from one of his breast pockets. It contained fresh white wood ash from last night's camp fire. He held it at arm's length and at waist height above the ground. One tweak of his wrist sent a small cloud of ash-powder drifting away from his hand.

Everyone watched the pale puff of dust slowly descend. It dissipated

amongst the grass on the right hand side of the game warden's feet. The ash bag was an important hunter's tool for it made the wind visible and it exposed the directional drift of even the most gentle breeze.

Richard felt the excitement in him rise. Trickles of sweat ran down the sides of his jaw line. His trembling hands were sweating, too, in anticipation of the danger that was to come… even though he would not be a part of it. This was the young ranger's third rhino capture-hunt. The previous two, although informative, had been unsuccessful.

Mike had no idea how many rhino capture-hunts he had conducted. He had stopped counting a long time ago. But that fact in no way reduced the pre-hunt buck fever that now gripped him; and he knew young Richard was experiencing identical emotions.

Mike's hands, too, were sweating and they were trembling imperceptibly.

"The wind's O.K.," Mike whispered quietly to Richard. "But you almost don't need to use an ash bag with resting rhinos. Look at this one. She is lying down with her bum facing directly into the wind."

"Why's that, Mr. Campbell?"

"Shhhh. Keep your voice down, Richard. Rhinos have incredibly good hearing … Remind me to tell you some other time." He smiled at the young ranger; "Add it to your list."

Mbuyotsi signalled the rear guard to come forward. They did so quietly and cautiously, soundlessly placing their satchels and back-packs in one central position. Then each man quickly selected a place nearby to wait. Each location was at the base of a tree which the man believed he could easily climb. And there they squatted down, wordlessly, on their heels, their fearful eyes fixed on the resting rhino.

"Bwisa josak," Mike commanded. His voice was subdued… whispery. He signalled to one of the black men to bring him a water bag. He would need a good slug of water before starting what he knew would be a long and arduous stalk. He might not get another shot at the water for several hours.

The man who had been carrying Mike's water bag was dressed in a ragged checked shirt and torn long black pants which were tied at the waist with an old piece of grimy rope. He almost tip-toed to where the game warden was standing, carrying the water bag, like an offering, at arm's length in front of him. All the while he kept a wary eye on the intimidating form of the not so distant rhino.

The Makorekore people were petrified of the awesome chipembere. And

they were incredulous that this strange white man was able to catch them with such ease. They had concluded he must have some kind of extra-strong *'muti'*… some especially powerful nyanga's (witch doctor's) medicine.

As a consequence, they treated the game warden with some reverence, as though he was himself a magical sorcerer.

When the josak arrived Mike took a long draught of the crystal clear water. The bag was new and the water tasted of raw canvas; but it was cool and refreshing.

Mike hefted the capture gun into his left hand and wiggled the dart free from its securing loop in his hat. He slipped it into the breech and made the weapon ready for action.

"Right! We're ready to go."

Mike looked at his entourage. Then he looked around at the nearby bush and at the two rhinos lying quietly in the thicket. Once more he tested the wind with the ash bag.

The breeze was constant. If there were going to be any problems with the wind, Mike knew they would come later when he was deeper inside the jesse. Hot eddies often wafted about on invisible currents inside the coverts, drifting the air hither and thither in uncertain whirlpools. When those conditions occurred, the orientation of the rhino itself, rather than the drift of the ash, would be the surest way of determining the true trend of the wind.

"O.K. Richard, I'd suggest you and the trackers move to those rocks over there." The game warden pointed to a small group of boulders on the downwind side of the thicket. "You should be able to see what's going on from there. Get the rest of the guys to move back a hundred yards or so along the tracks."

So much for the men already having selected their trees to climb!

"You know the drill. No unnecessary talking. No moving about. And no smoking… Richard… watch Ben with that bloody pipe of his."

"O.K. Mr. Campbell."

"Right. Start moving… I'm going in now."

An hour later the game warden had advanced only some forty yards into the thicket. The brittle leaf-trash on the ground… like a carpet of crisp dry cornflakes… had been a great hindrance to his progress. To maintain absolute silence, he had had to remove the leaves, one by one, from the site of his every next foot fall. Michael's senses were so acutely focused on the job in

hand, he was barely aware that his knees and his back were aching from the strain of the constant bending and squatting this demanded.

He had to concentrate on not bumping the rifle barrel against the thousand-and-one desiccated branch stems and fragile twigs, through which he had to negotiate a passage. With the smallest of pressure the tiny twigs would break off with an explosive and audible *'snap'*.

And all the time he had to keep a watchful eye on the rhino. The closer he got to her, the more important it became that he keep as much of the flimsy cover as possible between himself and his quarry. Although rhinos have poor day-time eye-sight, at twenty yards Mike knew he was well within range of the old cow's vision. Only the obscuring thicket matrix, his excruciatingly slow movements, and his complete silence, kept him from being detected.

He advanced directly towards the sharp end; towards the horns of the sleeping rhino. He had no other choice. It was the direction of the air flow that dictated how he should approach his quarry.

At twenty yards range there was still no chance of him firing a dart. The thin veil of twigs that lay between him and his target would so surely have deflected the dart that he dared not even think of such a premature action. He simply had to get a completely clear shot and the closer he got to the rhino the greater that possibility became.

As the range shortened so the tension within him grew. At twenty yards his nerves had been as taut as piano wires, his heart had been pounding, and his body had been trembling from the prolonged exertion of the stalk. The effort to control his ever growing fear sapped his energies, too.

At fifteen yards his senses were on fire.

If the rhino suddenly caught his scent now; or saw him; or heard him; she would explode into a full-blown charge. Then he would have to trust his legs for there were no nearby trees to climb.

As he moved towards his quarry, Mike Campbell made a mental note of every possible avenue of escape; every bolt-hole; just in case.

All around him the stark jesse was no consolation. He could not climb stems that were no thicker than his wrist. They would never hold his weight. And they provided no barrier protection whatsoever. If the old cow came at him now he would have to run round the bushes to evade her, whereas she would simply plough straight through.

There was no climbable tree anywhere nearby except the one under which the rhino lay. The only other tree within sight was a distorted Commiphora,

twenty yards away, behind him. Mike kept its location at the forefront of his mind. Should the rhino seriously attack him now, however, he hadn't a chance of reaching that tree before she got to him. The jesse was just too thick. Furthermore, before firing his dart he would have to get a lot closer to the rhino; and each extra step he took towards her was one step further away from the Commiphora.

Mike knew that, with a new baby to protect, the old cow would be very aggressive. And with that sure knowledge plaguing his mind, sweat began to surge out from every pore on his body.

'Game wardens that catch black rhinos… If they said they did not fear their quarry,' Mike thought, 'are either morons or bombastic liars.' These were thoughts that regularly passed through the game warden's mind.

As for the big elephant guns that Richard and Mbuyotsi carried…? Well!!! They were really just for show. They were something to bolster the spirit when thoughts of the danger welled up in the mind. It was simply not practical to have anyone riding shotgun close behind the man with the dart gun. Two people inside the jesse made twice as much noise as did one. Neither of those two heavy weapons, therefore, provided much protection. It was at times like this that he wondered why they bothered to carry them at all.

It was at times like this, too, that Mike Campbell understood why lots of people called him crazy; '*mad-in-the-head*'!

The ash bag was constantly in his hand now. After every painfully slow and methodical step he tested the wind. Within the thicket the faint air currents at ground level were as fickle as he had predicted. They drifted first one way then the other. But the general flow of the breeze was away from the rhino to his right-rear. The rhino's resting-orientation remained his primary wind-guide; but he took no chances.

The midday heat beat down on him fiercely through the sparse, bare twigs of the thicket canopy. The thin cotton shirt on his back, dry and burning hot across his shoulders, was soaked down the length of his spine and huge damp patches hung beneath his armpits. His face was awash with sweat from the heat; from the exertion; and from the tension. With his bare forearms, he ever-so-slowly wiped away the puddles of perspiration that repeatedly formed above the ridge of his eyebrows. He could not afford to allow the salty liquid to trickle down into his eyes and distort his vision.

As Mike drew closer he was better able to examine the exact placement of

the various thicket coppices that lay between him and his quarry; and so he planned his final approach. He was about to close the gap. This was the most dangerous part of the whole stalk.

As was always the case, the wind direction prevented Mike from approaching the rhino from behind. He therefore decided to come at her from an oblique angle, cross-wind, in order to get a dart into her shoulder. This could only be done, in this thick bush, from a range of about twelve yards. The baby would then be on its mother's far side, thus eliminating the worry that the dart might accidentally hit the little fellow.

Michael began to inch his way towards the firing position he had selected.

The rhino lay dozing. She had been active all night long; eating, drinking, and eating again and all the time walking. The heat of the day was her time to rest, to sleep. Her eyes were shut; her eyelids fluttering.

Mike guessed it was relatively cool in the deep shade of the squat jackal-berry tree. The soft drift of the air caressed the rhino's body and dried off the tiny nodules of port-wine-coloured sweat that exuded copiously and continuously from the countless pores on her thick hide. The evaporating effect cooled her body.

The scents that came to her from her rear were innocuous. All were odours with which she was familiar. She felt safe and she was at ease.

Her eyes were blank, only focusing when they opened on the ground near to her nose; and on the bushes immediately in front of her.

Her trumpet-shaped ears were constantly active, flicking independently, forwards, sideways then backwards. They moved seemingly without coordination, like the eyes of a chameleon. They checked to the left, to the right, to the front, to the back, all the time automatically absorbing every sound that came from the bush all around.

Although she was resting peacefully, the rhino's most acute defensive senses, those of smell and of hearing, were fully alert.

Richard and the trackers sat silent and expectant on their boulders. They watched every move that Mike made with both fascination and apprehension. The tension within them was electric. Never in his wildest dreams had Richard imagined that he would one day witness a hunt such as this. From where they were watching, it almost seemed the game warden was close enough to reach out and touch the rhino. And still the animal lay there, in the dust, heedless of the danger.

‘And that man…! He must have nerves of steel’ Richard thought.

“Surely the rhino can see him now?” Richard whispered to Mbuyotsi.

“Uh-uhh,” the Bushman responded softly, shaking his head. He touched his nose and one ear. *‘If the rhino were to* ‘see’ *his Nkosi Katasoro at all’* Mbuyotsi tried to explain, *‘it would be with her nose and her ears’*.

Richard made a mental note to find out what *‘Katasoro’* meant.

“Yaaah…” Richard responded. *“And then?”*

Mbuyotsi did not understand English very well but he got the drift of Richard's inference.

“Aaaiiiyeee,” the tracker said demonstrably, softly shaking his head. *“Then we’ve got a problem.”*

Ben, who had been listening to the discussion, looked with alarm at the young white game ranger. The tracker caught the young man’s eye and he shook his head silently.

“SSSssshhhuuu”, he pronounced in a whisper. Everyone was talking too much!

The three men lapsed into silence. They then became all-absorbed in their own private contemplations which were, one way or another, all concentrated on Mike Campbell's agonizingly slow progress.

Mike had entered what he referred to as the rhino’s attack circle without detection. Now, she would instinctively charge him the moment she saw him… if she saw him. There would be no hesitation. Her reaction would be innate… reflexive. And she would come at him like an express train.

“Shit!” Richard said under his breath at that thought. He now suddenly realised all the implications of this important fact.

The young game ranger's eyes now never strayed from the crouched figure in the bush not so far away ahead. He began to sense… to feel… the game warden's vulnerability. And in his hand he held the big elephant rifle with a more determined resolution.

“Can’t we get closer with the rifles?” Richard asked Mbuyotsi.

He had gradually come to realise that if Mike Campbell got into difficulties now there was no way he or Mbuyotsi could render any kind of assistance from this distance.

“Aaiyeee…” the Bushman hissed, aghast at the suggestion. He gave the young white man a reprimanding look. *“We stay right here,”* he said with emphasis, pointing meaningfully to the rock upon which young Richard was sitting.

Ben caught Richard's nervous eye. A soft smile played round the corners of the tracker's mouth. In his own language he whispered mischievously to the universe: *"If you move from this spot, young man, Katasoro will skin you alive."*

Richard did not have the experience to know that every additional human being in that thicket would add to the risks Mike Campbell was then taking. The fewer people there were to make noises and to transmit smells, the safer it was for the man with the dart gun. The most important thing right now was to keep the rhino oblivious to the game warden's presence.

Nevertheless, Mike was getting perilously close and Richard felt his own fear rise into his throat. A strange panic began to invade his senses. *'What'll I do if the rhino charges him?'* Richard thought. *'I'll have to run… and hope that I get to Mr. Campbell before the rhino kills him.'* The knuckles on his hands turned white as he tightened his grip on the heavy weapon.

The Bushmen were now watching with rapt attention, too, their wrinkled brown faces inscrutable. They all lapsed into a tangible silence. There was an excited, expectant, ambience of anticipation, and of fear, in the air.

Mbuyotsi held Mike's .458 Magnum with the same determined readiness as did Richard hold his rifle. This fact was not lost on the young ranger. Richard then realised that if the rhino did attack Mike, it would be a race between them both to see who would get to the scene first.

Out in the bush ahead of them, Mike Campbell resolutely, inexorably, and with great stealth, closed the gap. His every move was carried out in ultra slow motion.

Just two paces more… to his right front… would place him behind the last thicket tuft that lay between himself and his quarry. From that position, if he leaned out from the edge of the bush, he would be able to fire his dart down a clear avenue through the twigs and branches into the unsuspecting rhino's heavy shoulder.

The firing position he had chosen was much closer to the animal than he had previously thought necessary. He now gauged the distance between himself and the rhino to be no more than ten paces. He'd been closer several times before, but ten yards was quite close enough. Now he still had to close the gap by two more steps. Getting within that kind of range of a wild black rhino was far too close for any sane man to seriously contemplate. But Mike needed that one clear shot to make sure the dart's heavy needle would sink deep into the rhino's shoulder muscles.

The old cow was still oblivious to Mike's presence. Only that single thicket bush now separated them and through its flimsy lace-work of naked twigs, he could clearly see the rhino's one drowsy eye. Opaque white mucus dribbled from the corner of the eye socket and a swarm of tiny black mopani flies hovered persistently round the liquid orb. They were visiting the rhino's eyes to drink their tears, together with whatever nutrients the liquid contained.

The mopani flies, the diminutive stingless bees of the African tropics, were obviously irritating the old girl. She repeatedly tried to blink away the rows of flies that settled along her lower eyelashes. That was a good sign. It meant the rhino's thoughts were focussed on the puny pests.

Mike was also aware of the mopani flies that were seesawing close around his own face. So far they had not ventured into his eyes, nor had they yet tried to crawl down his ear holes, or up his nostrils, as was their common practice. He prayed that they would not start any of those irritating and distracting antics at this crucial time.

He pushed his right leg slowly forward and, without haste, placed the heel of his foot on the ground to steady himself. All the while he kept a beady eye on the rhino's ears, and on her sleepy eye, for any sign of alarm. Nothing happened. He eased his weight forward and began to roll his foot gently onto the ground. At the critical moment, when his weight was shifting from one foot to the other, there came the faint crunching sound of a crisp dry leaf crackling on the outside edge of his forward foot.

Mike froze. Without moving his head, he flicked his eyes down and brought them instantly back to focus on the rhino. In that brief glance he saw that the side of his canvas boot had touched the edge of the open space he had prepared for his next foot fall. The contact had been just heavy enough to disturb the adjacent carpet of dry leaves.

'Dammit,' he thought. *'Dammit… Dammit… Dammit.'* He'd been preoccupied with watching the rhino and had lost concentration. Now, despite his bent-over position, with his legs awkwardly outstretched, he stood immobile.

Automatically, instantly, he screwed up his face and squinted through the slits of his half closed eyelids; as an owl observes the world in daylight. There is nothing quite like a pair of staring eyes to attract attention and at this close range the rhino might just pick up such a detail.

The old cow had heard the tiny disturbance. Mike noted the sudden attentiveness in her now fully opened eye. Her ears stopped their monotonous

oscillations and focused to the front. They now looked and acted like twin radar discs; like probing antennae. Only once did one ear flick back, then it came forward again. And there it remained. Both ears slowly canvassed the bush ahead and around, searching, probing, listening for a repeat of the sound the rhino had heard.

Mike was deeply conscious of the heavy beat of his heart. It sounded like a tribal drum pounding against his ribcage. *'She, surely, would not hear that rhythmic thump?'* At such close range he could not be sure; even of that. It was quite possible given the rhino's acute sense of hearing. All she needed now was to hear one small confirmatory sound, or to get one whiff of his scent, and Mike would be in really deep trouble.

He dared not move. Despite her poor vision, at this close range she would see him if he moved. He knew she could already see his shape through the thicket brush, but without any detail. All it would need for her to recognise him as a man, was one flick of a wayward eyelid.

The rhino did not raise her head but for five long minutes she remained alert. In all that time her big round ears patiently concentrated their attention to the fore, and to her front flanks, panning the bush; working together as both independent and paired receptors; each ear highly sensitive to every sound.

Then, slowly, she settled down again. Her eye resumed its sleepy look and her ears again began to flick backwards and forwards; backwards and forwards. And, as if to confirm the return of her relaxed mood, she forcibly expelled a tense lungful of air. It was released as a huge sigh, blowing up a cloud of dust from the ground in front of her nostrils.

The immediate danger was over. Mike could now once again set about completing his hazardous task. Hardly daring to breathe, he twisted his forward foot away from the offending litter. Then he eased his body forward, slowly, successfully transferring his weight to his front foot.

'So far so good!' He watched the rhino carefully. Her disposition did not change.

He lifted his left foot and began to move it across to where his right foot was firmly planted on the ground. As his leg came inching over, the rhino's head suddenly lifted off the ground; and it swung in his direction. She had not been quite as unsuspecting as Mike had thought.

She had seen him move. Of that there was now no doubt. But she still did not know what he was. Her eyes and her ears were now focussed directly on

his khaki form in the naked thicket. He was less than ten yards from her snout!

There was still a chance that she would accept him as something harmless. But for that to happen he would have to remain absolutely still. Only complete immobility now would cause her to accept him as something inanimate and benign. Knowing the incredible patience of the black rhinoceros, Mike knew that that process could take half-an-hour or more.

He was at that point in time standing on one foot with the other suspended in the air. It was an awkward pose which would be impossible to maintain for any length of time. It was imperative that he move into a more sustainable position.

The rhino had still not risen to her feet, an indication that she was not yet too greatly alarmed. She could see his shape and she was suspicious, but she could not smell him. That was the key. So, perhaps, if he moved in minuscule proportions, he might just get both of his feet more comfortably on the ground.

He really had no choice since muscle fatigue was already setting in. So, with infinite caution, he began to draw his left leg forward and downward, towards where his right foot was firmly planted on the ground.

The second Mike moved, with a loud snort, the rhino launched herself to her feet. She spun her heavy body round to face him directly. Fortunately she did not charge. Instead she assumed a defensive position with her head held low, her long front horn sweeping the ground from side to side, pointing menacingly towards him.

During her eruptive movement Mike set his elevated foot squarely on the ground before freezing behind the flimsy screen of twigs that subtly obscured him from her vision. His capture gun, an ineffectual weapon for defense, was nevertheless at the ready in his hands.

Suddenly Mike experienced a strong compulsion to drop his gun and to run; run; run. Panic surged within him. His impulse to escape was a natural instinct to survive.

Mike Campbell had been in similarly dangerous situations many times before, and he knew that to succumb to panic would be suicidal. Placing a firm and resolute grip on his quaking nerves, he forced himself to override his fears. He replaced the panic with an unwavering calm. This enabled him to focus on the purpose of his mission and, indeed, on his very survival.

The rhino was still unsure of what he was. That was why she had not charged. She did not yet know if he was a living creature let alone a man. The shape she was looking at might well be just an old tree stump, and the movement she had seen could have been a small bird flying off from the standing log. But Mike understood that any sound or movement from him now, would provide all the confirmation the old cow needed. She would then attack him instantly.

If she charged him now Mike Campbell knew he stood no chance. No chance at all.

So the rhino cow, her tiny calf standing courageously at her side, and the game warden, stood confronting each other less than ten yards apart. At that moment only the flimsy jesse-bush screen in front of him, his immobility, his raw guts and his common sense, separated Mike Campbell from a certain and horrible death.

Mike's body was trembling but he forcibly controlled his vibrant fear. He was no fool. He fully understood the danger. He knew that, unless he maintained a firm grip on his fluttering courage, within a few short seconds he would be history. One tiny movement; one betraying sound; and he would be a dead man. He had no illusions. He knew that if the rhino charged him now it would be impossible to evade her.

His mind was on full alert. It was spinning with thoughts of possibilities and probabilities. If the rhino did charge, all he could hope to do was to stand his ground, and to fire his dart at point blank range into her forehead. At such short range the aluminium projectile had quite an impact. It might disintegrate, but it would not penetrate a rhino's skull. It certainly would not kill her, and he was not sure that such a blow would even make this rhino falter. For one thing he was far too close; and for another, she had a very small baby to defend.

The rhino's ears remained steadfastly focused on him. Her tiny brown eyes searched his obscure shape for some give-away feature or movement. She continued to hold her head low, her threatening front horn close to and parallel with the ground. He could hear the quiet puffing sounds of her breath, uff-fuh… uff-fuh… uff-fuh… as she continually tested the wind for scent.

The calf, the button of its embryonic front horn shining on the blunt tip of its snout, grew impatient and shuffled around at its mother's side. It too, blew air from its tiny nostrils. It sensed the tension and, emulating its mother, it

cast its head first one way and then the other in search of the unseen enemy.

The actions of her calf did not distract the old cow. Her attention remained focused on the solid figure behind the lattice of stems right in front of her. She was not going to disregard the danger signals but she would not attack; not until she knew what it was that she was facing.

Mike Campbell stood his ground, stoically, silently, stationary, hardly daring to breathe. Both man and beast were tottering on the brink of terrifying, violent action. But, for the moment, it was an impasse.

"Fucking hell!" Richard exclaimed in horror as he watched the hunting tableau suddenly change. In one instant of time the thrilling, calculated dice with death was transformed into a now probable and horrific catastrophe. It was no longer a game.

'What the hell was the man waiting for? Why didn't he run?'

Richard Poole launched himself from his rock, flicking off the safety catch of his rifle as he hit the ground.

"AAIIIEEE… NKOSANA!" Mbuyotsi shouted in a hoarse undertone. His sibilant voice was just loud enough for the white man to hear.

The young ranger hesitated. He looked back at the Bushman and saw the alarmed look on his face. The tracker's hand was held vertically, palm open. It was an obvious restraining gesture.

Richard stopped.

"What's it? What's the matter?"

"Aikona, Nkosana! Don't run to Nkosi Katasoro"

Mbuyotsi jumped down from his rock, maintaining the urgently restraining signal of his extended hand. He continued to shake his head negatively.

"Mbuyotsi…" the young ranger protested. With the palm of his hand upturned, he gestured helplessly at the distant, dangerous stand-off. *'They were wasting precious time!'*

"Shhhhh…" The Bushman cautioned. "Don't run into the thicket, Nkosana. Mr. Campbell will be killed if you go running headlong into the jesse right now… PLEASE…"

'What did the little tracker mean? How would he cause the death of Mr. Campbell if he ran to the game warden's assistance? The matter was urgent. Something HAD to be done, and done quickly.' He opened his mouth to protest again.

"Shhhh… Shhhh…"

Ben jumped down from his own rock then and joined them on the ground. Unlike Mbuyotsi, who was prepared to argue with the young white man, Ben simply moved off into the thicket completely ignoring the altercation.

"BWIYA." COME. Ben said over his shoulder in a commanding manner.

Ben understood, too, that there was no time to waste. Something had to be done but it was not a headlong rush towards Katasoro and the rhino.

Abruptly, Mbuyotsi turned away from Richard. He set off quickly in silent pursuit of Ben.

"Bwiya." Come. He urged the white man to follow him; beckoning with his free hand. In the other he carried Mike's .458 Magnum.

Richard was at a loss. Mr. Campbell had threatened him with extinction if he ever shot a rhino in protection of a human life… even his own life. But had he really meant it? The game warden was clearly now in a most desperate plight. Richard wanted to act quickly; impulsively. He wanted to rush to the game warden's rescue. As the only white officer on hand, he felt responsible for his superior's safety. But the trackers had taken the initiative out of his hands, a fact which added a little anger and frustration to his agitation.

Richard cast desperate eyes into the thicket. The rhino and the game warden were still facing each other, neither had moved. He could see them clearly, but not well enough to risk a shot at the rhino, which is what he really wanted to do. But there was far too much heavy brush in between. The bullet would be deflected. It might then even hit the man he so desperately wanted to protect.

'Should he fire a shot into the air? That would frighten the rhino away! Maybe? Maybe not!' He was not at all sure how the rhino would react. Tentacles of fear rose up from the inexperienced rookie's bowels, forming a tight, seething knot in his stomach. He wrestled with a toxic and potentially lethal mix of indecision and terror. In truth, he simply had no idea how he could diffuse the precarious events that were taking place right in front of his eyes.

Whilst he was anxiously turning these ideas around in his head, the trackers were moving steadily away from him. But they were not advancing in the game warden's direction. They were proceeding through the edge of the thicket on the rhino's down-wind side.

'What should I do?' Richard's mind raced. 'Should I follow the Bushmen? Or should I follow my instincts?' He had to do something.

He thought about what the trackers had said. They had specifically

cautioned him not to run into the thicket. The inner voice of his conscience told him calmly to heed that advice. But his eyes were wild, betraying his tremendous anxiety; the desperation that plagued his indecisive soul.

Richard looked again into the thicket. The rhino was still standing facing the game warden. Mike Campbell hadn’t moved. The situation looked very menacing. The panic that now gripped him threatened to cloud his judgment.

He looked toward the trackers. In sharp contrast to his own, the Bushmen's actions were forthright; confident; decisive. They seemed to know precisely what had to be done. But what were they doing?

Still the young game ranger hesitated. His youthful exuberance was still inclined towards dashing recklessly into the jesse and to directly accomplish the game warden's rescue.

Finally common sense prevailed. With his mind made up at last, he turned abruptly and hurried after the trackers.

When Richard caught up with them he discovered, to his surprise, that they were making no attempt at all to be quiet. They were not making excessive noises but neither were they overly cautious. They were simply walking through the thicket as if it was of no consequence whether the rhino heard them or not. Their feet shuffled noisily through the carpet of dry leaves and they pushed through the bushes, casually letting the branches brush resoundingly over their khaki bush clothes. All the while their eyes were on the rhino, watching her reactions.

Mike, still trembling with controlled fear, saw the rhino's right ear jerk to the side. It turned back towards him; then flicked away again. The old cow turned her head, just a fraction, to the left.

‘She's losing interest,’ Mike thought, relieved. ‘So soon?’ His heart began to beat a little easier. ‘Had she really already decided that he was not a threat?’

Then he heard the noise that had distracted her. It was the faint sound of someone, of more than one person, walking through the dry leaves at the bottom end of the thicket. He smiled hesitantly. His ingenious Bushmen were going to do it again. They were going to extricate him from his sticky predicament. How many times, and in how many different ways, did he owe his life to the astute resourcefulness of those two little brown men?

But the danger was not yet over. The situation could, in a flash, still change for the worse. If the rhino charged him now she would be all over him in a matter of seconds.

The game warden remained silent; immobile; listening; watching.

The rhino's attention became increasingly distracted. Finally she became totally engrossed in the noises being made by the distant trackers. To her the game warden was still only a mysterious and amorphous shape in the bush. But the sounds she could now hear were tangible. There was definitely something walking through the carpet of dry leaves at the bottom edge of the thicket. She could neither see, nor smell, what it was. But she could hear it and she was certain that something was there.

It could be a herd of impala, or a small group of kudu, a sounder of warthogs, even another rhino. She listened for a familiar bleat, a snort or a grunt; the sounds of animals rooting the ground, or browsing; or the clatter of horns or of tushes which always happened when young males began to joust.

There were none of those sounds so she stood her ground, listening intently.

The rhino was now fully aware of the trackers' presence but she had picked up no scent at all. She became agitated by the confusing disturbances but she was not yet fearfully alarmed. The noise was too far off to represent any kind of immediate danger. She held her position. She tried to absorb and to analyse all the other sounds and the smells that came to her from the bush all around, too. She tried to identify every alien element.

Slowly she turned her head fully to the left. Her ears were now wholly focused on the sounds being made by the moving trackers. They were some distance away and they seemed not to be approaching her position directly. This placated the old cow but she continued to listen, sniffing gently at the capricious breeze.

Gradually she put aside her diffident concern for the uncertain brown shape so close at hand. The noises that she could hear, by contrast, were absolute. And as the trackers moved distantly past her flank, so she shuffled round, under the canopy of the jackal-berry tree, in order to maintain the focus of her surveillance. And as the trackers moved around her, she turned more and more to face them. Head up, eyes and ears focussed on the sounds she could hear, her probing senses followed the trail of the faraway noise. And her tiny calf, standing boldly on the outside of its mother's right front leg, mimicked her every move.

'They've done it,' Mike thought jubilantly.

And indeed they had. The trackers had altered the focus of the rhino's concentration. They had changed the old cow's mood by diverting her

attention. She was now looking in the opposite direction facing almost directly away from the game warden. Her blunt end, at last, was turned towards him; and the wind had not changed.

‘They’d better watch it,’ Mike thought, ‘just now they are going to give the old cow their scent.’

The trackers, with Richard at their heels, finally saw that they had achieved their objective. They, too, understood they could go no further. Ben was forever conscious of the breeze. So they retired to the base of a climbable tree. There the tracker tapped softly on the loose and hollow bark. It was not a great noise, just loud enough to hold the rhino's attention.

Mike took the final step of his planned advance; to his right-front. It was the single step that he needed to get a clear view of the rhino's buttocks. The huge left hind leg, with its baggy-pant folds of heavy grey skin, was now clearly visible. He could even see the veil of loose sand that still adhered to the rhino's granulated hide where it had recently pressed upon the ground. There was not one single stick, not even a twig, in the way of the dart’s flight path.

A rhino’s rump is the best possible target site. Its abundant heavy muscles quickly absorb the drug; and a dart banged in from the rear is protected by the rhino's own body when it bulldozes its way through the bush after being hit.

These were unconscious thoughts, however, for this was not the time to indulge in mental exercises. The rhino could move again at any moment and his advantage would then be lost.

Even as Mike shifted his weight forward with his last advancing footstep, the capture-gun was swinging up to his shoulder. He selected the desired point of impact and settled the foresight onto a spot a few inches lower… to compensate for the projectile's rising parabola. He squeezed the trigger.

The capture gun detonated with a ringing crack. There was no recoil but Mike could feel the dart slide fast and smoothly down the rifled barrel. Like a silver streak it flew straight and true, striking the rhino's buttocks with a heavy thump, right on target. There was a blaze of bright colour… of red, white and blue… as the goose-feather flights flashed briefly in the sunlight. The dart stuck fast. It was *‘in’*.

Mike was not consciously aware of dropping the gun and the tiny ash bag… Or of his soft bush hat flying off his head as he turned to run. After firing the rifle he waited only long enough to confirm that the dart had not deflected, nor bounced off the rhino's hide, before he abandoned everything

and took to his heels.

At that moment all Mike Campbell had in his mind were the hazy details of the tortuous route that led him back to the old Commiphora tree behind him. He could vaguely see the twisted grey trunk through the dense bush; and he ran at the tree with all the speed and the strength that he could muster, twisting and turning, ducking and diving, through the heavy undergrowth. He was completely oblivious to the punishment that his bare arms and legs were taking from the spiky bushes.

The rhino was taken by surprise. As she felt the dart strike home with a punching thump, she automatically exploded forwards, a loud whooshing expulsion of air bursting from her lungs. Then behind her, she heard the sound of Mike's racing footsteps, and the swishing sound of bushes brushing against his body, as he dashed towards the safety of the Commiphora tree.

With incredible agility the rhino spun round on one front foot to face her adversary. She quickly zeroed in on the sounds of his flight. Then without hesitation; with her head held close to the ground; with her horns sweeping forward into the bush ahead; and with loud, frightening, puffing emissions of air from her nostrils, the old rhino gave chase. Her tiny calf, itself puffing away like a toy steam engine, followed on behind.

Mike could hear the heavy and intimidating exhalations of breath getting ever closer behind him: *'pfussss… pfussss… pfussss… pfussss.'* They were repeated with each and every impact of the rhino's galloping front feet. He could feel those hooves pounding into the sandy soil on the thicket floor behind him.

By making the break first, Mike had bought himself some time. He had gained valuable distance in his flight that put him half-way to the tree before the rhino fully began her charge. But once she had something tangible to chase she was instantly on his tail.

Despite her age and ponderous size, the old rhino was fast and nimble. She gained ground with every lunging step and was right behind the game warden when he, at last, swung round behind the protective tree trunk.

Mike threw himself desperately into the lower branches of the Commiphora and he began, frantically, to scramble higher. All he had to do was to get six feet above the ground and he would be safe. Rhinos never tackle a man unless he is on or near the ground.

The rhino hit the tree trunk with her shoulder. The impact of her massive

weight sent a violent, convulsive shock up its entire length. The jolt nearly dislodged Mike from the branches. As he faltered and struggled to maintain his hold, the rhino's probing front horn shot skyward. She missed him narrowly and she bounced up and down on the ground below in anger. She thrust at his body viciously; again and again and again; in a wild endeavour to skewer him. But he was out of her reach.

In her manic assault the rhino had splintered a low bough with her head. It fell to the ground. In a fit of savage rage, she picked it up with her front horn and flicked it high into the air. It came crashing down onto her back, infuriating her still further. She horned the branch into the dirt with sideways sweeping motions of her head. Then abruptly, just as precipitously as she had launched her attack, she abandoned it. She stormed off through the undergrowth amidst an unfurling cloud of dust, to the roar of splintering bushes and the grating sound of branches as they dragged across her heavy hide.

At first the rhino galloped away, emitting continuous rasping, puffing noises through flared nostrils: pfussss…pfussss…pfussss… These were sounds designed to intimidate her enemies. Then, remembering her maternal responsibilities, she settled into a slower triple pace. She ran on looking back first over one shoulder then the other, all the while her tiny baby bounced along behind her like a rotund little drum on four wildly flailing legs.

As she ran off Mike noted, with satisfaction, the waggle of the silver dart sticking in her buttocks, and the flashing red, white and blue colours of its feather flights. The narcotic, injected on impact, was already being absorbed deep inside her flesh. For Mike it was a gratifying thought.

From his safe sanctuary in the high branches of the tree, he watched the rhino racing ever further away. He was greatly relieved by her departure because she could so easily have pushed the tree down.

Even after she had disappeared from view Mike held his position. His uncontrolled trembling was due partially to the aftermath of his narrow escape from death, and partially from relief that he had accomplished his mission successfully. His mouth and throat were parched and raw. He sucked on his tongue in a futile search for saliva. The heat, fear, sweat and exertion had drained his body of fluids. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. It was over. Thank God. It had been a close call but it had been worth it. By nightfall he'd have the old cow and her calf safely in the stockade at his

Nyamasoto camp.

It had, indeed, been touch-and-go today, but he had survived it. Nevertheless, after every such experience he wondered how many more times the universe would let him get away with taking such incredible risks. Sooner or later it would happen; a rhino would catch him. It was bound to happen. And it was only a matter of time before it did so.

Abruptly he jammed these negative thoughts from his whirling mind. If he continued to entertain such pessimistic ideas he would surely wish such an accident upon himself. He hadn't been injured simply because he knew what he was doing. Nevertheless, the nagging doubts persisted.

'Damn it,' he thought fatalistically. *'Que sera sera. What will be will be.'* There was no future in negative thinking.

He listened then, contentedly, to the diminishing rhythmic beat of the rhino's footfalls: pommm… pommm… pommm… pommm… They sounded just like the measured cadence of a trotting horse's hooves. They got fainter and fainter as she ran off up the gradient behind him.

"Whooo-oouhH." The loud whooping call of the spotted hyena came to him through the bushes. It was Ben enquiring if he was all right. He could not see the trackers, neither could they see him, but they were clearly concerned for his safety.

"Whooo-oouhH." He replied, lifting the last notes to a lilting crescendo.

The whoop of a hyena was a far-reaching call that Mike and his trackers used to locate each other when separated by great distance. That one response would be enough to tell them he was still in one piece; and it would give them an indication of his location.

Only when all sounds of the rapid and hasty departure of the rhino and her calf had faded right away, did Mike Campbell drop out of the shattered tree. He sank down at its base and sat on the ground with his back leaning against the trunk. His body was still quaking violently and his hands were trembling. He took several deep breaths, again, as he fought to regain his composure.

Urgent, shuffling sounds alerted him to the hurried footfalls of the approaching trackers. As they came into sight he was pleased to see that young Richard was with them.

Mike knew intuitively that the manner in which they had diverted the rhino's attention had been Ben's brainchild, for he had used that tactic several times before. Richard's position in the Bushmen's company now, clearly

implied that he had had the common sense to allow Ben to take the lead; and that he had not panicked.

The last thing Mike Campbell had needed at the critical time of his stand-off with the rhino was to have had the cavalry rush in to rescue him. Little did the game warden realise just how close he had come to hearing the clarion call of their bugles.

"Haaiieeee… Madodas!" Mike exclaimed, shaking his head dramatically. He smiled at them ruefully as the three men approached. His exclamation was an expression of relief and of thanks that a dangerous moment had come and gone. More than anything, it was an acknowledgement that he had been in great difficulties, in great danger, and that he was very grateful to have come out of it unscathed.

"Aikona…" Mbuyotsi responded, shaking his head, too. *"Nkosi? Hah! Iss fahnie."*

The Bushman continued to hang and shake his head. He held his hand to his mouth in an affected gesture of incredulity. Behind the hand Mbuyotsi's eyes were sparkling with excitement.

Mike didn't think it had been very *'fahnie'* at all, neither during the time of the confrontation nor now, but he made no attempt to correct his Bushman friend. 'Where the hell had Mbuyotsi picked up such an expression?'

Ben stood back and smiled silently at the big game warden. When he caught Mike's eye he raised his eyebrows expressively and nodded his head knowingly, once. He was saying to Mike: *'You were lucky this time. That was a very near thing'.*

Mike knew he was right.

Richard didn't know what to say. He just stood and gawked at the game warden with wide open, unbelieving eyes. His face was still blanched.

"Hhummm! I am very thankful for your help, you guys," Mike thanked the two trackers succinctly. "And you, too, Richard. Thanks. It got a bit sticky there for a few moments."

'A bit sticky?' Richard thought. 'Shit! That's an under-statement if ever I've heard one.'

But he said nothing. He was very conscious of the fact that he had nearly balls'ed the whole thing up. And the last thing he wanted was for his mentor, now ever-more his hero, to find out just how close he had come to doing the unthinkable.

Mbuyotsi wandered off, following Mike's running tracks, back-tracking to where he had dropped the capture gun; his ash bag; and his hat. Mike always dropped those three things when he had to flee the scene of a rhino's charge. It had become one of the tracker's automatic tasks, to recover those three items, after every such incident.

"*Now we've got to find her.*" Mike said matter-of-factly.

"Got to find her?" Richard was incredulous. "You mean, after all that, you actually darted the rhino?"

"Of course. That was the object of the exercise, Richard… Wasn't it?" Mike laughed lightly. "And the dart is 'in' all right. Slap bang in the middle of her bum. I saw it after I fired. And I saw it still in place when she ran off from the tree."

"*Fucking hell…!*" It was the only comment that Richard Poole could think of at that moment to sum up his astonishment.

Chapter 3

ANNA and Daniel sat close together on two low Batonka stools. The pink soles of their naked feet were outstretched towards the smouldering coals of the fire. They displayed an air of contentment, their eyes frequently meeting, roving lovingly over each others' faces and bodies. Every now and again one reached out and touched the other as if to be reassured about the reality of their reunion.

Rex Mbudzi lay back comfortably on the chief's old deckchair. It was positioned so that the glowing embers of the fire were between himself and his two companions. His eyes sparkled in the fire's lambent light as he watched his companions' displays of radiant affection.

The bright moon hung low in the inky sky and the huts of the chief's village were silhouetted starkly in its colourless light. The huts closest to the fires, however, were washed with their roseate reflections.

At dusk, two of the chief's three junior wives, accompanied by their daughters, had returned to the village. They were tired and dusty from their day-long preparations of the village crop lands. Several young boys had brought in the cattle, the sheep and the goats from their distant grazing grounds.

From the centre of the village there came the sounds and smells of the chief's various families preparing their evening meals. There were the dark and silent images of people moving about in the focal amber glows of other fires.

The sounds of cattle jostling about in their bush-pole kraal came to them from out of the darkness. A cow lowed for her calf. Occasionally there was the bleat of a goat. And from the distant river the whup-whupping call of a freckled nightjar could be heard.

Having exhausted their initial question-and-answer period, the three companions sat silently contemplating the flickering bed of red hot embers. The shimmer of purple flame that played over the fire's surface was mesmeric, encouraging their thoughts to wander.

Rex had returned to the village with Rachel early in the afternoon, leaving the two love-birds to their own devices next to the river.

Daniel and Anna had spent the afternoon making tempestuous love hidden amongst the rocks on the golden sands of the river bed. After their two year

separation the imperative to swiftly gratify their voracious, high voltage desire could not be denied. Finally, exhausted and content, they bathed together leisurely in the cold clear waters of a rocky pool before returning to the village at sunset.

Sitting by the fire now, sexually satiated for the time being, Anna felt cleaner and more refreshed than she had for a very long time. Her mind was more tranquil and vital than it had been for years. Her unexpected reunion with Daniel had been a fillip to her sagging spirits and now, with him by her side, she felt she could once again face whatever the world chose to throw at her.

The logs that fed the fire poked out like the spokes of a wheel. Rex leant forward and pushed those nearest to him deeper into the seething coals. Daniel did the same on his side of the fire. The wood began to crackle and to splutter, and within minutes flames and burning sparks were rising into the dark night air. A pall of smoke drifted lazily over Rex, forcing him to move his chair. No sooner had he done so, however, than the breeze changed and he had to move again.

Daniel began to chuckle.

“What do you find so amusing, comrade?” Mbudzi asked in the Zezuru dialect.

“Don't you know the old Shona proverb about the smoke that follows a man around a fire, Comrade Commander?”

“It points out the man who sleeps with grandmothers,” was Mbudzi’s immediate response.

“That's right,” Daniel smirked.

“Well… I can think of several young grandmothers that I really wouldn't mind sleeping with at all,” Mbudzi laughed, glancing quickly at Anna. Her gaze was fixed on the fire. She seemed not to have been listening.

“Is your name really Mbudzi, Rex?” she asked suddenly, raising her eyes to look at him.

“No. That is my Chimurenga Name, Comrade Anna… my Nom de Guerre.”

“Your what?”

“My War Name, Anna. My Name of the Revolution. Like Daniel now calls himself Comrade Muliloh.”

“But why Mbudzi, Rex? In Chi-Zezuru Mbudzi means a hoary old male goat. Do you call yourself Mbudzi, perhaps, because you sleep with old

grand-nanny-goats?”

Rex smiled roguishly into the flames. She had been listening and she had his measure.

“The white people say that ‘sarcasm is the lowest form of wit’, *Comrade Anna.”* He sparred with her not unkindly.

“They also say that ‘wit is the highest form of humour’, Rex.”

He smiled into the fire and shook his head. He had to hand it to this woman. Her mind and her tongue were as quick as a mamba's strike.

“Touché!”

Daniel looked at his friend and superior, nodding his head sagely. He raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips in a knowing gesture. If Rex was to work with Anna he was going to have to get to know her better. She was no fool and she gave just as much as she took.

“Seriously, Rex,” Anna relented. “What is the point of having a chimurenga name? The revolution is a very important issue and by using these secret names aren't you just playing Cowboys-and-Indians? Shouldn't you, instead, be getting down to the real business of fighting a war? There hasn't been a battle with Ian Smith's soldiers now for three years.”

“And there won't be for another year at least, Anna,” Daniel said. He looked deeply and seriously into the fire.

“If we are to win this war, Comrade Anna…” Mbudzi continued, his face looking very earnest. “If we are going to win this war, it’s going to have to be a sustainable and protracted struggle. It’s going to be a war of attrition. We are going to have to wear down the mabunus’ will to fight, and we are going to have to exhaust the country’s economy. Chimurenga names are going to be a very important and very serious part of it. They will be one of the reasons why we shall win.”

“I don't understand.”

“Because I call myself an old goat,” an amused ring had crept into Mbudzi’s voice now, “I add to my anonymity. And the greater the obscurity of my real name, the more secure I shall be when we start to make things happen.”

“So… What is your real name, Rex?”

“That I shall never tell you, Comrade Anna. Even Daniel doesn't know my real name.”

Anna hunched her shoulders. She looked back into the fire, unhappy and

unconvinced.

"Who did you think you were coming to meet here today, Anna?" Daniel asked pointedly.

Anna looked at him… puzzled.

"It wasn't me…" he said assuredly. "You came to meet someone that you understood could give you information about your husband. Am I right? The person you came to see was a man called Muliloh."

"I'm beginning to get the picture," she said, nodding. "Your chimurenga name is Muliloh, Daniel. That is the Matabele name for fire. By doing that not only do you protect your real name but you also hide the fact you are a Shona. Muliloh suggests that you are probably an Ndebele".

"Hah-haaah. I think she's got it." Daniel flashed his eyes at Rex.

"Why fire, Daniel?"

"Oh… Just a bit of melodrama," he said sheepishly. "Like… If you put your hand onto a fire you're gonna get yourself burned."

"So, there is a bit of frivolity in the names game after all?"

"Yes, of course. Like Rex is an old goat. We can't be serious all the time. But there is another reason for us using chimurenga names, Anna. It's to protect our families. To make sure they are not arrested by the police Special Branch and then used as bargaining chips to get our guerrillas to stop fighting."

"Of course…," the implications suddenly became clear to Anna. "If the Rhodesian security forces knew the identities of the ZANLA men they were fighting they could round up their wives and children or their parents…"

"…and put them in concentration camps." Daniel steered Anna's thoughts in the direction he wanted them to go.

"The British did that to the families of the Boer fighters during the Anglo-Boer War," Rex continued the narrative. "They put them on short rations to induce their men, the fighting commandos, to give themselves up. The women and the children who were treated in that fashion were skin and bone when a flu epidemic hit the camps and they died in their thousands… The Afrikaners, today, say that nearly 30 000 of their women and children died of the flu in the British concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War."

"The Rhodesians wouldn't do that! Would they?"

"We're not prepared to take that chance, Anna. Our chimurenga names will make sure they never know who we really are."

Anna was quiet for some time. She was mentally absorbing the ingenuity of the nom de guerre strategy.

"Your use of chimurenga names makes a lot of sense, Rex," she conceded at last. "But, whereas I strongly believe we Shona have the right to self-determination, I cannot accept that the white Rhodesians would starve our families in this day and age."

Mbudzi's face suddenly clouded. His anxious eyes moved from Anna's face to that of her husband's.

"She is sound, Rex," Daniel said tiredly. "All it will take is a little political orientation."

"Political orientation?"

"All that means, Anna," Daniel lifted his eyes away from the fire slowly, "is that before we can use you in the liberation struggle you will have to be re-educated."

"You don't trust me?"

"No, Anna… No! I didn't say that. And I don't mean that either." Earnestly looking into her eyes Daniel moved his hand across and reassuringly squeezed her fore-arm.

"Don't misinterpret me, Comrade Anna… or your husband," Mbudzi said very seriously. "We simply have to have everybody thinking the same way if we are to win this war."

"You mean I need to be brain washed? Is that it?" Angry displeasure splintered from her words.

"Anna, stop it! Listen to what Comrade Rex is trying to tell you."

"For God's sake. I'm getting tired of all this comrade nonsense. Everything you two say is comrade this and…"

"ANNA! I said stop it. Listen to what Rex is trying to tell you," Daniel said again more firmly, his eyes betraying a hint of impatience.

Anna Moyo looked at Mbudzi irritably. Then she looked at Daniel with some dismay.

Tilting her head sideways and lifting her chin in a defiant gesture she said, "I object to being treated like an imbecile, Daniel. I have proved myself a staunch supporter of ZANU, and I need no further convincing that the liberation struggle is a just and right cause. Furthermore, I feel strongly that I retain the right to express my own opinions… And I'm not sure that I like the idea of allowing myself to be brain-washed."

"You haven't changed at all in the last couple of years, Anna." Daniel

smiled approvingly into her blazing brown eyes. “You're still, thank God, the same fiery woman that I married. But please… I say again… please. Just listen to what Rex has to say.”

Anna turned her angry face away from Daniel and she glared again at Mbudzi. She waited, her teeth and her hands clenched tightly in frustration.

“Nobody is doubting your loyalty to the cause of our liberation struggle, Anna,” the ZANLA commander continued slowly. He purposely did not call her comrade. “But we must all be trained to play our many different roles in the coming war in a coordinated fashion. That is the only way we can be sure of achieving our objective… which is ultimate victory. That is what political orientation means, Anna.

“Political orientation will also teach you to know who our enemies are, and who our friends will be when the war begins!

“And if you want to know what that means, I can tell you… briefly. ALL white Rhodesians… ALL the mabunus… the marungus… the makiwas… no matter what you call them… are our enemies. So are all those blacks, the sell-outs, who help the mabunus to kill our freedom fighters. Even those Mashona village peasants, the povo, who do nothing more than give the white men information, are sell-outs. They, too, are the enemy.

“Those who help and feed the vakomana of ZANLA, on the other hand, and those who withhold information from our enemies, will be our friends and allies. There will be nobody in the middle. ZANLA cannot allow anyone to be neutral. Everybody must choose which side he or she wishes to fight on.

“And Anna, nobody in ZANLA can be allowed to have even one good thought about any of our enemies.” The ZANLA commander looked her very purposefully in the eye.

Anna said not a word.

“We must develop in our minds an absolute conviction that our enemies, ALL our enemies, are bad… and that everything they do is bad. Because only then will we be able to kill them without compunction.”

‘So, I AM going to be indoctrinated,’ Anna thought with disapproval. She objected to the idea of being subjected to such mental programming. But she kept her thoughts to herself.

“Political orientation means, too, Anna,” Mbudzi continued, “that you will be instructed regarding the direction in which the politics of Ian Smith is taking our country… Zimbabwe… compared to the direction in which ZANU

intends to lead us. In these respects, and many others, everyone in ZANLA must achieve a uniform understanding regarding what the real situation is here at home.

"Anna… ZANLA is a people's army and the liberation struggle is a people's war. You know nothing of these things yet. So if you decide to join us, you must first be taught the objectives of our coming war; and about the teachings of Mao regarding how guerrilla warfare should be waged."

"Mao?"

"Mao Tse Tung. The great leader of the Chinese People's Republic."

"So Smith is right. You are fighting a war for communism."

"No, Anna…" Daniel interrupted quickly. His discourse was cut short, however, by a lifted hand from Mbudzi.

"What is communism, Anna?" Mbudzi asked. "Is it not just one extreme of socialism?"

Anna remained silent.

"But it does not really matter what you think at this time," Mbudzi was persistent. "Political orientation will help you to understand that whatever political system develops in Zimbabwe after we have won the war, it will not be prescribed by the communists. This is what Ian Smith tells his white followers all the time. He is wrong. Once political power is in the hands of the people, the Mashona people themselves will decide what form of government Zimbabwe will adopt. So we will not be replacing Smith's white minority rule, necessarily, with a Chinese imposed communist rule. Having said that, however, there is no substitute for the wisdom of Chairman Mao's ideas for waging guerrilla warfare. And the fact that Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese people practice communism does not alter that basic truth."

"What about the Russians? Aren't ZIPRA[xiii] *trained by communist Russia?"* By asking this question, Anna informed Mbudzi that she knew something about what was going on.

"Yes. And see where that got them. The Matabele ZIPRA fought Smith's marungu soldiers throughout 1966, 1967 and 1968," Mbudzi almost sniggered. "And they were defeated in every single battle."

"Comrade Rex was first trained by the Russians, Anna," Daniel cut in quickly. "He was once a guerrilla fighter in ZIPRA. Now he is a senior military commander in ZANLA."

Mbudzi smiled at her benignly. He wondered just how much of what he

was saying was sinking in to this woman's excitable and very pretty head… and just how much she really comprehended, highly intelligent though she appeared to be.

"I left ZIPRA and joined ZANLA when I realised that ZIPRA, and ZIPRA's entire Matabele-dominated Military High Command in Lusaka, had no winnable programme to fight the white man, Anna." The man's smile persisted. "As a liberation army ZIPRA is finished… discredited.

"Anyway… Zimbabwe cannot afford two liberation armies, especially when they split the loyalties of Zimbabwe's people right down the middle on tribal lines. ZANLA is the only army that counts. And ZANLA is going to win this war."

"Are there no Mashona fighters in ZIPRA?"

"None… Those Shona cadres that once were with ZIPRA, like me, have all left. The Ndebeles are too arrogant. They still think of themselves as superior Zulu warriors and they still look upon the Mashona as an inferior, subjugate tribe. When I was with ZIPRA the Matabele soldiers treated us Shonas like dogs. There will always be tribal conflict in Zimbabwe, Anna, as long as the Matabeles think of themselves as Matabeles first and as Zimbabweans last."

"And how many Matabeles are there in ZANLA?"

"Only a few at the moment. But ZANLA thinks of itself as a Zimbabwean army, not as a Mashona army, and our ranks are open to ALL loyal black Zimbabweans."

'He's politicking', Anna thought derisively. 'Everyone knows the real truth. Putting Matabele and Mashona together in one army is like trying to boil oil and water in the same pot.'

"So you left ZIPRA…?"

"Yes… And when I joined ZANLA the first thing that happened to me was that I was politically re-orientated, as you will have to be if you join us."

"And who did that? Who was it that politically orientated you, Rex?"

"The Chinese… in Peking."

"In Peking? In China?" Anna was clearly astounded.

Mbudzi flashed his big bright eyes and nodded. His smile was fixed.

"So you've seen a bit of the world!" Anna said, stating the fact. It was not a question.

Rex nodded again. And he laughed. He was clearly enjoying himself.

"I've also had military training in Russia, in Cuba, in Lybia and in Bulgaria. And in the Russian training camps in Zambia. And by the Chinese

in ZANLA's Itumbi training camp in Tanzania. But Daniel's been around, too."

"Daniel? You've been to China?"

Daniel smiled. "I completed a guerrilla training course in China's Nanking Military Academy last year. Then I received further training in Bulgaria… then Egypt… then Lybia… and finally, Rex and I trained together at Itumbi in Tanzania."

Shaking her head, Anna looked at her husband blankly, her incredulity very apparent. So much had happened since she had last seen Daniel. They clearly had an enormous amount of catching up to do.

"There is a vast difference between the Russian approach to conducting an armed liberation struggle and that adopted by the Chinese, Comrade Anna," Mbudzi continued. His use of the title comrade seemed to flow naturally and unconsciously in his language. Strangely, it now sounded less offensive to Anna.

"The Soviets believe that the decisive factor in any war lies in the superiority of an army's weapons. The Chinese, on the other hand, know that the most important factor in winning a guerrilla war lies in the political orientation of the country's people. Those two opposing ideas are but one example of the many contradictions that separate the Russians from the Chinese. And they are reflected in the different approaches that ZIPRA and ZANLA have adopted in Zimbabwe's war of liberation."

Mbudzi continued to beam his indelible smile at Anna. *"I know, Anna… I have been trained by both of them."*

"So you changed horses in mid-stream. You abandoned what you believed was a lost cause, and you climbed on board what you think will be a winner."

"Of course. Who in his right mind goes down with a sinking ship?"

"And what makes you so sure that ZANLA will now win when ZIPRA lost?" Anna asked pointedly.

"Because ZANLA is approaching the problem in the correct manner, comrade."

"You seem very sure of that?"

"Yes I am. And for a number of very good reasons."

Anna waited.

"Firstly, we come from the people, Anna. We are, therefore, going to go back to the people. We will stay with the people and through the people we shall win this war. In Comrade Mao's own words: for a guerrilla war to

succeed the freedom fighters must ‘swim amongst the people’. The people must be our source of supplies and shelter as well as our security. ZANLA is going to win this war, comrade, because the people are going to help us. Have no doubt about that.”

Mbudzi paused. He poked at the fire with a stick.

“Then there is the fact that we have the whole of Africa supporting us, as well as strong moral support from the rest of the world. The world, as you know Anna, is applying trade sanctions on Smith's government. Smith and his fellow white Rhodesians are thought of as international rebels,” Mbudzi laughed. “In this case it is not the guerrillas who are considered the rebels…

“And the OAU, the Organisation of African Unity, is behind us, as are the presidents of the front line states… Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana. So is China. Who do you think is supplying us with weapons?” Rex looked at Anna, his eyebrows raised enquiringly.

“Also, FRELIMO… Mozambique’s equivalent of ZANLA… have for the first time crossed the Zambesi and are now fighting the Portuguese colonialists in the Tete province of Mozambique. That means we have good friends just across the border. And the border between Mozambique and Zimbabwe, Comrade Anna, is just a simple cattle fence. We do not have the same logistical problems that ZIPRA had to face when they fought Smith's forces out of Zambia. We do not have the wide Zambesi River to cross or Lake Kariba.” The ZANLA commander smiled confidently at Anna.

“And finally, Comrade Anna,” Mbudzi said assuredly, “we shall win this war because right is on our side. Zimbabwe belongs to the indigenous people of this country… to the Mashona people… and we shall take the land back from the white man who stole it from us.”

Anna noted that Mbudzi did not now include the Matabele in his rhetoric. He did not refer to the indigenous people of the country as Zimbabwean but as Mashona. It was a contradiction of his statements of just a few short moments ago.

‘He's just as much a tribalist as are the Matabeles he so seriously denigrates,’ she thought. ‘But all the rest of what he says makes sense.’

“Given all those circumstances, Anna, how can we possibly lose?”

“But Rex… When are you going to start fighting? As I said before there hasn't been a battle against the white soldiers for three years. Smith seems to be holding the superior hand. He is telling the world that the liberation struggle is over… that his military forces have won the war.”

“We will start the war again, comrade, when we are good and ready,” Mbudzi said resolutely. “Since 1968 ZANLA may not have been fighting, but we have not been idle. We have given a great deal of thought to the matter of how we should fight this war. And since the ZIPRA defeats, all ZANLA’s guerrilla fighters have been re-trained. But we will not be ready to resume hostilities for at least another year, maybe longer. In the meantime, let Smith think and say what he likes. The more complacent he becomes the better.”

“Good God. What on earth have you got to do that can possibly take so long?”

“We still have to properly mobilise the masses, comrade. We have to prepare the people to receive our fighters. We have to educate the people so that they will become enthusiastic about the war. They must understand that if ZANLA is to help them gain their freedom from white oppression they must feed our fighters. They must be taught how important it is to provide our men with shelter when it rains, and with a place to hide when the regime's rebel forces come looking for them. We have to be certain that we have achieved all of this before we start the war.”

The look on Mbudzi’s face was intense. He clearly believed passionately in everything that he was saying.

“And to achieve all that, Anna,” he continued, “we need to develop a corps of loyal comrades who are well trained militarily, and who are, themselves, properly orientated politically. Comrades like yourself, Anna, when you have been trained. And like Comrade Daniel here, and me.

“Before we physically engage the enemy, Anna, our political commissars must first go from village to village. They must prepare the people to accept the freedom fighters when they come. The political commissars must educate the people. They must explain to them how they have been truly oppressed by the white man. That message must be projected strongly… even exaggerated. Most of the people have become so familiar, so complacent, with the way the white man treats them that they no longer understand that they are being oppressed.

“So… before we deploy fighters to take on Smith's army, Anna, we have much work to do. The people must be made politically mature, mentally, before they will voluntarily want to support our vakomana when the shooting war begins. The people have to be mobilized first, if we are to conduct a successful war. To win the coming chimurenga war, comrade, it is not just a revolution of the gun we need to fight, but a revolution of the mind. A

revolution in the way our people think."

Anna was becoming captivated by Mbudzi's fervour.

"We intend to use very different tactics to those that were employed by ZIPRA in the 1960s, and which failed, Anna," Daniel supported Mbudzi.

"ZIPRA never even tried to politicise the people," Mbudzi continued. "Nor did they mobilise them, Anna. That is a major reason why they failed. We in ZANLA understand quite clearly that only after we have politicised the people will they be able to identify with our fighting programme. We have no intention of repeating ZIPRA's mistakes. ZANLA will not practice conventional confrontation with the mabunu as ZIPRA was prepared to do… as the Russians trained the ZIPRA fighters to do.

"ZANLA will, instead, follow the classical teachings of Chairman Mao. Our tactics will be those of hit-and-run."

Anna was stunned by Mbudzi's obvious military capacities. She was equally surprised by her husband's grasp of guerrilla war strategy. Rex and Daniel had clearly both been very well trained and their plan of action appeared to be logically sound. But she was bemused by the enormity of the extended programme that lay ahead. Furthermore, she was consciously humbled now by both men's enthusiasm… by their determination… and by their certainty of success… despite the gargantuan task they had set themselves. And it was a task they had, apparently, not yet even begun.

Anna felt embarrassed now by her arrogant presumptions of just a few short moments ago.

"You have set yourselves a gigantic task," Anna opined, "and you haven't even started with the people-programme yet."

"But we have, Anna. Oh, yes… We've started all right. That is why Comrade Muliloh and I are here right now."

"Anna," Daniel changed the subject abruptly. "This could get pretty heavy… I mean really very dangerous. Are you quite sure you want to join us?"

"You and I made up our minds about that over two long years ago, Daniel," Anna replied resolutely. "When you decided to leave your well-paid job as headmaster of Murewa High School to join the armed struggle! I have never had any second thoughts about the matter, and I have no doubts now."

It had taken courage for Daniel Moyo to leave his promising career in the Rhodesian government's Ministry of African Education. But he had felt very

deeply that he, and Anna and their three children, would never experience equality with the white man the way the politics of the country were progressing. In Daniel's opinion, the Smith regime was not moving in any real or honest way towards creating a common franchise for all the country's peoples. If anything, the Rhodesian Front government had shifted away from that human rights ideal.

When Daniel finally acknowledged that this was true he realised the only way Rhodesia's African people could ever achieve a satisfactory long term future for themselves, was for all those who believed in human dignity to join the armed struggle. But, in the wake of the Rhodesian security forces' huge military successes against ZIPRA at that time, it had not been easy for him to make the decision to join ZANLA.

Daniel and Anna anguished over their options for more than a month. They had the insight to understand that it would be foolhardy to expel the white man from the country. They clearly recognised that it was the white man who had dragged both the Matebele and the Mashona people out of their primeval past and set the country on the road to becoming a modern state in the world's family of nations. Neither of them wanted to have the white man expelled. That idea had not ever entered their heads. Coexistence was the better option. All they wanted for themselves, and for the other black people in the country, were equal rights. They wanted the same opportunities that the white man enjoyed on the same level playing field. But that was clearly not going to happen… not without a major social and political upheaval.

In the end they had both come to the same conclusion. There was no other way out. If the Mashona people were to have any hope of living a dignified life in the future, a life where everybody in the country would be equal, they had to commit themselves to the War of Liberation that ZANU told everybody was imminent. Anna agreed that Daniel should go and join ZANLA… on condition that she would be able to participate in whatever it was that Daniel would be doing.

Anna and Daniel, therefore, made a pact. And they made it in the full knowledge of all the risks involved. Daniel would resign his post and settle Anna and the children with her parents in their traditional rural village in the Soswe Tribal Trust Land, fifty miles south of Marandellas. He would then join ZANLA, the military wing of ZANU. And as soon as he had established a place for her at his side he would summons her to join him.

The letter of summons, Daniel said, would contain an authenticating code

word. They agreed it would be the name Michael. That was the Christian name of their mutual white friend of their childhood days, Michael Campbell.

Their plan of action was now in operation. The letter Anna had received from Muliloh contained the name Michael in the very first sentence. So she knew it was authentic. It was the letter that had summonsed her to Chief Matsiwo's village.

When Daniel left to join ZANLA, Anna had had no idea she would not see him again, nor hear anything about or from him, for over two years. It had been a long and anxious time of waiting. And now that she and Daniel were re-united she was not about to allow him to recant on their agreement.

"If it means I shall be able to work with you, and get to see you from time to time, then that will be preferable to staying safely at home in the Soswe, Daniel," she had told him as they lay in each other's arms on the river bank that afternoon. "Never again do I want to live as I have done for the past two stressful years. Not ever seeing you or hearing from you, not knowing what you were doing or where you were. Not even knowing whether you were dead or alive. It wasn't easy."

Mbudzi watched Anna carefully as, in her mind, she recalled her discussion with Daniel of just a few short hours before. He had no idea what she was thinking but he could see the resolve in her countenance.

'She has spunk this one,' Mbudzi thought. *'We need women like this in the new ZANLA forces.'* He desperately wanted this particular woman to join the liberation army. *'She would be superb.'* And in his mind he started to chart a course for her involvement.

It was important to Mbudzi, however, that Anna join ZANLA in the full knowledge of all the implications. It would be a futile exercise if she became disenchanted with their cause later simply because she felt, then, that she had been duped in the beginning.

'There must be no falsehoods with this woman.' Mbudzi sensed that Anna would consider truth withheld as being a lie. The allegiance of the likes of Anna Moyo would not be secured through perfidious subterfuge. *'She would, now and always, have to be told the truth.'*

"If you decide to join us, Comrade Anna, understand that you must strictly observe certain disciplines. For example, from now on you must never again mention the fact that you come from Soswe," Mbudzi instructed her earnestly. "And you must adopt a chimurenga name, too."

Anna looked at the ZANLA commander directly. She nodded her head,

confirming her understanding of what he had just said. Her whole body began to tingle. Anna realized, suddenly, that her life as a soldier was about to begin. What she had just been put through was an induction. An induction carried out by both Rex Mbudzi and her husband, Daniel. As her mind was coming to terms with what was happening to her, she was overcome by a strange sense of trepidation and uncertainty. She found herself wondering if she would be able to accept and to embrace the strict military discipline required of a soldier.

"Are you quite certain you want to join us, Anna?" Daniel prompted, reading her mind.

"Yes. I am sure." She quickly steeled her faltering resolution.

"Anna, Comrade Daniel tells me you have three children. What have you done with them?"

"They are being looked after by Anna's parents, Comrade Rex," Daniel replied. "And by my mother at our family home in the Soswe. My father, as you know, is dead."

"Then let us get a few more things straight, Comrade Anna. From now on, for your own sake as well as that of your family, you must not contact your parents or your children in any way whatsoever. Not until this war is over… however long that may take. Children have a habit of saying things about their parents in the wrong company. And information can be easily extracted from both young and old by experienced interrogators. They must all, therefore, know nothing at all about your connection with ZANLA or your whereabouts."

Anna looked blankly at the ZANLA commander. Daniel had warned her about this and she had tried to condition her mind to accepting it. But all along, she had had doubts. Now that the moment of truth was upon her she was overcome by panic, trepidation and lingering doubt.

Would she really be able to withstand the agony of not seeing or hearing from her children? Not even being able to tell them that she and their father were alive and well? It was her ultimate sacrifice, as a mother, for the cause of Zimbabwe's liberation.

"It's tough being a soldier, Comrade Anna," Mbudzi said, pulling no punches.

Mbudzi was a father himself. He fully understood the anguish such deprivations caused and he knew that, for a mother, the suffering was even more onerous.

For some time Anna stared blankly into the glowing coals, her mind in turmoil. She could still reverse her decision, she could still walk away from all this and return to Soswe; and there, as a non-combatant, she could wait out the war with her children. But that would place her in a mental vacuum. She would not hear from nor see her husband for many years. And she would have to live in a void hoping against all odds that Daniel would not be killed.

From what the two men had told her, Anna recognized that the coming war might, indeed, drag on for years. And if they both lived, separately, through a long war what would she and Daniel have between them at the end of it? Already she could see that in the last two years her husband had matured significantly in many dimensions. By the time the new chimurenga war was over, if they both survived it, he would be even further advanced intellectually and politically. What would they then have in common? Their marriage might well have become an empty shell. The only way to make sure that did not happen was to join her husband in the armed struggle. Her children would have to take second place to Daniel; and to their mother's contribution towards making Zimbabwe free. There was one consolation: in the end it would be the black children of Zimbabwe who would benefit the most from their parents' war-time sacrifices.

All of a sudden Anna became conscious of the fact that she had been staring long and vacantly into the fire. She felt the eyes of both men upon her. Daniel's hand was once again on her arm, his fingers kneading the muscles gently, caressingly. She realised his fingers were expressing his understanding and his concern for the turmoil that he knew was boiling away deep down inside her soul.

"Take your time, Anna," Daniel said softly, reassuringly. *"It is a big decision for a woman, a wife, and a mother to make."* He made no further attempt to persuade her. His own opinions on this very personal family subject were deeply divided.

"The conditions that I have outlined, comrade, are those that all our fighters have to observe," Mbudzi said quietly. "We cannot make an exception because you are a woman and have children. They are conditions that concern security which we cannot and will not compromise. So, if you join us you must accept these terms. If you cannot, then you must go home to Soswe. The choice is that simple and it is yours to make. Nobody will force you to join ZANLA."

Anna looked across the fire at Mbudzi. Her resolve suddenly hardened. She really had no choice. She did not want to lose her husband and Zimbabwe needed her services. She was prepared to make the sacrifice. She would join ZANLA.

"My chimurenga name shall be Motoh." Anna said quietly. It was a statement of her final and irrevocable commitment.

Mbudzi smiled. *"Welcome to ZANLA, Comrade Motoh,"* he said happily, once again shoving the burning ends of the logs into the centre of the coals. Once again the logs started to crackle, sending yellow flames and sparks rising from the red hot embers.

Daniel did not immediately respond to his wife's declaration. For a long moment Anna was concerned. She looked at him questioningly. What she saw was a comfort. She saw a contented smile on Daniel's face and she knew that he approved.

"Motoh?" Daniel said thoughtfully. "That's the Shona word for fire. Why have you chosen fire as your chimurenga name, Anna?"

Unleashing her pent up emotions with a sudden powerful thrust, Anna pushed him sideways off his stool.

"Hey!" He exclaimed, laughing at the unexpected attack. He rammed his hand out sideways but it did not save him from plunging ignominiously into the dust. And there he lay, on his back, laughing. Mbudzi laughed, too, both men grateful for the opportunity to release the tension of the past few moments.

"For the same reason that you chose Muliloh, Daniel, only I'm not afraid of letting the mabunu know that I am a Shona… and that I am proud to be a Shona." Anna proclaimed derisively.

"O.K., O.K." Daniel said rising to his feet and dusting himself off. *"Is it safe for me to sit on that thing again?"* He pointed to the stool. He righted the stool and settled his buttocks back onto its hollow surface.

Smoke from the burning logs drifted over the ZANLA commander again. He was forced to get up once more and to drag the old deck chair well to one side.

"Comrade Mbudzi!" Anna exclaimed. "That is a good name for a freedom fighter, Rex. And may you sleep with many young grandmothers."

She laughed. They all laughed together. And it was happy laughter.

Chapter 4

IT was dark when Mike drove his battered old Land Rover into the camp at Nyamasoto. The paraffin Tilley lamps had been lit and their glowing mantles cast a soft yellow light across the officers' dining room tent.

The shelter was a simple, open-sided, tarpaulin roof. The heavy canvas sheet had been suspended across a two-inch diameter steel pipe fixed between the high forks of two convenient mfuti trees. Rough pole uprights planted in the ground held the corners and the sides of the tent high and wide from the ground. Beneath the canopy another giant tarpaulin had been spread across the floor… the ground sheet… and standing on the ground sheet there was a long trestle table with half a dozen steel-framed canvas camp chairs positioned around it.

Close behind this make-shift pavilion, the lamp lights illuminated four faded khaki ridge tents. These were the officers' sleeping quarters. Their fronts had been laced shut to keep out the dust and the debris that blew up during the day; and to protect their contents from the ravages of marauding vervet monkeys.

As the Land Rover came over the last crest and began its long run down to the camp, Mike could see his two white game rangers sitting at the table. There was a third white man with them that he did not, at first, recognise.

In the distance, flickering through the bleakness of the pale moonlight, there were other lamps shining. These were paraffin storm lanterns that hung from the tent poles of the tarpaulin dormitory shelters that housed the capture team's black labour force.

There were a number of fires burning in this camp and in their flickering sallow light Mike could see the shapes of several black men… some squatting… some standing around. They were all motionless, their eyes fixed on the approaching vehicle.

The rhino holding pens were located between the two camps. Their stark, stout and ragged mopani[xiv] pole walls stood forlorn and forbidding in the anaemic silver light of the moon. In a passing sweep, the head-lights of the Land Rover briefly illuminated the shapes of two large Nissan lorries standing alongside the pens. Two solid wooden crates, bound with broad steel

bands, stood on their deckings.

"The lorries are back," Mike said to Richard in the passenger seat next to him. "I guess that means we'll be loading tomorrow."

"Loading the rhinos?"

"That's right. One more day's hunting and the pens will be full. If we can get rid of two animals tomorrow, that'll give us more room to manoeuvre. You'll be doing the escort duty this time in the VW Combi, Richard. Six hundred miles to the Gonarezhou!"

Richard had not yet experienced that long a haul.

"Non-stop," Mike reminded him. "And, remember, with live rhinos in the crates there is no time to rest en route and no time to stop at some roadside motel to have a meal."

When the convoy left Nyamasoto it had one objective… to get the rhinos to the off-loading pens in the game reserve as quickly and as safely as possible. Richard would be taking the animals from the very north of the country to its south-eastern extremity.

"It's a hell of a trip, isn't it, Mr. Campbell?"

"Thirteen… fourteen hours of non-stop driving. The first hundred miles is over rough dirt roads. It is a hell of a trip. But at least you'll get to see the rhinos being released into their new home. That's a bonus. And the Gonarezhou is worth seeing. It's a beautiful game reserve."

Richard thought about the long and monotonous drive that lay ahead of him on the morrow, but it was not the tedium of the slow escort run that bothered him. What concerned him was the fact that he would not be able to accompany Mr. Campbell on the rhino hunts for several days.

"The round trip takes… what… four days?"

"That's right. A day to get there. A day to rest. A day to collect provisions for the camp and to pick up some fresh lucerne bales for the rhinos. Then a day to get back."

'Four days'. Richard thought disconsolately.

Mike glanced surreptitiously at the young man, sensing what was passing through his mind. He chuckled quietly.

"Never mind, Richard," he said, robustly smacking a flat hand onto the young ranger's knee. "You'll be back on another hunt in no time at all."

"You read me like a book Mr. Campbell."

Mike laughed. “I was your age once you know.”

“If you're loading rhinos in the morning, I suppose that means you won’t be hunting tomorrow?”

“No. Even if we start at first light we'll be lucky if we get the lorries away by nine o'clock. To leave here to start a hunt on the Ruya at that time of the day would be a waste of time.”

In the reflective glow of the headlights Mike saw Richard smiling. The young ranger was pleased and Mike knew why. He was thinking that every hunt that did not take place in his absence meant one more hunt for him to participate in, in the weeks ahead.

The two game rangers, and the third man at the table, rose to their feet when the Land Rover came to a halt alongside the dining room tent. Both the rangers, one of them just back from the Gonarezhou, had had a hot bush shower and they were looking fresh in crisp clean uniforms. On their shoulders the dark green epaulette tabs, with the department's golden yellow National Parks and Wild Life insignia, stood out in bold contrast to their pale khaki shirts. Six brown beer bottles on the table, three already empty, accounted for their relaxed comportment.

“Sorry about the dust, chaps,” Mike apologised as he climbed wearily out of the vehicle. That remark was almost a salutation in the camp but it did not make the raising of the dust any more acceptable. Nobody commented.

“And… Hello, Ian.” Mike said warmly, recognising the District Commissioner immediately.

Ian Allen stretched over the table to shake the game warden's hand. Mike smiled broadly, clearly delighted to see an old friend.

“Hello, Mike.” The D.C. replied affably. He had a richly timbered and cultured voice. *“Like old times at Sizemba, hey?”*

“Yaah…” Mike answered “That's where it all started, wasn't it? Catching rhinos with Rupert Fothergill. You know he died last year of a heart attack?”

“Yes, I did. I was sorry to hear it. But it seems that Rupert's rhino capture mantle has now fallen squarely onto your shoulders.”

“I suppose so… until I get some of these youngsters here trained-up. Anyway… it's late. I take it you'll be staying the night?”

“Uh-huh. If you don’t mind. Have camp bed… Will sleep the night.”

“Good. We'll get a tent organised for you.”

“It’s done. Peter, here, has already done the honours.”

“Fine. So you're all set up then.”

Mike turned to his two spanking clean rangers. “Isn't anybody going to offer me a beer? I'm as dry as a wooden god.”

This galvanised the young men into action and Mike soon had a cold bottle in his hand. He put half the beer down his gullet in one swig. *“Hah! That feels better,”* he exclaimed happily. Mike then spoke to the older of the two game rangers. *“I see you got back O.K., Peter. Everything go all right with the release?”*

“No problem, Mike. Went off like clock-work. All three of them just wandered off feeding quite happily. I think they were very tired and very hungry after the trip.”

“Good. No problem with the cow re-accepting her calf?” The half-grown calf had been separated from its mother on the long trip. It had been transported in a mini-crate loaded onto a trailer that had been towed behind one of the lorries.

“Uh-huh. Went off without a hitch! In fact, as soon as they were reunited the calf was suckling. Poor little bugger must have been famished.”

“Super.” Mike liked to hear good news regarding the rhinos he had caught. Now they were wandering about the Gonarezhou, free, to repopulate the sanctuary.

The rest of Mike's beer disappeared quickly. He was immediately handed another. The rangers did not have to be reminded again how thirsty and dehydrated a man was when he returned from an all-day rhino hunt in the hot Zambesi valley sun.

Mike looked again at the D.C. He was still the same tall, balding, ram-rod figure of a man that he had known when they were both stationed at Binga at the upper end of Lake Kariba. Those had been halycon days.

“You haven't changed much, Ian.”

“A bit broader about the beam, Mike,” Ian responded, patting his thickening stomach.

“Yaah… Well I suppose I'd be the same if I was confined to a desk. Fortunately, I've got the rhino ops. And we've also been culling a lot of elephants in the Gonarezhou. All the outdoor activities keep me in shape.”

Mike suddenly realised that Richard was standing politely to one side, quietly drinking his beer. He did not know the D.C. *“Sorry, Ian. I presume you've introduced yourself to Peter Goodrich and Jack Parker, here?”* He made a gesture towards the two rangers the D.C. had been drinking with.

“Yes. And we've been having an interesting chat.”

“But you haven't met Richard Poole… Richard this is Mr. Ian Allen. He's a D.C… where is it you're stationed now, Ian? Mount Darwin?”

“Centenary! I was transferred out of Binga a year ago.” The D.C. shook hands with the timid young game ranger.

As District Commissioner Ian Allen was the senior government civil servant in the district of Centenary. He was also the district’s magistrate. His principal responsibility, however, was the administration all native affairs in the district’s tribal trust lands.

“Yes, I knew about that.”

“And now, let me get off my feet for a wee while.” Mike pulled a chair away from the table.

“Whew,” he exclaimed as he sat down heavily. He stretched his long legs out over the canvas floor. The other men in the group sat down and followed suit.

“I don't get any younger,” Mike joked. He was obviously pleased to be relaxing after a long hard day in the heat. *“What brings you to the rhino camp, Ian?”*

“I heard you were catching rhinos on the Ruya, Mike,” The D.C. replied. “Actually… it was me who recommended that the rhinos here-about be captured and removed. There is a major poacher in this area who has been snaring the hell out of everything. When rhino horn started being surrendered to my office for the found-horn bounty money, I realised that something had to be done.”

“Yaah… I heard there had been some rhino poaching going on… and that that was the reason for us coming here. But I didn’t know you were the instigator.”

“Guilty as charged,” the D.C. smiled at the game warden.

“Just as well… We’re using them to restock the Gonarezhou National Park. The last black rhino down there was shot in 1934.”

“Good… So it’s working for you. Just as well you took the trouble to train me well at Binga!”

They both laughed.

“Anyway, I knew you’ve been here for about a month, Mike, so I thought it was time that I came up to see you.”

“I'm delighted you did… and honoured. Tell me, how's Pat? And how’s she liking Centenary? You know, it’s a place I've never been to.”

“Pat's fine thank you, Mike. And she is enjoying Centenary. It’s a nice little farmers' town. All the mod cons… stores… a club… tennis courts… even a golf course. The village itself is not very big but there's a large white farming community in the district. The social life gets a bit hectic at times… compared to Binga. Pat loves it but I sometimes find it hard to keep up with the social pace.”

“And the tribal area?”

”Huge…”

“Well you're used to that, aren’t you? The Binga district wasn't exactly small.”

“You're right… And you and Nikki? How're you liking the Gonarezhou?”

“Fantastic! We both love it. And we've had an addition to the family. A sister for young Mark. We've called her Karen. You know that Nikki was pregnant when we left the Chizarira?”

“Yes, and I did know about your little girl. Congratulations. Nikki, in fact, wrote to Pat shortly after Karen was born.”

“And tell me… How are Hugh and Rosemary?”

“Growing up too quickly… They're both at boarding school in Salisbury now.”

There was a growling rumble in the distance.

“That's nice… Excuse me Ian… Is the off-loading pen ready, Jack?”

It had been Jack Parker's duty today to look after the camp. He had been responsible for tending to the needs of the four animals they had in the pens whilst the capture team was out hunting. Mike had earlier that afternoon radioed the camp to advise Jack of the day's successful captures, and to get him to prepare for the reception of the new cow and calf.

“Yes Sir, everything's ready. And I moved the old bull and the heifer into the two departure pens as you wanted.”

“Good. I can hear the lorry coming now… Ian, you'll have to excuse us for a while. You know the drill when we off-load a rhino…”

“I believe you got two today?”

“Yaah! A cow and a tiny calf. Why don’t you grab another beer and come over to the pens with us while we off-load them.”

The lights of the approaching lorry cut through the dusty night sky, the twin beams swinging high over the camp site. Mike did not wait for the D.C.

to reply. This was a task that took priority over all else. He already had his mind focused on its logistics.

He turned to his rangers. “O.K. Peter, let’s get some Tilley lamps over to the pens. Jack… Your guys ready?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Right, let’s move then.”

Chapter 5

CHIEF Matsiwo's youngest wife, and Rachel's two elder daughters, brought the evening meal to the vakomana of ZANLA. Curtsying, and with their eyes fixed on the ground out of respect, they silently laid the dishes on the ground in front of their important guests.

The main course was sadza… a huge off-white pile of steaming, stiff maize-meal porridge. It had been carefully patted into the shape of a large Christmas pudding and was served on a single, flat wooden platter.

Anna, Rex and Daniel were each presented with two enamel dishes. One contained hoveh, large pink chunks of hot catfish in a watery gravy. The other held a slimy concoction of chipudzi and dhovi which, despite its unappetising appearance, was a tasty mixture of rape and mashed pumpkin with a peanut sauce.

A boy in his early teens carried over a pine-wood chair upon which he set a paraffin storm lantern.

The guests hombera'ed the women, clapping their cupped hands together gently. Anna thanked them verbally. Like silent waiters, the young people of the village nodded their heads in acknowledgement. They then moved out of the firelight and disappeared into the darkness.

The three visitors arranged themselves around the sadza platter as though they were sitting on three sides of a square. They placed their personal dishlets in front of them. The chair, with its storm lantern, occupied the fourth side.

Rachel brought over a large dish of water which she placed in front of Mbudzi, attending to the senior man first as Shona custom demanded.

She stood patiently at Mbudzi's side holding a clean towel in her hand. When he had finished washing his hands Rex passed the water bowl to Daniel.

“Thank you, comrade,” Mbudzi looked up and smiled at Rachel as he took the towel from her. He dried his hands then quietly clapped the palms of his hands together softly… saying thank you Mashona style.

Rachel curtsied silently in response.

Daniel and then Anna, washed and dried their hands in turn. They, too, then hombera’ed the chief's senior wife.

When her guests had finished washing their hands Rachel retired, taking with her the bowl of water and the towel. She had avoided conversation for it was not the custom of her people to talk at mealtimes.

Daniel took a large handful of the scalding sadza into his right hand and, kneading it between his palm and fingers he rolled it into the shape of a rugby football. With his thumb he pressed a large hole into one end and into this hollow he scooped a chunk of fish flesh and some gravy.

"The fruits of our labours." he said gesturing towards the fish in his hand.

The ZANLA people were emancipated. They were not at all constrained by the traditional non-verbal mealtime etiquette of their rural compatriots.

The fish was, indeed, from their catch that very day. Daniel pushed the fishy end of the sadza into his mouth and bit the torpedo in two. As he chewed he re-shaped the remaining sadza in his hand.

Anna and Mbudzi also tore chunks of sadza from the communal pile, manipulating the hot food in their right hands. They were scrupulously careful not to use their left hands. In all Shona tribes it is customary to use the left hand for the unclean functions of the body. Consequently the left hand is never used at mealtimes.

"Rex… Will I be going to China, too?" Anna asked excitedly.

Mbudzi's mouth was full so Daniel answered for him. *"No Anna,"* he told her. *"You will be going to Mgagao."* He licked his fingers noisily.

"And where is that?" She asked as she tore another piece of sadza from the pile. Both her face and her voice betrayed her disappointment.

"In Tanzania." Daniel, too, took another piece of sadza. "Mgagao is a new camp that replaced Itumbi in May this year. It's about sixty miles south of a place called Iringa. We had eight Chinese instructors at Itumbi. There are twenty at Mgagao. It's a much bigger camp"

"And how long will I be at this place… Mgagao?"

Daniel looked questioningly at Mbudzi.

"And what will I be doing when the war begins?" she added hastily.

"Comrade Motoh…" She shot a surprised look at Rex, momentarily taken aback. It was the first time she had been truly conscious of someone addressing her by her chosen chimurenga name. She smiled sheepishly.

The ZANLA commander stopped what he had been about to say. He looked good humouredly at his new recruit.

“Comrade… you must get into the habit of using our chimurenga names.”

“Yes, Comrade Mbudzi.” The jargon was unfamiliar. It felt thick on Anna’s tongue.

“That's better.”

Daniel, chewing lustily, looked on with amusement.

“Comrade Motoh. When Comrade Muliloh told me about your desire to join him in the field I made up my mind then that we would train you to become a political commissar… A very special political commissar.”

“And what does a political commissar do exactly?” Anna asked, popping a smaller than normal ball of sadza into her mouth. If they were to conduct a conversation whilst eating she did not want large mouthfuls of food to interrupt the flow of their discussion.

“First of all, comrade,” Mbudzi said, “you will be our first woman political commissar. We shall set you up as the wife of a local chief… one who is very sympathetic to ZANLA. Your initial assignment will be to politicise the people; and then to maintain their correct political orientation. You will also function as our intelligence hub.”

“I won't be this chief's real wife I take it?”

“In name only,” Mbudzi smiled. “But that position will give you a very secure cover, Anna.”

“How so?”

“The Rhodesian Army Intelligence Corps have a department known as PSYAC. It’s their psychological warfare branch. One of PSYAC's missions is to find ways and means of winning what they call the-hearts-and-minds of the rural people. The purpose of the exercise is to woo the peasants, the povo, into supporting the white regime.” Mbudzi explained, the ball of sadza in his hand now forgotten.

“One of PSYAC’s first undertakings after it was formed was to tap the District Commissioners’ knowledge about tribal customs. They recognize that the surest way to upset the local populace is for the regime's soldiers to violate tribal taboos.

“For example, the D.C.s have emphasised that it is strictly forbidden for village women to converse with strange men. As a consequence, the army intelligence officers now instruct all sections of Smith's security forces to avoid talking to the women in rural villages.”

Mbudzi paused. A mischievous, mocking, smile ran all over his face.

“So,” he continued sardonically, “we shall use that fact to openly hide you.

And once the masses have been properly politicised Anna, you will be able to move about amongst the people quite freely. You will be able to operate right under the noses of the mabunus without them ever suspecting who you really are. And because you are a woman… and the wife of a chief… they will never guess that you are an important ZANLA freedom fighter. They will never try to question you."

"How do you know all this, Comrade Rex? About the Rhodesian army intelligence?"

"Comrade Mbudzi…" he corrected her quickly.

The ZANLA commander smiled slyly. "We have our own intelligence service operating amongst the mabunus, Comrade Motoh. There is no need for you to know such details."

"And Daniel? When I am doing all these things where will he be?"

"Comrade Muliloh…" Mbudzi raised his eyebrows at Anna and nodded his head. She immediately realised her mistake and she bobbed her head in acknowledgement. *"Comrade Muliloh will eventually be the Sectorial Commander of the battle sector in which you will be operating. I shall see to that personally.*

"However, whereas you will have a permanent base of operations, for security reasons he will have shifting ones. But he will always be somewhere in the same sector as you… or at a rear base just outside the country in Mozambique."

Anna exchanged a warm smile with Daniel. Waging war on these terms would be very much preferable to sitting at home, frustrated and fretting. She suddenly felt very confident that her decision to join ZANLA had been the correct one.

"You said ZANLA does not plan to confront Smith's forces… that, instead, you would hit-and-run. What did you mean by that Daniel?"

"What that means, Comrade Motoh," Daniel responded… smiling, "is that ZANLA will pick its targets carefully. It will select those to attack which are the least dangerous. Soft targets we call them. When we strike we shall hit them hard and fast, and before the mabunus can retaliate, we will run away… and we will 'live-to-fight-another-day', as the saying goes."

"And you think you can win a war by doing that?"

"Yes," Daniel replied confidently. "Comrade Mbudzi told you it'll be a war of attrition. Fighting this way, over time, we'll wear the mabunus down. Remember we're preparing to fight a protracted war, Anna. The longer it

takes the more expensive it will be for Smith to fight us. And the more certain will it be that we shall destroy the white man's economy. By using hit-and-run tactics, and sabotage, and by slipping away to hide amongst the people, we'll grind the mabunus into the ground. We'll force Smith to the political negotiating table… on our terms."

"Comrade Muliloh is exactly right, Motoh," Mbudzi cut in quickly. "There is no point in us trying to stand up and fight Smith's conventional army… with its support of jet aeroplanes and helicopters. We'd be mad to do that. All our cadres would be dead before we even started… as ZIPRA found out in '67 and '68.

"What we're going to do, instead, is to impoverish the Rhodesian economy, and to demoralise it's manpower, until Smith is forced to yield to our demands… meaningfully."

"A quick defeat of the Rhodesian army and its air force may seem the best and most noble way to achieve our majority rule independence, Comrade Motoh," Daniel said with a puckish grin… "But it would cost us dearly in lives. ZIPRA showed us quite clearly that we cannot win the war using those tactics. But, by fighting a proper guerrilla war, as Rex and I have described to you, we will win although it will take time."

Anna tried to rationalise ZANLA's proposed guerrilla tactics in the context of war as she understood it. It seemed a strange way to fight the mabunu. But if ZANLA believed they could win by using such methods, and if it meant greater safety for Daniel, she would be content to accept the men's assurances. And what they had said did sound logical.

"You will have a much better understanding of all of this once you have spent a few weeks at Mgagao," Mbudzi said persuasively.

"Neither of you have yet answered my question…"

"How long will you be at Mgagao?" Mbudzi cut in quickly. "No! I haven't answered your question. But I haven't forgotten it, Comrade Motoh.

"You will probably undergo about six or seven months of instruction to prepare you for your special role. It will be a tough training course, comrade," Mbudzi grimaced. "Life at Mgagao starts each day at 4.30 in the morning… with physical exercises. I don't know what they will do with a woman recruit, but the men then go on a long run. That builds up their fitness and stamina until they can keep on jogging, with heavy packs on their backs, for fifteen miles and more.

"Political education starts at seven o'clock. You will be required to absorb

the facts contained in Mwenje One which is ZANU's number one political manual. Mwenje means light, of course. So your mind will be enlightened. The manual outlines the National Grievances of the Zimbabwe people and it contains many first-hand experiences of our guerrillas before they joined the struggle.

"You will also be trained in all matters concerning guerrilla warfare. How… why… where… and when to attack the enemy… and what to do afterwards. But, as a future non-combatant political commissar, you will be principally instructed in Mao's specialised techniques to mobilise the masses.

"Special attention will be paid to your understanding of the National Grievances… for that is what you will be required to convey to the people. How they have been deprived of their land by the white man. How the white man forcibly limits the number of cattle each black family may possess. The manner in which the white man has restricted the black man's education… his job opportunities… and so forth. And the inferior quality of the African health and education services compared to that enjoyed by the white man. And, of course, the fact that the black man has no political voting power.

"You will read and discuss the writings of Marx, Lenin and of Mao Tse Tung. You will learn all about the different and contrasting facets of capitalism and communism. You will be taught the true history of Zimbabwe – not the white man's version. And you will examine and analyse the era of colonialism in Africa. You will also be taught many other things about Zimbabwe… for example, its geography, climate, vegetation, agriculture, wildlife, minerals, industry, population… and about the country's economic base."

"And about weapons," Daniel added. "You will be taught to handle the AK-47, which is ZANLA's front-line assault rifle… The RPG rocket launcher… the RPD machine gun… and several kinds of pistols. But we do not expect that you will ever be called upon to fight. The role we have planned for you is far too important for ZANLA to use you, or to lose you, in common battle. Nevertheless, you must still be utterly familiar with all our weapons and know how to use them."

"The mind boggles," Anna said to herself under her breath. There was far more to the ZANLA war machine than Anna had ever imagined and she was now both thrilled and mysteriously apprehensive concerning her agreement to become involved in it.

The two men had bombarded her with a deluge of ideas and information. And they both now watched her reactions carefully, hoping they had not deterred her. Anna's heart was pounding but far from feeling depressed, she was thoroughly exhilarated.

“Comrade Mbudzi, I am ready to begin. When do I start?” she announced with a broad smile.

Mbudzi smiled. ‘It will be through men and women of the calibre of Daniel and Anna Moyo,’ he thought, ‘that Zimbabwe will be returned to the Mashona people.’ It was at times like this that he felt the full power of his passionate and patriotic fervour for Zimbabwe. He reaffirmed in his mind his earlier conviction that Anna Moyo would be a great asset to ZANLA.

“Comrade Motoh,” Mbudzi responded. “We still have work to complete here. Maybe we'll have to stay another week, perhaps two, and you will remain with us for as long as it takes. Then Comrade Muliloh and I will lead you out of Zimbabwe and set you on the road to Mgagao.”

“And how will I get there?”

Anna had visions of a journey to some secret place by train, or bus, or even in another lorry. Then, perhaps, a military flight to the training camp. She had read in the Rhodesia Herald how certain ZIPRA recruits had left the country by train. They had travelled to Francistown in
Botswana and from there they had been flown to Lusaka in Zambia. She was not prepared, therefore, for Mbudzi's reply.

“We walk,” he said without ceremony. “From here we walk across the border into Mozambique. We go first to the FRELIMO camp at Chamboko. It’s two days’ easy march from here… if the Portuguese army isn't too active.”

Anna looked at Mbudzi with incredulity. She could not believe what her ears were hearing. *‘Walk! All the way to Mgagao in Tanzania?’* She then repeated her thoughts verbally: *“Walk! All the way to Mgagao in Tanzania?”*

There was a mischievous smirk at the corners of Daniel's mouth. He studiously contemplated the ball of sadza in his hand and avoided meeting Anna’s eyes.

“Then we cross the Zambesi by dug-out canoe,” Mbudzi continued ignoring her question. “And we travel on foot for another three days to the north, to FRELIMO's Chifombo base camp. After that, neither Comrade Muliloh nor I can accompany you further. You will then join other recruits, some ZANLA and some FRELIMO, and you will be guided by the

FRELIMO cadres to the Zambian town of Chipata on the Malawi border. There you will pose as a FRELIMO recruit… because Zambia's President Kaunda does not like ZANLA… he is a ZIPRA supporter. From Chipata you will be taken by lorry through Malawi into Tanzania. The same lorry will take you direct to the Mgagao training camp."

"Is there no transport before…"

"Before Chipata? No! Remember the Portuguese are still fighting FRELIMO so we shall have to adopt avoidance tactics the whole time we are in Mozambique. That is not as difficult as it sounds though. We will travel only at night and will move from one secure FRELIMO camp to another. FRELIMO are our friends and they will guide us along safe routes."

"Now you know why I told you to bring along comfortable walking shoes." Daniel lifted his eyebrows.

She looked down at her flimsy canvas tennis shoes and wondered what they would look like after ten days of extended forced marches through the African bush… at night.

"I have one last question," Anna cast an inquisitive glance at Mbudzi. She rolled a fresh ball of sadza in her right hand and scooped up a portion of pumpkin mash. *"What sort of duties do the other women perform in ZANLA?"*

Mbudzi smiled mischievously.

"They don't, Comrade Motoh," he said simply. "You will be our first woman recruit to fill a senior position in the field."

Chapter 6

“WELL… we were going to have bangers-‘n-mash and whistle-berries for supper, but seeing you brought some fresh steaks back with you, Peter…” Mike let the inference hang in the air.

The five white men were seated in their camp chairs around the glowing coals of what had been a large camp fire alongside the dining tent. A single Tilley lamp on the table cast its soft penumbral light over the gathering. A red glow from the embers reflected off their faces.

“Whistle-berries?” Richard queried innocently.

“Baked beans stupid,” Peter Goodrich exclaimed. “They make you whistle. They make you fart, you idiot.”

Mike chuckled. Peter was often very abrupt and coarse in his treatment of the two junior rangers. He sometimes had to be reprimanded and pulled back onto the tracks of reality. But he was good value in everything else that he did and that fact was a worthwhile compensation.

“Baked beans? O.K.…” Richard looked embarrassed. He had worked himself round Peter’s rebuff slowly. When he did get the message, his cheeks, right up to his ears, turned a bright red and he squirmed in his chair in discomfort.

Mike drained his beer and tossed the bottle into the bush behind him. He was not at all concerned about littering because all the dead-bodies would be picked up in the morning by the camp cook.

A loud whooshing sigh came from the stockade. It was followed by a plaintive mewing call from another rhino. Everyone looked up… listening.

“That's the new cow. She's still under the influence of the largactil,” Mike said. “She's clear of the M-99 now… the immobilising drug… but she's still heavily sedated.”

Seeing Richard’s anxious look he explained “She's all right. It'll take a few hours yet for the tranquiliser to wear off.”

“She won’t stand on her calf in the meantime?” the D.C. inquired worriedly.

“Uh-uh… She's not asleep, Ian… just drowsy. And she knows she's got her

baby with her."

The game warden was feeling refreshed after his hot bush-shower. It was a nightly ritual which he looked forward to after a long hard day. There was nothing more invigorating than the feel of the hot water cascading from the shower-rose running over his body. It rinsed away the soap suds and with them the layers of dust and sweat. He had stood under the bucket until the very last drop was drained. Now he felt revitalized in freshly laundered clothes. He'd wear the same garments in the morning and by tomorrow evening the cook boy would have washed and ironed the dirty clothes he had today discarded. It was a set routine.

"Anybody for another beer?"

"Yes thanks Mike… why not." Peter had already had five beers but another one was neither here nor there. For him, after four tedious days on escort duty, tomorrow was going to be a relatively easy day.

"Jack?"

"Yes Sir. Thank you."

"Richard? How about you?"

"Uuhhh-uhh! No thank you, Mr. Campbell. I've got the escort duty tomorrow and I will have to be up at sparrows."

"We all do," Mike reminded him. But still the young ranger desisted.

Ian Allen smiled at the quaint and approbate manner in which the young rangers addressed the game warden. Jack and Richard, both just turned twenty, both very much cadet game rangers, were still at the stage where they were tripping over their misters and their sirs. He liked that. It indicated the youngsters' respect for the person and the rank of their superior.

Peter Goodrich was seven or eight years older than the two younger men and he held the official rank of senior game ranger. But that slight age difference, and his superior status, gave the man an added maturity and confidence which was clearly apparent in his mien. He called the game warden, Mike. But, in his many other mannerisms, Peter still treated Mike Campbell with the respect that his higher rank and greater experience warranted. There was also no doubting the high esteem in which he, too, held Mike Campbell as a hunter… and as a man.

Mike had gained an enviable and justified reputation as a great elephant hunter amongst the native tribes of the Wankie and Binga Districts. Katasoro was the honour name they had bestowed upon him… *'He who shoots*

elephants in the brain'. He had also acquitted himself with distinction as an army-tracker during the battles with ZIPRA in 1966, 1967 and 1968.

'He's a remarkable man,' mused Ian to himself. *'He deserves the respect of his young officers.'*

The three game rangers were, between them, responsible for the many supporting duties on the operation. They took turns in riding shotgun for Mike when he hunted the rhino. They supervised the watering and the feeding of the rhinos in the holding pens, and they carried out the escort duties when the lorries transported the animals down to the Gonarezhou National Park in Rhodesia's South-Eastern Lowveld.

"How about you Ian? Another beer?"

The D.C. looked dubious.

"Go on… I need another one," Mike coaxed. "I'm still not completely re-hydrated after today's hunt."

"O.K. Thank you Mike, but only if I can leave the six-pack that I brought along with me. I can't be drinking your camp dry."

"Forget it, Ian. Richard will be bringing back half-a-dozen crates when he comes back from the Lowveld in a few days' time. You're our guest tonight and the beers are on the house."

The D.C. sighed. *"If you insist."* He had discovered long ago that it was impossible to win such an argument with Michael Campbell.

"I do insist… TSINDI… BWISA FOUR MADOROH." Mike shouted to the cook.

The Shona cook was standing about idly in the nearby kitchen shelter, his back leaning against one of the pole pillars that supported the lean-to thatched roof. He had been listening with a bored detachment to the marungus' discussion. At Mike's command he pushed himself away from the pole and moved over to the gas-powered cooler box.

All the while he muttered cantankerously to himself, a fact which was not lost on any of the white men. He lifted the lid of the cooler box and fossicked about inside, chuntering volubly. The sound of clinking bottles carried clearly to the camp fire.

Bottles in hand, he shuffled over to the fire and without making eye contact, he glumly handed a beer to Mike. He then made a morose and silent gesture to the company-at-large, and handed the other bottles to those who extended their hands.

"What's the matter with you," Mike enquired truculently. The last thing he needed was a prima donna black fellow in the camp.

"Haaaiieee… Bwana… Gham kah meena yena Jorjo. Aikona Tsindi."

"Oh, Shit!" Mike exploded. "Not again. Gham kah wena yena Jorjo. All right…" Mike turned and addressed the four white men sitting around the camp fire. "Listen chaps," he said, "To keep the peace… from now on the cook's name is Jorjo… No more Tsindi, O.K.?"

"Yaah… Gham kah meena yena Jorjo. Aikona Tsindi." The man seemed happy with Mike's instruction. He understood English much better than he spoke it and he smiled hesitantly at the five marungus sitting about the fire. *"Name kah meena yena Jorjo,"* he repeated inanely. *"Aikona… NOT Tsindi."*

"All right… That's enough," Mike said irritably. "Give the man an inch… one chance to express his opinion… and he takes over the conversation."

"You're pissed!" Peter looked up at the cook angrily. "You've been at the fucking tototo again… Moonshine… Jorjo!!! That's what we should call you."

"Haaaiieee. Me no pissed, Bwana. Me no drink tototo."

"Like hell you don't… you drunken old fool."

"O.K. Peter leave him be," Mike said, scotching the altercation. He turned then to the cook and issued him with another instruction. *"Jorjo… Please go to the compound and get me five shovels… Five mafosholos."* Mike held up one hand, five fingers extended. *"We marungus want to cook our own steaks tonight."*

"But gham kah meena yena Jorjo."

"Yes… Yes. Your name is Jorjo." Peter interceded. "Now fuck off and get us those bloody shovels. And make sure they're clean before you bring them to us."

The shovels had various uses in the camp. One was… together with felling axes… to help cut new tracks into the places where the darted rhinos had gone down… to get the recovery lorry into them. Another was to clean the muck out of the empty rhino pens after the animals had been moved. The game rangers also used them for frying their steaks over the hot coals of the campfire. Peter particularly wanted to make sure the thick rump steaks he had purchased in Salisbury earlier that day were not going to be garnished with fresh rhino dung.

Muttering to himself the cook turned away and shuffled off into the darkness.

“He's as pissed a coot,” Peter said angrily. “He’s been at the moonshine… can’t resist the stuff.”

The game ranger leant over and absently took the brown beer bottle out of the D.C.'s hand. Still glaring at the retreating form of the old cook boy, he casually pressed the lid of his own bottle sideways against the top of the other. The metal cap popped off.

He handed the opened bottle back to the D.C. And seeing the look of amazement on Ian Allen's face, he added off-handedly: *“It’s a trick I learned in the army.”*

Mike handed his bottle to Peter and the ranger snapped its top off, too.

“You're right, Peter. He is pissed,” the game warden agreed. “But you know as well as I do that the best way to handle him when he's like this is to ignore him.”

“He gives me the shits when he's pissed. Stupid old fool.”

Peter opened Jack's beer as he had done the others. Then he placed the lip of the cap on his own bottle on top of the flat steel edge of his camp-chair arm. He banged it once with the heel of his hand and the bottle top tumbled into the dust. He made it all look so simple.

The D.C., who had been quietly watching the altercation, sensed that there was more to the situation than met the eye. *“What's with the cook boy, Mike?”* he asked. *“The Jorjo-Tsindi issue!”*

“He's pissed,” Peter repeated the obvious irritably. “I know the old bugger too well. He's somehow got hold of some tototo. Stupid fucking kaffir.”

“PETER!” Mike immediately remonstrated. “I don't want to hear that word uttered in this camp. You must never disrespect our black staff like that…” For a moment or two the game warden scowled at Peter Goodrich. ‘One more slip like that and I will send Peter back to head office in Salisbury…’ Mike contemplated the idea. ‘And that will happen no matter how good he is at his work’.

“Sorry Mike… It just slipped out.” Peter was genuinely contrite. “He just makes me so fucking mad. He's definitely been at the tototo.”[xv]

“Just remember how many times these ‘kaffirs’ as you call them, save your bacon in the bush, Peter. I, especially, don’t want my trackers to hear you using that word in my company. I won’t have it.”

Peter was crestfallen… rueful. Nevertheless, he raised his face to Mike and retorted belligerently: *"I did say I was sorry!"*

The D.C. raised his eyebrows and he looked at Peter Goodrich expressively. *'You'd better watch it, Peter my man,'* Ian Allen willed the game ranger to understand. *'Don't take on Michael Campbell! You won't win.'*

The game warden looked at Peter meaningfully. Then he turned his head away. *'Peter mustn't get too full of himself,'* Michael thought to himself. *'He's getting a bit too big for his boots'.*

"I agree with you, Peter," Ian Allen opined, wanting to defuse the situation. "He's drunk as a Lord. But what's the story about his name being Jorjo?"

"Hah!" Peter smirked. "Tsindi is his nickname, Mr. Allen. Jorjo is his situpa name… the name registered on his work certificate."

"So why do you call him Tsindi? He obviously objects to that."

"You know what a tsindi is, Mr. Allen?."

"Yes. It's the Shona name for a squirrel."

"And have you ever watched a mopani squirrel when it chatters?"

"I suppose I have… But I don't understand what you're getting at."

"With each syllable a squirrel utters, it flicks its tail up and down – chah, chah, chah, chah, chah, chah, chah." The ranger mimicked the rapid prattle of a mopani squirrel's call, and as he did so he flicked his forefinger up and down, repeatedly, in rhythm with each plosive sound. *"Well now… that old bugger's thing-a-me-jig jumps up and down like a squirrel's tail every time he sees a local houri that he thinks he can lure into his bed. That's why I gave him the nickname Tsindi."*

"That old man…?"

"OLD? Don't you believe it," Peter interjected quickly. "His hair and his teeth may be falling out but all the other bits of his anatomy are still intact and they function perfectly well, believe me. That old bastard wriggles like a rattlesnake. He's probably sired half the existing Mashona nation. He's had VD more times than I can tell you. Gonorrhoea… syphilis… you name it. He's had them all."

The D.C. turned to Mike and he asked the question: "So why do you employ him? If he's always contracting a venereal disease…?"

"He's actually Peter's cook," Mike explained. "Peter's still a bachelor, you see, so he brought his cook along to service the camp kitchen." Mike, the

D.C. noticed happily, seemed to have gotten over his chagrin.

Peter smiled impishly at the D.C. “The V.D. doesn't worry me, Mr. Allen. I don't have to sleep with the man. And why do I keep him on? I dunno… Probably because I've got used to the old bugger… and he's used to me. He’s not a bad cook either… when he’s sober. We satisfy each other's needs and I long ago decided I'd just have to accept the good with the bad.”

“How long's he been with you?”

“Eight years. And I feel responsible for him somehow. If I fired him nobody else would take him on. I certainly could not give him a worthwhile testimonial.”

“Anyway… From now on he's Jorjo… not Tsindi,” Mike interjected.

“You know, Mike,” Peter said in all seriousness. “Sometimes he likes to be called Tsindi. He thinks it gives him some kind of macho status. The drama tonight is just the tototo talking. He's trying to impress Mr. Allen, the D.C., here.”

“Just the same, Peter. Until he's worked the brew out of his system, his name is Jorjo.”

The steaks were heavy and thick, and they covered almost the entire curved blades of the shovels. Each man scraped out his own little pile of glowing, red-hot coals from the heart of the campfire and then rinsed the ash off his shovel with water from a josak. The make-shift frying pans were all now resting directly on these beds of intense heat. The steaks were sizzling away nicely, giving off tantalizing waves of mouth-watering aromas.

“Always remember, Mr. Allen, never use oil in your shovel,” Peter continued with the explanation he had started earlier. It was he who had introduced the camp to the finer art of cooking steaks in a shovel. He was determined that the D.C. should leave the camp on the morrow properly educated in the culinary art.

“Just do as we did tonight. Cut a piece of fat off the rim of the steak and let it render itself down in the basin of the shovel. Then cook your steak in its own juices. And remember… when you first start to fry your meat turn it over several times very quickly to seal the surfaces on both sides. That keeps the juices inside the meat, and… Hell's teeth… My mouth is watering already.”

The D.C. was now squatting next to the fire like the other men, holding the long arm of his shovel in one hand, and a table fork in the other. Periodically,

he used the fork to shift the meat about, or to turn the slab of steak over. Despite the slacks he was wearing, the heat from the coals bit into the tender flesh of his inner thighs. He stretched his long arms further and moved back a little, noticing that the others seemed unaffected by the heat.

'I must be getting soft,' he thought.

"Mine's about ready. You don't want to overdo it," Mike said to his friend the D.C. "You guys ready?"

"Yaah. Mine's about done, too," Peter responded.

"O.K JORJO… PUT THE OTHER FOOD ON THE TABLE." Mike shouted the instruction to the still recalcitrant cook. He spoke in a rich Shona idiom that was designed to impress the D.C. He knew that Ian Allen was a native-linguist of note.

"How're you doing, Ian?"

"Super. I think mine is also done. If it tastes as good as it looks and smells, it's going to be fabulous. A meal fit for a king!"

"Rhodesian rump steak has just got to be the best in the world." Mike offered his opinion. "And cooked in a shovel on hot hard-wood coals, a'la Peter Goodrich, it is superb."

"I think I might have just one tiny problem," the D.C. interposed. "I'm not sure I can eat a steak this size."

"You will, Ian, you will. Take it from me. Once you get your teeth into that meat you will pack it all away." Mike assured him.

Jorjo had set five dinner places around the table on a clean white table cloth. Large, hot and heavy porcelain dinner plates were in place, ready to receive the enormous steaks. One by one the men left the fire and took up their places at the table. They slid the heavy slices of juicy meat from their shovels onto the plates, raising the shovel handles so that the juices dripped off onto the steak. They wanted nothing to be wasted. They then, one by one, threw their greasy shovels into the dirt beyond the tarpaulin ground sheet.

Jorjo shuffled towards the table carrying two long-handled aluminium pots, their bottoms blackened by the kitchen fire from which they had just been removed. He carefully placed them on spare dinner plates which were set amongst the condiments. The steaming pots contained mashed potatoes and whistle-berries.

"Magwiris and red-peans." Jorjo announced with a flourish.

"Potatoes and what?" Ian Allen looked in amazement at the unrepentant cook. *"What in God's name are red-peans?"*

Peter laughed.

"As far as Jorjo is concerned," Mike explained. "There are no such things as peas or beans. There are only red-peans and green-peans… These are red-peans."

"Otherwise known as whistle-berries." Peter laughed again. "Have some red-peans, Mr. Allen."

"Red-peans…"

"Help yourself, Ian," Mike coaxed the D.C. indicating the pots. "It's not the Ritz, but I'm sure you're going to remember tonight's meal for a long, long time… red-peans and all."

Jorjo, his good humour now suddenly restored, chuckled at the hilarity. He gathered up the discarded shovels and carried them away from the dining tent.

The D.C. looked down at his dinner plate with some dismay. The huge steak occupied the whole surface of the platter leaving no room at all for any additional food. Peter recognised his dilemma.

"Just put a dollop of mashed potato on top of the steak, Mr. Allen…, and some red-peans. You can have some more when you've made some room."

"Phew…" the D.C. exclaimed, swallowing his spittle loudly. "I don't think I've ever seen a steak this size before let alone been expected to eat one."

"There's only one thing better than a steak like this," Mike opined, flicking a thick lump of steaming mashed potato off the serving spoon onto the top of his steak. *"And that's tortoise."*

"Tortoise?" Disbelief rang in the tone of Richard's voice.

"Yes, a big fat leopard tortoise. It's the best tasting meat ever. When I was your age, Richard, in Wankie Game Reserve, my Bushmen trackers taught me how to eat tortoise."

The conversation moved from tortoises to other things. Time marched on; then, almost simultaneously, the men put their knives and forks down onto their empty plates and they leant back in their camp chairs rubbing their full tummies in contentment.

It had taken the five white men just fifteen minutes to demolish their gigantic steaks; and all the potatoes and all the baked beans to boot. Ian Allen could not believe that he had eaten so much food.

"Let's get back to the fire so that Jorjo can clear the table." Mike suggested. The men all moved and as they were settling comfortably around the embers of the fire, Jorjo appeared with a tray of steaming mugs of bush-

caffey… hot black coffee laced with a heavy slug of brandy.

The game warden and the district commissioner stayed up long after the game rangers had gone to bed that night. The dying bed of hot red embers lay at their feet and in their hands they cupped tin mugs into which Mike had poured several thick fingers of neat KWV brandy. They reminisced about the days they had enjoyed together at Binga… when Ian had been the D.C. there and Mike had been the local game warden.

They spoke of boats and crocodiles; of tiger-fishing and Lake Kariba; of Manzituba in the Chizarira Game Reserve where Mike and Nikki had been stationed; and about the war when Mike and his two Bushmen had tracked down ZIPRA terrorists for the army.

As head of the civilian administration in the district, Ian had been an integral member of the JOC (the Joint Operational Command Headquarters) which was the nerve centre of local military operations. New JOCs were set up every time ZIPRA terrorists crossed the lake from Zambia. None of the incursions had succeeded. This fact was due, in no small measure, to the exceptional tracking abilities of Mike Campbell and his two Bushmen trackers.

1966, 1967 and 1968 had been tumultuous years for both Mike and Ian, but the war had been won. All over the country, ZIPRA had been defeated resoundingly but not without cost. Hundreds of ZIPRA fighters had been killed, but so had many Rhodesians, both black and white. Many more had been wounded… including Mike's tracker Ben.

“I see you've still got Ben and Mbuyotsi with you?”

“Yaah…” Mike sighed. “A bird can't fly without wings… I saw you chatting to them over at the pens.”

“How's Ben's arm?” Ian asked.

“It's O.K. actually… He was bloody lucky not to lose it. He was lucky not to lose his life.”

Mike stared into the shimmering embers, thinking back gravely to that terrifying ZIPRA contact when Ben's arm had nearly been blown off his body. He thought about the Bushman's remarkable recovery… and he laughed with a light mirth.

“You never saw the mess that bullet made of his arm, did you Ian?”

“No. But I heard all about it.”

“It was a hell of a wound. But you know, they stitched all the torn muscles

together, and transplanted nerves from his legs to replace the ones that had been shattered in his arm. That young surgeon at Wankie hospital did a fantastic job… James was his name… but the arm will never be one hundred percent again.

"Government eventually gave him an eighty-five percent disability pension. Stupid little fool took it as a lump sum and pissed it all up against the wall inside six months."

"No!" The D.C. was aghast. "Well, I suppose that's what they're like… the Bushmen. No sense of responsibility."

"You're right. They're real bloody reprobates. Anyway," Mike said. "He put it to good use you know… his injured arm, I mean."

"Oh?"

"Yes, even now he's got a hell of a scar. It's still thick, purple-pink and raw, and it stretches from his elbow to his wrist. He keeps it covered all the time. Even when he's tracking he keeps his sleeves rolled down. But when he goes to a beer drink… which is whenever he gets the opportunity… and anyone asks to be shown the wound, he demands a beer as the viewing price."

"Enterprising!" The D.C. laughed.

"Down at Chipinda Pools he's quite the hero. None of the local natives in the Lowveld have had anything to do with the war. So it's quite an event for them to meet someone who has actually been in combat… let alone someone who has been wounded."

Mike laughed derisively.

"His wound has probably got him more free drinks than he ever bought with his disability money."

"So he hasn't changed very much?"

Mike shook his head. *"Never will."*

"And is he really that much crippled?"

This time Mike's laugh was almost a roar. "Let me tell you something. I saw him chopping a piece of wood the other day… with one of those little knob-kerrie axes. He was using his injured arm as though there was nothing wrong with it.

"The little bugger saw me watching him and he knew immediately what was going through my head… Ever seen a black man blush?"

Ian laughed, too. "Well I'm delighted to hear that."

“Yaah… I'm happy about it, too. But I think government got their facts a bit arse-about-face. I reckon, now, Ben's got about eighty-five percent of the use back into that arm – and he's lost only about fifteen percent. He really is all right, Ian.”

“Lucky man!” The D.C. nodded happily.

For a while both men stared silently into the mesmeric purple glow of the red hot embers. And they listened to the silence of the African night. Mike never tired of these idyllic moments just before he went to bed.

In the distance a South African nightjar was chanting away its monotonous litany: Good Lord deliverrrr us… Good Lord deliverrr us… Good Lord deliverrr us… It went on… and on… and on.

A spotted eagle-owl hooted disconsolately from the hillside behind the camp.

“Yes… Those were both frightening and exciting days weren't they, Mike?” The D.C. broke the spell suddenly. “But thank God the war is over.”

“Is it?” Mike retorted quickly. “I hear tell there is great activity outside the country, Ian, in Zambia and in Tanzania, in particular.”

“It’s all political hot air… nationalist rhetoric… Mike. I think the black nationalist movement has shot its bolt. After the thrashing we gave ZIPRA in '68, I don't think they'll try again.”

“There's nothing going on up here in the north? No subversive politics? No intimidation of the people?” Mike asked.

The D.C. stared into the fire. He shook his head. “It’s all absolutely quiet, Mike. The Mashona are a docile people… not at all like the Matabele who, as you well know, have a Zulu ancestry and Chaka-Zulu warrior traditions. The Mashona know that we beat ZIPRA fair and square. They won't try to take on the SF. Our Security Forces are very strong and the Mashona know it.”

“What about ZANLA? The military wing of ZANU. They're Mashona.”

“Yes… And that's precisely why ZANLA won't get anywhere… because they are Mashona.”

Mike raised his eyebrows and sucked his breath in noisily… demonstrably. “I'm not sure I agree with you, Ian. I grew up with the Mashona, you know. As a youngster my best friend on our old family farm at Marandellas, was a little black boy… a Shona. A Zezuru to be more accurate. I speak Chi-Zezuru fluently, you know. I taught him English and he taught me Chi-Zezuru.”

“I didn't know that?… That you spoke Shona, Mike. I heard you speaking to the cook boy just now and it surprised me.”

“I had no cause to use it at Binga, Ian. As you know, everybody there spoke Chi-Tonga or Sindebele, neither of which I can speak fluently. Or else they spoke Chi-Lapalapa.”[xvi]

“We live and we learn.”

“But, to get back to our discussion, Ian… Don't write off the Mashona.”

“Well, Mike. I've set up a pretty good ground coverage network throughout the tribal areas in the Centenary district… also in the African compounds on the white farms. I've got paid informers everywhere and my native messengers are loyal to the core. There hasn't been a murmur.”

“That's encouraging. And I hope you're right… that the war's over, I mean. Now all we've got to do is get rid of the damn trade sanctions. Then international recognition for the country will come automatically.”

“The cherry on the top of the UDI cake! Wouldn’t that be something! It would, at least, vindicate Ian Smith’s 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Great Britain.”

“Yes… But what about Mozambique, Ian? It’s not good news that FRELIMO have crossed the Zambesi. They're fighting the Portuguese in the Tete province now. That's just across the border from here.”

The D.C. pursed his lips and nodded. “I know,” he said slowly. “And you're right. It’s not good news. But what you probably don't know is that there are Rhodesian troops fighting in Mozambique with the Portuguese right now. Our Air Force has hit several FRELIMO-oblique-ZANLA camps in Mozambique… A big one only yesterday.”

Mike sat up, looking with renewed interest at the D.C. This unexpected news came as a complete surprise to him.

“Keep it under your hat Mike but, because ZANLA are known to be helping FRELIMO against the Portuguese, the Porks have invited us to participate in their colonial war effort. By working with the FRELIMO guerrillas, ZANLA have given us the excuse we needed to fight them in Mozambique. That we are actually fighting there now is not general knowledge… yet. Only the SAS and some regular Selous Scout units are involved. But it’s good news because any country that can fight its enemy on foreign soil has an advantage.”

“So we're already fighting ZANLA?”

“In a way… yes. Every time we kill a FRELIMO gook in Mozambique we

hit a ZANLA supporter. And sometimes we kill ZANLA cadres, too. It's much better that we fight ZANLA in Mozambique than that we fight them here in Rhodesia."

"There's no ZIPRA presence in Mozambique?"

"Not to my knowledge."

Mike turned his gaze back to the fire and considered what Ian had just told him. He was a bit confused. The D.C. had been contradicting himself. He had denigrated the ZANLA forces and said that the war was over. In the next breath he had said that the Rhodesians were fighting ZANLA in Mozambique. It must have been the beer talking! He let it pass.

After a while Mike continued: "You know, Ian, you are right," he said. "It is an advantage to fight ZANLA in Mozambique and if we can help the Portuguese to push FRELIMO and ZANLA back north of the Zambesi, we'll be helping ourselves, too. It'll keep the enemy from our eastern borders."

"Precisely."

As the midnight hour passed Mike lay awake in his camp bed listening contentedly to the sounds of the night. The brandy had mellowed him and the talk of his childhood days brought back to him fond memories of many wild escapades with his young Shona friend, Daniel Moyo. The recollections flashed vividly, one after the other, across his super-active mind… each episode quickly shunted aside by the one that followed.

It was, however, the lingering memory of a handsome native girl that swamped Mike's mind as he drifted off to sleep that night.

He remembered Anna Mashonganyika as an extremely attractive half-cast girl with pale brown skin and dark, almond-shaped eyes – eyes she had inherited from her Chinese father. She was a girl with big firm breasts and the body of a nymph. Her skin had been soft and smooth as silk. She had then been a child-woman in her late teens.

Michael Campbell's one-time huge attraction to this very beautiful young woman was a secret that he kept strictly to himself… because her mother was a Shona peasant. It would not have done the game warden's reputation any good at all had their long-ago liaison become common knowledge. The white elite of Rhodesia did not, in any way, condone miscegenation.

Nevertheless, he could not deny the insatiable lust – even love – he had once felt for this half-Chinese half-Shona woman. And as he lay in bed, half-awake and half-asleep that night, he wondered what had become of her. And

when he dropped off to sleep he had a smile on his face as happy and salacious memories of their love-making travelled with him on his journey into the Land-of-Nod.

Chapter 7

“R*EX won't be here today,”* Daniel said, sipping noisily on his mahewu. Rachel had brought the warm sorghum brew over to them in two calabashes a few minutes earlier. *“He left before dawn on a mission.”*

They were sitting next to last night’s fire. The new logs which Daniel had placed over the dying embers were starting to crackle into life. They smoked heavily before they burst into flames.

In Mbudzi’s absence, Anna commandeered the chief's old deck chair and Daniel sat on one of the stools beside her. Both had blankets wrapped about their shoulders to ward off the early morning chill. Both wore the same serene look of contentment on their faces. Much of their night had been spent making love, not in the wildly tempestuous manner of the previous afternoon, but slowly, languorously and with great passion. When they woke up in the early dawn, together for the first time in two years, their desires rose up once more… demanding and insistent. Unable, and unwilling to resist, they again surrendered to their lustful cravings. They finally left their hut as the rim of the sun peeked above the horizon. Its first gentle rays revealed the obvious post-coital glow that emanated from both their faces.

The chief's sons had already driven the domestic stock out of their pole kraals and they were herding the cattle toward their distant grazing grounds. Matsiwo's junior wives and his unmarried daughters had also earlier left the village. They had gone back to hoeing the family fields with their short-handled badzas. Except for Rachel's background presence the chief's village now looked and felt deserted.

The mahewu was tart with the tang of sour milk. It was their breakfast. It would have to satisfy their hunger until the midday meal.

“Where's he gone?”

Anna took a heavy draught of the now unfamiliar concoction. She ran the back of her hand across her lips and shut her eyes. It had been a long time since she had drunk mahewu and its unique smell and piquant flavour took her back into a different time zone of her people.

“You don't like it?”

“What? The mahewu?”

He nodded.

“No…” Anna said quickly. “It's O.K… It’s just such a long time since I

had it for breakfast. It reminds me of my childhood."

"Well… You're going to have to get used to it again."

"I asked you where Rex has gone?"

"Chief Matsiwo has been away organising a meeting for Rex with a number of senior tribal chiefs," Daniel responded to the question without further hesitation. "Yesterday we received word that the meeting had been arranged for today… at a village called Mubamuchena. It's about ten… twelve… miles away. He borrowed the chief's bicycle and left very early this morning. He should be nearly there by now. He'll be gone all day. In fact, he may not even get back until tomorrow. We never know how long these meetings will take."

"Daniel, I haven't asked you this yet… but just what is it that you two are up to here at Matsiwo's village."

A conspiratorial smile spread slowly across his face. "As we told you yesterday, we're busy mobilising the masses."

'Dammit! Why doesn't he just spit it out,' Anna thought with exasperation. 'This is not the time for him to be playing cat-and-mouse games with me.'

Daniel saw her look of irritation. The last thing he wanted to do was to annoy his beloved wife. So, in a more gentle tone, he continued. *"Ever heard of the Monomatapa?"*

"Of course," she retorted angrily. "What Shona has not heard of the Monomatapa? He was the founding king of the Mashona nation."

"Well," Daniel continued quickly, hoping his explanation would mollify her anger. "We're right in the heart of the capital province of his one-time kingdom. In fact, the location of his old capital is not far from here. It's across the border in the Tete province of Mozambique near a small town that is now called Chicoa."

"You mean there are Mashona people living in Mozambique?" Anna asked, placated at last.

"Oh yes," Daniel replied. "And they've been there for five hundred years. As you well know the boundary between Southern Rhodesia and Mozambique was drawn up at the beginning of this century by white men… the Portuguese and the British mainly. But when they established the boundaries they took no cognizance of the tribal affiliations of the people on the ground. They simply drew a line on a map that demarcated the extent of their conquests. They were lines that divided their respective zones of influence, at that time, over the local African tribes.

“The people just across the border in Mozambique, however, are just as much Shona as are those who are living on this side of the line. They both ignore the border and they cross it all the time to visit one another. They marry into each others’ families. They speak the same language. And they practice the same customs.”

“Really…?” Anna commented. “That must have tremendous advantages for ZANLA.”

“Absolutely! And it is one other reason why we are sure we shall win the war, Anna. We will have the support of all the Mashona people… those that live on this side of the border and those that live inside Mozambique.”

Anna had been forming a mental picture of what Daniel had been saying since yesterday. This new piece of the jigsaw puzzle made the image in her mind even more comprehensible. She realized that it was a picture painted on a canvas that had far greater dimensions than she had ever imagined.

“But it is the peoples’ common customs and beliefs that will help us the most,” Daniel continued resolutely. “That is what Rex and I are involved with at the moment. We intend to manipulate those customs and beliefs to ZANLA's advantage.”

“And just how do you propose to do that?”

“The so-called Monomatapa was not originally a Makaranga, Anna… like you and me. He was a Rozwi. And the Makaranga people, as you know, are the true Mashona. The Mzezuru clan… our people… is a Makaranga tribe. We are one of The-True-People-of-the-Sun. Nevertheless, the BaRozwi tribe integrated with the Makaranga and the BaRozwi became the royal clan of the Mashona people… all because of its powerful king, the Monomatapa. In the old days it was the clan from which all the Mashona kings… the later Mambo Kings…were drawn.”

“Yes, yes. Every Shona knows that.” Anna was getting impatient with all Daniel’s minute explanations.

“But there are things about the BaRozwi that some of us have forgotten, Anna. People like you and me. We've been too pre-occupied with absorbing the white man’s customs, culture and religion to have remembered very much about our own customs, culture and religion.”

“Such as? Give me an example.”

“The BaRozwi were ancestor-worshippers, Anna. They believed that the spirits of their kings, when they died, would watch over the people forever.

And the Tawara group of Ma-Shona tribes… those who live in this part of Zimbabwe and across the border in Mozambique… still believe that."

"Daniel," Anna interrupted "I do know something about our ancient religion. I clearly remember my grandmother telling me all about our ancestral spirits when I was a little girl. What I didn't know, until yesterday, was that some Shona still believe in it. I thought it had died out… like the ancient druid religion of England."

"Tell me again what happened here yesterday?" Daniel interposed pointedly. "Tell me what Rachel told you about the Mashona spirits."

"Rachel showed me the shrine of what she called her village spirit."

"The midzimu shrine," Daniel prompted.

"Yes. But you don't believe all that, Daniel… Do you?"

"The spirit thing? No, of course not… but it doesn't matter what I believe, Anna. The important thing is that the people around here believe it. And if I know Rachel, when she showed you the shrine yesterday, she also impressed upon you that they really do believe in their spirits?"

Anna nodded, her face serious. "So what are you and Rex trying to do?"

"Not what we're trying to do, Anna. What we are succeeding in doing."

Daniel paused to let Anna absorb that idea. Then he continued: "Let me try to explain this ancestor-worshipping thing. Then you'll understand just how we can get the Makorekore and the other Tawaras onto the side of ZANLA."

He paused again and he smiled to himself contentedly. He was mentally distracted from his discourse by confident thoughts of the certain success of ZANLA's grand plan. He poked at the fire almost absently with a stick.

"The Tawara Shona, Anna… of which the Makorekore are a part… believe there are three levels in the hierarchy of life."

Anna noticed the excited sparkle that was now shining in Daniel's eyes.

"The spirit world… the living people… and those who are yet to be born." Starting with his thumb he raised three fingers, one at a time on his left hand.

"Those yet to be born…?" Anna's question queried the whole idea.

"Yes… but the people living in this area are especially motivated by their devout respect for the dead. That is, for their ancestral spirits."

Anna looked at Daniel, shaking her head slowly. "I can understand about living people worshipping spirits… in a way. But what have the unborn got to do with the living… and with the spirits?"

Daniel laughed. “They represent the future generations who will one day honour the currently living people's spirits when they are dead.”

“O.K. Now I am starting to make the connection.”

“And that is why you will never get these people to practice any kind of birth control.”

“Right!… So…?”

“They believe it is vital to maintain communication within this three tiered regime, and that it is the only way to ensure that their own souls will not be lost in limbo when they die.”

Putting his now empty calabash onto the ground, Daniel moved his stool slightly so that he could look directly into Anna’s face. Her face showed him that he had her rapt attention.

He leant over and stoked up the fire before continuing. “They also believe that there is a hierarchy within the spirit world. The mhondoro or lion-spirits are the top-ranking spirits who take care of the affairs of the whole tribe. They are normally the spirits of dead kings. But sometimes they are the spirits of the tribe's most prominent prophets… the spirits of people who once had the powers of profound divine insight.”

Daniel took into his lungs a big breath of air. He let it out slowly.

“Then, lower down the scale,” he continued, “there are the midzimu spirits. These are the family spirits who look after the affairs of each village. A midzimu is nearly always the spirit of the previously deceased village headman. So they change with each sabooku's death. And the oldest living male member of the family… the man who will probably be the next village midzimu… is normally the intercessory. It is he who consults with the midzimu spirit over matters of great family importance.”

“Rachel told me something of this yesterday,” Anna responded. “But, I must say, I paid her scant attention.”

“You saw Chief Matsiwo's midzimu shrine yesterday?”

Anna nodded. “Yes I did. I walked right passed it and had a good look.”

“That is where the chief gives offerings of food and beer to his midzimu… and it is where he talks to the spirit.”

“Are the Makorekore really and truly serious about all this?” Anna asked. There was a heavy ring of doubt in her voice.

“Oh, yes, Anna. They are very serious. Very, very serious, indeed. In this part of the country their religion is perhaps the most important factor of the peoples’ lives. They are like the Italians and Catholicism. They really do

believe that the spirits control their destinies."

"And you intend to use that fact to ZANLA's advantage. How very clever, Daniel. But how are you going to do it?"

"Through the svikiros."

"The mhondoro spirit mediums?" Anna stated as she leant forward, her interest quickening. She settled her elbows onto her knees and she cupped her chin in her hands. Her wide open, bright and shining eyes were fixed on Daniel's face.

Daniel nodded. "They are the ones who act as the intercessories between the chiefs and the mhondoro spirits."

"The Lion Spirits?" Anna confirmed her understanding of what a mhondoro spirit was.

"Yes. But the mhondoro svikiros are human enough. As a Zezuru you've probably only heard vague stories about them. I didn't really understand what they were all about until I met Rex."

"Go on. I'm fascinated." And so she was. Anna found Daniel's explanation of all this religious hype absolutely absorbing. She, however, was a total unbeliever. Nevertheless, the more she listened to her husband's explanations, the more she had to remind herself of that fact.

"Sometimes the svikiros are simply referred to as mhondoros… as lions. Nowadays, they are really only recognised by the northern Mashona tribes. The Makorekore… the Dande… and the Barwe peoples."

"Altogether… the Tawara group of Mashona?"

"That's right… Anyway, as I explained, the head of the village family is normally the man who communicates with his own village midzimu… the spirit of his own dead father. That seems to be quite a simple procedure. Getting in contact with a mhondoro spirit is a lot more complicated."

Daniel paused then to gather his wits about him.

"The people believe that the mhondoro spirits themselves select a member of the community through whom they will make contact with the people. They will not normally speak to the people through anybody other than their own self-chosen mediums. Only when a mhondoro svikiro dies, and before another one has been appointed, will a mhondoro spirit sometimes use a midzimu spirit to communicate with the tribe. And that happens only when they want to pass on a message of the utmost importance. But, from what I can gather, that has only happened very, very rarely… so Rex has told me."

"So the mhondoro svikiros are very important people in the community?"

Anna was getting to see the picture.

"And very influential ones, too. They are the principal rain-makers of the tribe but they also perform other special functions. Besides being the keepers of the tribal spirits, svikiros are required also to prescribe remedies for drought, disease, crop failures and such like things… in a global sort of way. And since all disasters are believed to be activated by human failure, or by deliberate human malice, it is from the mhondoro that they seek advice regarding how to make all such bad matters right."

Daniel was now greatly warmed to his subject.

"The mhondoro are also the king-makers. When a chief dies, his successor cannot be appointed unless, and until, the local svikiro has confirmed that the mhondoro spirits approve the nominee."

"So the svikiros are actually more powerful than the chiefs?" Anna suggested incredulously.

"Not exactly, Anna. According to tribal law their power over the people is subordinate to that of the chiefs. But, in practice, they are far more influential. A chief, for example, will never challenge a decision that has been made by a svikiro."

"And how are the svikiro's approved… appointed… come into power… whatever? There must surely be some traditional ritual that appoints them to be a svikiro?"

"You are right, Anna. There is a complicated tribal rigmarole… a very special rite…involved in the authentication of anyone claiming to be a svikiro…"

"Go on…" Anna prompted.

"I'm not sure how that's done exactly, but it doesn't really matter," Daniel said impatiently. "The important thing to understand is that the spirit mediums… the mhondoro svikiros… are the people's intercessories with the top echelons of the spirit world.

"The most influential of all the senior spirits is one called Nehanda. Consequently, the most important of all the spirit mediums is the Svikiro Ne-Handa."

"Nehanda? Wasn't she hanged by the white settlers way back in…?"

"1898? No. Not Nehanda herself. That was the reigning Svikiro Nehanda. She was responsible for what the white man called the Mashona Rebellion of 1896. In fact, she worked with another powerful spirit medium, the Svikiro Kagubi. And, together, they inspired the Mashona people to rise up in revolt

against the white settlers."

Again Daniel paused to get his bearings within the convoluted history.

"That rebellion was the first chimurenga war that we waged against the white man, Anna. The first time the Mashona tried to regain their freedom. The marungus hanged that Sivikiro Nehanda… and the Kagubi medium, too… for the major part they both played in the Mashona uprising.

"The people who saw her die say the Svikiro Nehanda went to the gallows screaming abuse at the white man, and swearing that Nehanda would one day sweep the white men out of the country and into the sea.

"And every Svikiro Nehanda since that time has expressed a particular hatred for the white man." And that concluded what Daniel thought was the end of his narrative. He had not counted on Anna's intense level of curiosity.

"So… Who is, or who was, the real Nehanda?" Anna asked in a show of deep interest.

"She was the sister of Mwene Mutota. King Mutota of the BaRozwi. She was the sister of the founder of our nation."

"You mean the Monomatapa?" Anna asked the obvious question.

"No Anna! Mwene Mutota! Monomatapa is a misnomer. It is derived from the way the Portuguese tried to pronounce the king's name. And from the way they used it. They referred to him as King Monomatapa as though Monomatapa was his name. They did not understand that what they were actually calling him then was King King-Mutota."

"And is there a Svikiro Mutota?"

"Oh, yes. His name is Kupara George and he lives in the Muzarabani area about twenty miles east of here. I have met him."

"There's something I don't understand." Anna said with a frown on her face. "You say that Nehanda is the most important of all the mhondoro spirits. Why is the king's spirit not more important? Nehanda, after all, was just a woman and even now women are still mere chattels to tribal Mashona men."

"Some say it is because she was a woman, Anna. Women, after all, are the crucibles of the nation. It is in their wombs that the future generations of the Mashona are created.

"But that is not the true reason." Daniel held up one forefinger to emphasise his point.

"The BaRozwi believed that Mutota obtained all his energy and power from his royal sister, and that it was this power that gave his kingdom

prominence. She, therefore, is credited with being the provider of that power.

"There was a ritual amongst the BaRozwi called kupinga-pasi which required that a new king should break the tribal taboos. Its purpose was to demonstrate to his people that he had the sovereignty to defy the social conventions and the power… the capacity… to survive the experience. One of the traditional transgressions… an option that he was required to consider… was that he engage in ritual incest with his sister."

"To produce a child? A future king from the union?" Anna was aghast.

"No," Daniel said immediately. "That was not the purpose. According to tribal law, the act of incest was a crime the mandatory punishment for which was death. It was necessary, therefore, for Mutota to prove that, as the king, he had the power and the temerity to disregard the tribes' traditional proscriptions regarding this taboo. And that he could do so without incurring the wrath of his people or the condemnation of the mhondoro spirits.

"Legend has it that the king's sister was called Nyamhita and that, as a bribe for her participation in the incest plan, she was offered a small district of the realm to rule. The district was called Handa. It was a gift to compensate her for surrendering her virginity and her power to her blood brother, the king.

"The story goes that she was a reserved and very beautiful girl, and that she was unwilling to participate in the ceremony. She resisted for a very long time but was eventually forced into doing so. She was effectively raped. When she received the King her brother's gift she became known amongst the people as Nyamhita of Handa; or in Chi-Shona, Nyamhita-Ne-Handa.

"Shortly after moving to Handa, Nyamhita disappeared and was never seen again. Some say she was so ashamed of having committed the act of incest with her brother – forced though it may have been – that she ran away and hid herself for the rest of eternity. Others say that she was murdered on the orders of the king.

"When news of his sister's disappearance reached King Mutota, he instructed all his people to search for her. She was, of course, never found. What his warriors did find, on the side of a small granite hill close to the king's military town, was a sign that they said she had left behind. It was the imprint of a young woman's pubic apron on a vertical rock face. The people were told that she had simply disappeared into the rock and that she had left the mark behind to tell them where she had gone. That hill is still known today as Gumbi-Ne-Handa… the Apron of Handa. It is located in the Tete

province of Mozambique not far from the town of Chicoa."

"What a fascinating story, Daniel. But just how are you going to turn all this knowledge to ZANLA's advantage?"

"That is the brilliant part of the plan." Now Daniel's whole being became ebullient.

"The present Svikiro Nehanda lives," he continued more urgently now, "in a special village complex on the banks of the Musengesi river. It is only about five miles north-east of here. She is very carefully guarded and tended by a permanent corps of devoted servants. There are also a number of temporary labourers who are supplied and periodically rotated by the local Dande and Muzarabani communities.

"That is why, Anna, Rex and I located ourselves here at Chief Matsiwo's village. We are just a stone's throw away from the Svikiro Nehanda." He smiled a knowing smile at Anna. She was already putting the pieces of the puzzle together.

"And, quite simply Anna… to cut a very long story short… it is our plan that the svikiro should join with us in ZANLA."

Anna sat bolt upright in shock. Her brow creased into a heavy frown. *"WHAT?"* she gasped, staring unbelievingly at her husband. *"Join ZANLA? And just how do you propose to get her to do that?"*

"Oh, she won't be a combatant or anything like that," Daniel explained with a smile. "She's far too old for that anyway… But just think about the implications if she does join ZANLA. She is the one person in the whole of northern Mashonaland who can get the rural people onto our side. One word from her and they will do exactly as they are told."

Anna felt palpitations fluttering inside her breast. An unexpected tension gripped and writhed inside her body. And a ripple of weird sensations ran up and down her spine. Goose pimples erupted along her arms and for the first time in her life, Anna really began to believe that Zimbabwe, the land of the Mashona, would at last be reclaimed by her people.

"If you can pull that off, Daniel," she said in almost a whisper now, "it will be a brilliant coup."

Anna suddenly felt very excited.

"Well…," Daniel told her now. "Rex and I have already met her… the Svikiro Nehanda. We were taken to her by Kupara George… the Svikiro Mutota. And Rex and I believe we have got her in the bag."

"She has agreed?"

"Not exactly. Almost…" Daniel nodded his head slowly as if to convince himself of the fact.

"She's a real old crone, Anna. Chief Matsiwo says she is eighty-six years old and because of her age the people here now call her the Mbuya Nehanda."

"Grandmother Nehanda," Anna said softly.

Daniel nodded.

"She may be old, Anna, but she has an almost supernatural and very commanding presence. After meeting her, Rex and I had absolutely no doubt that she is an extremely powerful woman.

"And old though she may be, she's far from senile. Once she knew the reason for our visit… that ZANLA was seeking Nehanda's help to defeat the white man… she immediately and imperiously commanded Chief Matsiwo to summons all the senior chiefs of the Tawara tribes to a special meeting. They are coming here, now, from their tribal lands right across Zimbabwe's northern border with Mozambique… from the Zambesi to Mtoko."

"And will they come?"

"They dare not refuse, Anna. They'll come all right. In fact, most of them have already arrived. Rex has gone off to meet them today."

"So that's where he's gone. And what happens now?"

"I'm not sure. But we'll know a lot more when Rex gets back. I believe the mbuya will be getting in touch with the spirit of Nehanda today, witnessed by all the tribal elders and, through her, Rex will be able to discuss the coming war with the long dead Nyamhita. And, hopefully, she will instruct the chiefs to support ZANLA."

"Daniel. You sound as though you believe all this hocus-pocus?"

He laughed. "No! No! I really don't. But if we're to get the people in the north of the country on the side of ZANLA, then we've simply got to abide by the protocols of their religious cult.

"But I do believe the svikiro herself has already committed herself to our cause, Anna. Remember every one of Nehanda's spirit mediums since 1898, has expressed a hatred for the white man. They all remember the prediction of the old mhondoro that was hanged… that Nehanda will one day sweep the white men out of the country and into the sea.

"I think the old lady has accepted our arrival here as a foretoken of that event. And I am sure she is taking the matter very seriously. Very seriously

indeed! In fact, Rex and I both believe she wants to be the svikiro that will cause that prophecy to come true."

Daniel smirked derisively.

"That probability has undoubtedly been mulling around inside her head since we first met with her. I am sure she believes that if she can pull it off… if she supports ZANLA and we do win the war… she will then most certainly become a mhondoro spirit herself when she dies."

Daniel looked at Anna, willing her to understand the implications. In his mind the plan all made complete sense. And the import of its successful implementation was as clear to him as the loud ringing of a Christian church bell.

Anna was too stunned by her husband's disclosures to say anything. She simply stared at him with sparkling eyes, her smile widening as her excitement began to grow. This new information had swept away any doubts that she may have had concerning her decision to join ZANLA. And her bubbling enthusiasm was now joined by a sense of confidence and determination. Her reaction… and her suddenly sparkling bright eyes… were not lost on Daniel.

"Not for a very long time has a Svikiro Nehanda been faced with such a critical challenge." Daniel continued slowly. "According to Chief Matsiwo, nothing of such importance has been presented to the mhondoro since the white man's war with the 'majerimani' in 1939. And if the svikiro accepts the challenge, a whole lot of ancient rituals will have to be revived and performed to properly appease the spirit."

Anna was now vibrantly energized. Her wide bright eyes never left Daniel's face as he was speaking.

"Chief Matsiwo says that if the spirit of Nehanda talks to the elders of the tribes… the most powerful of the chiefs… through Mbuya Nehanda… and she tells them to support ZANLA, all our troubles will be over. He says the people, every man, woman and child in this whole northern part of the country, will take heed of Nehanda's wishes. And he says that the people will then do anything and everything to support us."

Anna was dumbfounded by the ingenuity of the ZANLA strategy. Even before they had made their first approaches, Rex and Daniel had known that the old woman would be sympathetic to their cause. Now all she had to do was convince the tribal elders with her mumbo-jumbo… and the chimurenga war was already three-quarters won. And from what Daniel had told her, the

outcome of her meeting with the chiefs was a foregone conclusion.

Even if the people had no real sympathy with ZANLA… even if they were supporters of Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU party… even if they were what ZANLA called sell-outs… they would not dare go against the wishes of the most powerful of all their tribal spirits.

“Daniel, whose idea was this? Whose plan was it to use the Svikiro Nehanda and the other spirit mediums?”

Anna had a notion that, inventive and penetrating though his mind might be, this scheme had not been conceived by her husband. And she was even more convinced that it had not been dreamed up by Rex Mbudzi either. She had gained the impression that Mbudzi might yet prove himself to be an astute and courageous guerrilla commander, in time, but that he lacked the vision and the political acumen to conjure up such an ingenious plan.

No! These two men, her Daniel and Rex Mbudzi, were putting into operation someone else's idea. This plan was a stroke of genius. It had come from a mind of great acuity… from the talented brain of a master architect.

“Herbert Chitepo.” Daniel reported to her honestly and simply.

“Chitepo… the lawyer? Rhodesia's first black barrister?”

“The very same… He is now the chairman of ZANU. With ZANU’s elected political leaders, Sithole and Mugabe, in detention here in Rhodesia, Chitepo is the titular political head of ZANU in exile. He's the most senior of the ZANU politicians still free, and he's looking after the party's political and military interests from ZANU’s headquarters in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia.”

Anna shook her head. The man's plan was astounding. It was quite dazzling in its brilliance.

Chapter 8

PATROL Officer Jeff Robertson felt uncomfortably hot in his thick golden-brown serge tunic and long brown trousers. His light brown shirt, buttoned at the neck and his dark blue tie, neatly secured, were particular impositions. The winter uniform of Rhodesia's British South Africa Police was very smart but it was quite unsuited to the hot spring days on the edge of the Zambesi valley at Centenary. The uniform was still practical in Salisbury, on the colder highveld 5 500 feet above sea level, but Centenary was fully 3 500 feet lower in altitude and much, much hotter.

BSAP standing orders, however, decreed that winter came to an abrupt halt on the thirty-first day of August. There was still one week left on the official winter calendar before Jeff would be permitted to don summer dress. He was looking forward to the end of the month. He would then, for the next six months, be allowed to wear khaki shorts and a light-weight grey cotton shirt with an open neck.

Jeff looked up when Patrick Tondongwe walked into the charge office. The driver of the old Bedford truck was dressed, as usual, in his grease-stained navy slacks and a grimy airtex vest. On his feet he wore manyatelas, sandals made from rubber strips meticulously cut from old motorcar tyres. These were the same clothes that he had been wearing when he had transported Anna Moyo to Chireka village four days before. His clothes had been dirty then. They were much dirtier now and his body odour was distinctly fetid.

The policeman noted the man's dishevelled appearance. Then he turned his attention back to the pile of papers on his desk.

Tondongwe approached the high-level counter and leant his elbows on its top.

There were two African constables working together at a single desk opposite the white officer. They too, were dressed in their winter tunics, feeling just as uncomfortable in the heat as was their immediate superior. Like him, they were engrossed in paperwork. Both pretended not to notice the arrival of their Shona visitor.

Tondongwe waited patiently for over a minute, willing the white man to look his way. Eventually he caught the policeman's eye. A look of annoyance swept over the young officer's face.

“Constable Henry.”

“Sah?”

“You have a visitor.” He wagged his ball-point pen angrily towards Tondongwe. ‘Why did he always have to prompt his black P.C.s?’

“Yes, Sah.”

Police Constable Henry rose slowly to his feet. He procrastinated by unnecessarily re-arranging the papers on his desk before casually and arrogantly sauntering over to the counter. He deported himself with all the self-assurance and pumped-up authority that he could muster. He stood sullenly in front of his black visitor and openly examined him across the broad desk top. He waited officiously for the man to speak.

“I want to see the member-in-charge,” Tondongwe said in Chi-Shona.

Policemen always made Tondongwe nervous, black ones more so than white ones. He knew from experience that black police constables were always less predictable than their white officers.

“What is the nature of your business with the member-in-charge?” The constable asked in English. He had seen the man drive up in his old lorry so he felt sure his visitor could speak English. It was not possible for a Shona to pass the driving test unless he understood some English.

“I tell to the member-in-charge.” Tondongwe shot back at him belligerently.

“What‘s your name?”

“Aaaiieee,” Tondongwe shook his head. “I tell member-in-charge. Only member-in-charge.”

The constable eyed Tondongwe malevolently. Then he turned slowly to face his white superior.

“Sah. This man says he wants to see the member-in-charge.”

“What about?”

“He will not say, Sah.”

“Does he speak English?”

“Well enough, Sah.”

“What do you want?” The young officer asked Tondongwe directly, making no attempt to rise from his chair.

“I want see member-in-charge, Bwana.”

“What about?”

“Information.”

“What information?”

“I tell member-in-charge, Bwana.”

The policeman eyed the man speculatively, wondering whether the type of information this scruffy driver had, warranted the attention of the member-in-charge. But he could not refuse the man his request. All sorts of security and political information was coming in from the most unlikely sources, so when a request was made for a confidential audience with the station commander, standing orders prescribed that the petition be granted.

“Wait here,” the young white man sighed, rising reluctantly from the pile of bumf on his desk. He walked round the charge office counter and directly past his visitor. The stench of the man's stale body odour invaded his nostrils. He held his breath until he was well out of range.

‘Why don't these black bastards ever wash?’ The policeman thought uncharitably as he walked through a doorway and proceeded down a corridor.

He knocked on the open door of the member-in-charge's office. Inspector Harry Johnson, like his subordinates, was required to be dressed in his winter tunic, too. But unlike his young visitor he had taken his tunic off. It was hanging now on a coat hook on the office wall. His golden-brown military-officers’ peaked cap was hanging on another hook right next door to it.

The young patrol officer noticed. *‘R.H.I.P.’*, he said to himself. *‘Rank Has Its Privileges’*

Harry Johnson was hot, and he, too, was engrossed in paperwork. He had a small fan on his desk blowing directly into his face.

‘Paperwork! It was all the police ever seemed to do nowadays!’

“Yes Jeffrey?”

“Sir, there's a black man here who says he has information for you. He is very secretive and won't even tell me his name.”

“Does he speak English?”

“After a fashion.”

“So I won’t need an interpreter?”

“I don’t think that will be necessary, Sir.”

“Right. Send him in.”

“I must warn you, Sir… He pongs a bit… more than a bit!” The young officer screwed up his nose and wafted the flat of his hand across the front of his face.

The inspector opened a drawer on his desk and withdrew a small white aerosol canister. He held it aloft and depressed the button twice with the tip of his forefinger. Two spurts of scented vapour issued into the high rapidly swirling air of the office. He placed the can in full view on his desktop.

ROSE PETALS, the label on the canister said clearly in bright red lettering. In smaller print were the words: Air Sanitiser. Wraps up smells in a jiffy.

"Always be prepared", the inspector said facetiously. "I was once a Boy Scout, you know."

"You'll need it, Sir. This one's really ripe."

"Send him in. What he has to say might be important. Thank you, Jeff."

There was a series of security posters pasted onto the green oil paint of the charge office wall. The one nearest Tondongwe offered various rewards for the discovery or the surrender of a range of terrorist weapons. The poster that held his attention, however, was the one which offered one thousand dollars reward for information that led to the arrest, or to the killing, of a terrorist sectorial commander.

'A thousand dollars per head!' Tondongwe mused. 'And confidentiality is assured.'

Like many of his compatriots Tondongwe was an entrepreneurial opportunist. He was quite prepared to make a quick buck by passing on security information to the authorities even if it meant shopping one of his own people.

Who could tell? The strange and sophisticated black woman that he had transported to Chief Matsiwo's village four days previously might well be connected with the magandangas.[xvii] Maybe she herself was a terrorist! He certainly sensed that there was something very peculiar about her visit to the Dande. So, there just might be a dollar or two in it for him. He had nothing to lose by reporting her visit to Matsiwo's village, and possibly an awful lot to gain. It had taken him four days to make up his mind to report her arrival in the area.

The patrol officer returned to the charge office and immediately walked back behind the high counter. "*Constable Henry,*" he said with a natural authority. "*Take this man to the Member-in-Charge.*"

Chapter 9

ANNA and Daniel were curled up in bed together in each other's arms. They were chatting quietly about their family affairs back in the Soswe. Outside the dawn was breaking. The roosters were crowing, the cattle were lowing and the sheep and goats were bleating as the herd boys took the village stock out of their kraals. The chief's pigeons, in their high platform loft, were pronking and cooing amongst themselves; and from the trees all around wild turtle doves were calling, too. Many other gentle and familiar noises came to them from the awakening world outside.

There were also the sounds of human voices as senior members of the family gave loud and finite instructions to the young boys and girls whose long day was just beginning. It was the picannins who would be doing most of the work.

Without actually seeing what was going on outside, Anna and Daniel could both visualise the village activities as Chief Matsiwo's family rose early to start another new day.

The sounds of the cattle moving about outside, of their horns clutting together when they touched, of a hundred hooves beating the ground and the animal's soft mooing protestations, gradually moved further and further away as the herd boys cracked their whips and got the animals going. They were being driven down the track to Chireka between the make-shift brush fences. This was same track that Anna had walked along on the day of her arrival. In her mind's eye Anna could see the beasts as they moved lethargically down the narrow avenue.

Suddenly there came the sound of running feet outside. Someone banged a fist urgently on the plank door of their hut. "*Daniel… Anna… quick*! *The police are here*." It was Rex. There was a desperate urgency in his voice.

Daniel, still naked, rushed to the door and opened it wide. "Quick…" Mbudzi insisted. "Get dressed… We've got to run… Luckily the cattle are holding them up on the track from Chireka."

"*How many?*" Daniel inquired as he turned to grab his pants from the floor next to the bed.

"*Four Land Rovers… Somebody must have reported us… See you at the big rock at dusk…*" Mbudzi said in parting. Then he was gone.

The two of them dragged on their clothes. As he was pulling on his shirt, Daniel rushed outside and looked down the track towards Chireka. The cattle, about thirty animals, were all bunched up between the bushed walls on either side of the track. Beyond them he could see the white roofs of four grey police Land Rovers.

Daniel rushed back to the open door of the hut. Anna was nowhere in sight. *"Anna,"* he shouted into the darkness beyond the door. *"Are you still in there?"*

"Yes."

"What hell are you doing? We've got to go…"

"I am packing my clothes…" she responded cuttingly.

"Leave them… We've got to run…"

"I won't be long…"

Daniel rushed into the hut. Anna was busy stuffing her clothes into her small suitcase. *"You've got enough clothes on for today? You've got your shoes on?"*

"Yes."

Daniel grabbed her by the hand and dragged her out of the hut. *"Leave the rest, Anna. We must go…"*

"But…"

"No buts… We've got to go… Come on… Run with me…"

Hand-in-hand they disappeared through the gap in the pole palisade that marked the rear entrance to the village. Daniel immediately forced them both into a fast loping pace. They ran away from the chief's huts through the bush, thirty yards to one side of the path that led past the chief's midzimu shrine.

"I can't keep this up," Anna shouted at Daniel when they were past the shrine. Her heart was beating furiously in her breast. Her lungs were burning.

Daniel glanced at her and slowed his pace to a fast walk. "We've got to keep going Anna," he said. "If they've got dogs with them we may be in for a rough day."

"What about my clothes and things…"

"Rachel will keep them for us…"

"And Rex? Where has he gone?"

"If all goes well we will meet up with him this evening. We have a number of pre-arranged RVs?"

Anna had slowed right down to almost an amble. *"What's an RV?"* she demanded breathlessly.

"A rendezvous… a pre-arranged meeting place." Daniel slowed down to match Anna's pace. He looked over his shoulder and saw that they were now out of sight from the village. For the time being they were safe from immediate pursuit.

Anna was puffing and panting like a steam locomotive. *'The physical training she will get at Mgagao,'* Daniel thought, *'will get her in better shape'*. In her current state of unfitness Anna was going to be a liability today. But he was not about to leave her.

Daniel kept on walking as fast as Anna could go. By keeping off the paths and sticking to the bush, their tracks would be less visually obvious to the untrained eyes of an ordinary policeman… but not to a trained police dog! Holding on to Anna's one hand he dragged her through the bush as fast as they could move together. Daniel's one fear was that the police would have tracker dogs with them today.

In the late afternoon Anna and Daniel sat on the side of a high granite kopje. Daniel kept looking down along their back trail. At their rear stood a huge square granite boulder that was precariously positioned on the side of the solid granite dome. It seemed that, at any moment, the giant lump of rock would slide down the mountainside. But that was unlikely. It had been in that position now for many centuries.

They were fifteen miles east of Chief Matsiwo's village. Anna was exhausted. She had twisted an ankle and all her muscles were aching. She was not used to the kind of physical exertions Daniel had put her through today. If today was an example of things to come she had renewed doubts about ever becoming a ZANLA freedom fighter.

Within one month Anna was to change her mind when she realised just how fit she could really become. The Chinese instructors at Mgagao were ruthless in their training regimes!

Daniel and Anna sat close together in the shade cast by the big boulder. It was the first time they had stopped moving since the dawn. Anna felt gratefully relieved to be resting at last. At first they said nothing. Daniel was all the time totally pre-occupied as he continuously looked down upon the route they had followed to their present elevated position.

"We haven't been followed," Daniel eventually said with some assurance.

“If the police had had tracker dogs with them this morning they would have caught up with us a long time ago.

“The chief and Rachel must have spun the police a very fine tale,” Daniel continued. “Good for them…”

“You said that Rachel would look after my clothes and stuff?” Anna asked the question that had been bothering her all day long.

“Yes,” Daniel stated emphatically. “A quick escape from just such a predicament has always been a possibility. Rex and I discussed our getaway plans with both Matsiwo and Rachel when we first got to the chief’s village. They know exactly what to do… We will get your clothes and suitcase back just as soon as we have resettled somewhere.”

“Where are we going to now Daniel?”

“I dunno… We will learn soon enough when we meet up with Rex again.”

“And when will that be?”

“At dusk today.”

“Where?”

“Right here Anna. Rex and I have been here before and he knows exactly where to come to meet us. Remember what he said in parting this morning?”

Anna shook her head. Everything that had happened that morning had been far too precipitate for her to remember very much about anything.

“Rex said… ‘See you at the big rock at dusk’,” Daniel reminded her.

‘The big rock’! Still Anna couldn’t remember.

“This is the big rock behind us, Anna. This is our RV.”

“Thank God for that,” Anna said honestly. “I don’t think I could walk another inch… But what a relief to be able to get that lovely drink from the spring at the bottom of the kopje.”

Daniel looked at Anna. He could see she was deadbeat. He took off his jacket and laid it open on the bare rock next to her. *“You’d better get some rest,”* he suggested, patting the spread out jacket next to him. *“God knows where we are going to end up tonight.”*

Anna lay down quietly on Daniel’s jacket and, lying on her back, she first looked up at the several white puffs of cloud that were wandering about the deep blue sky above. Then she shut her eyes and tried to wish the present away.

“I wonder how the police found out about us?” Daniel mused in a soft voice. He spoke aloud what his mind was thinking. He had been talking to himself and was surprised when Anna came up with an answer.

“Tondongwe,” she said assuredly. “Patrick Tondongwe.”

“What?”

“Not what… who!” Anna corrected him.

“*Who then*…?” he asked her – irritated. “*Who is Patrick Tondongwe*?”

“*He is the driver of the lorry that transported me from Centenary to Chireka the other day*,” she answered her husband tiredly.

“*And why do you think it’s him*?”

“*Because he and I fell out with each other during the journey*,” she replied. “He is an obnoxious man.”

“So…?”

“He was trying to get me to have sex with him, Daniel… I told you that!” she said angrily, signifying that she thought he was being obtuse. “…and I kept putting him off. I kept him at arm’s length. And all along the way he kept asking me questions about why I had come to the Dande. He was not convinced when I told him I had come to see my husband who, I said, was working in the area.”

Anna took a deep breath. She let the air out of her lungs slowly. Her eyes, during this whole conversation, remained shut. Her speech was lethargic. *“He didn’t buy it… He smelt a rat…”* she said tiredly.

“We will talk about this man Tondongwe again later, Anna. Just you get some rest now…”

Despite the hardness of the granite rock beneath Daniel’s jacket, Anna was fast asleep within the next few minutes.

PART TWO

The marandellas farminG AREA
CENTRAL Rhodesia
CHRISTMAS, 1951

Chapter 10

WHEN Michael Campbell was twelve years old he was not yet five feet tall. His body was thin and wiry and his unruly sun-bleached hair was more white than gold. His face was lean and deeply tanned, even then, and from that pinched bronzed visage his piercing blue eyes shone out with a naked mischief that reflected his superlative zest for life.

When he was at school, he wore a short-sleeved khaki shirt, khaki shorts, and sometimes a grey felt hat. It was the garb, the trade mark, of all white Rhodesian schoolboys of his day.

For three twelve-week-long school terms a year, Michael reluctantly attended Digglefold Primary, a junior boarding school located seven miles west of the farming town of Marandellas. It was exactly forty miles from his parent's farm which lay adjacent to the Soswe Native Reserve to the south of the little town.

For a total of nine long months each year, Michael Campbell languished at school. He endured those tedious months stoically, if impatiently, because the three remaining months, the school holidays, were the best. He lived for the holidays. Three weeks in April. Three weeks in August. Six weeks over Christmas and New Year.

At school Michael wore his khaki uniform reluctantly. He was forced to wear shorts and a shirt, and grey stockings and polished black shoes. Even though the stockings were required to be gartered below the knee they spent the greater part of the day draped around his ankles. His shoes were always scuffed.

At home in the holidays he wore the shirt and the shorts but not the shoes and socks.

On the farm he rarely walked anywhere. He ran bare foot in the veld from the crack of dawn each day until he went to bed, exhausted, immediately after supper.

At twelve, Michael was in the standard five class at Digglefold. He was, therefore, a senior, a big fish in a very small pond. At the beginning of the

New Year he would be moving on to senior school, to Plumtree, four hundred miles away on Rhodesia's border with the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Plumtree School, Rhodesia's equivalent to Britain's Eton College, was located in the bush. In a way Michael was looking forward to Plumtree but he did not relish the idea of being reduced to the ranks of a junior *new-boy* once again.

He was particularly not looking forward to becoming some senior boy's *fag*, as was the tradition in all of Rhodesia's senior boys' boarding schools in those days. He'd been told all about it and knew that he would have to clean his fag-master's shoes each day; make his bed in the mornings; take his dirty clothes to the laundry; and return with those which had been washed and ironed. He also knew that he would have to carry the senior boy's books from his study to his classroom every morning, and return them after school. These were the aspects of Plumtree which did not appeal to young Michael. He did not enjoy carrying out these tasks for himself, so having to do them for someone else would make them even more tiresome.

Whilst Michael had many white friends at Digglefold, his relationship with them had never been as strong, or as important to him, as was his friendship with the son of his father's Number One tractor driver. His best friend during the holidays was a black Shona boy of his own age called Daniel Moyo.

Daniel had always been Michael Campbell's friend. Michael could not remember any time when he and Daniel had not been perpetually in each other's company during the school holidays. They had both been born on the farm and they had first met when they were barely past the toddler stage. It had been so long ago in their short lives, in fact, that the occasion had faded into an obscure oblivion in their memories.

Michael's two brothers were far too young to provide him with any type of companionship. When he turned twelve Bobbie was nine years old… Ian six. The age and maturity gaps were far too great. They did not share the same interests, and neither did the younger boys have their elder brother's indefatigable energy. It would take another fifteen years before the three brothers grew more comfortable together. In the meantime there was Daniel.

On the farm, Michael and Daniel accepted their special friendship as something that was normal because it had had happened spontaneously. At school, however, things were very different. Michael had learnt not to speak of Daniel to his white friends because it always generated nasty and negative

responses. When he had first gone to Digglefold he had spoken openly of his holiday association with the Shona boy. The other white children had responded by calling him a *Kaffir-Boetie… a Kaffir-Brother*. He had retaliated fiercely and angrily with his fists but even when he won those fights he was held, for a long time thereafter, in contemptuous ridicule by all the other white children.

During that period in the country's history, just after the Second World War, the black people of Rhodesia were still largely illiterate. They were, indeed, a mere step away in time from their primitive past. Fifty years previously they had all been savages, by the white man's standards, and they wore not clothes but the skins of animals. Their weapons had been spears and the Mashona lived then by their wits, in constant fear of being killed by their cunning, opportunistic and warring black neighbours in the south, the Ndebeles.

In 1890, on the authority of an agreement signed by the Matabele king, Lobengula, a pioneer column of white adventurers financed by Cecil John Rhodes, and under the commission of a Royal Charter from England's Queen Victoria, settled near Chief Harare's village in central Mashonaland. They called their encampment Fort Salisbury. It was to become the future capital city of Rhodesia. Their primary purpose was to mine for gold but many of them opted to become permanent settlers and farmers in the land of the Mashona people.

The Matabele king's permission was an important factor in the white man's occupation of Mashonaland. It gave the white settlers a legitimacy of sorts. This was because the war-mongering Matabele considered the Mashona to be a subjugate people who were under the yoke of the royal Ndebele king.

The Mashona, as a whole, did not agree with that concept. Indeed, there were many parts of Mashonaland that had never ever seen the flash of even a single Matabele assegai. The central Mashona people welcomed the arrival of the white settlers because their presence guaranteed them protection from the marauding Matabele regiments. And for three years after the occupation, not one single Matabele impi raided into Mashonaland.

As the years passed, however, Lobengula's warriors grew progressively more restless. They constantly demanded of their king the right to resume raiding the Mashona villages. An important motivation of their demands centred round the fact that their culture prescribed that a warrior could not be

declared a *man* until he had *blooded* his spear. And he could not take himself a wife until he had become a man.

The old and ailing king, despite his well-founded fear of the white settlers, could not contain his young men forever. Neither could the customs of his people be denied. Caught between a rock and a very hard place, therefore, he eventually acceded to the demands of his regiments and reluctantly authorised his impis to blood their spears in the villages of Mashonaland. When they did, they smacked right into the might of the tiny white settler community in Mashonaland.

The Matabele impis raided the villages of the Mashona at will, killing those of the men they could find, and the older women, too. They took the Shona cattle, driving them back into Matabeleland for their king, and they ate as many of the sheep and goats as they needed. The nubile young women were carried off as prizes of war to become concubines for the army, or wives for the warriors once they had bloodied their spears.

When they came across the gold mines of the white men, or their newly constructed farm houses, they did exactly the same. They entered the premises, killing whatever Shona men they could find and they took away every Shona women that was to their liking, leaving the white people, amidst all the blood-letting, strictly untouched. Sparing the lives of the white settlers had been a specific requirement of their king’s orders.

Inevitably a war ensued with the white settlers during which the flamboyant and ferocious Matabele regiments were utterly and ignominiously defeated.

Lobengula fled his capital at Gu-Bulawayo, *The Place of Slaughter*. He later took poison and was buried in a cave in Pashu's country near the Zambesi. The demise of their king brought to an end a bloody era in the history of the Matabele people.

The white conquerors immediately annexed Matabeleland, declaring it to be the right of conquest following a war that the Matabeles had started. All the prime agricultural lands of Matabeleland were acquired for white occupation, and the country's new legislature granted free-hold title to those pioneer farmers who settled on the land. The Matabeles who had survived the war were forcibly confined to those less fertile parts of their former lands, those parts that the white man did not want.

Inevitably, in 1896, the subjugated Matabele nation revolted against this

harsh and humiliating treatment and what became known as *The Matabele Rebellion* ensued. Surprisingly, the high priest of the Ndebele's Mulimoh God went to Mashonaland to seek the aid of the Mashona spirit mediums.

Consequently, at the urging of the Svikiros Nehanda and Kagubi, the Mashona people also rose up in rebellion. This was what the Mashona still refer to as *The First Chimurenga War… The First War of Liberation.*

The Mashona's altercation with the white settlers was also over land. It began when, without any form of agreement or consultation with the Mashona tribal leaders, the white settlers autocratically allocated traditional Shona lands to themselves, dividing the land up into private farms to which the settler farmers, similarly, obtained free-hold title.

This was quite contrary to the culture of the Mashona who considered the land sacred. It was beyond ownership by mere mortals. It was in the land that they buried their dead. The spirits of their ancestors, therefore, lived in the soil, in the hills, in the rivers, in the trees and in the air. The Mashona believed the living only had the right to *use* all these natural resources, not to *own* them.

The Mashona people had, at first, been quite prepared to share the use of their land and all its various bounties, with the white man. This, in recompense for his protecting them from the Matabele. The fact that the white man had bestowed upon himself private *ownership* of the land, however, and the fact that those individuals who had gained legal tenure of new farms *denied* the Mashona people their traditional right to share the products of those farms, had made the mhondoro spirits very angry. That was the reason why the greatest seer in all the land, the Svikiro Nehanda, had intervened and had fomented rebellion.

Both the Matabele and the Mashona rebellions were put down, at some cost, but without quarter, by the white settlers. The white Rhodesians, thereafter, advised the world that they had been attacked *without* provocation by the natives and that they claimed both Matabeleland and Mashonaland by right of conquest.

The native rebellions had been ruthless and barbaric. Many white men, as well as their women folk and children, had been butchered by the natives under the most horrifying of circumstances. The white man's suppression of the rebellions, on the other hand, was executed pitilessly and with equal ferocity. All those who had instigated the insurrections were put to death, including the Svikiros Nehanda and Kagubi.

The human-relations foundation upon which the new state of Rhodesia entered the twentieth century, and upon which the white settlers built their new nation, therefore, was fraught from the very beginning with racial tensions.

There were white people alive in Rhodesia at the end of the Second World War who still clearly remembered those rebellions. People whose mothers and/or fathers, or brothers and sisters, had been slaughtered by the natives in those, *at that time*, not so far off days. In the 1950s, the white survivors of those events still thought of their black fellow-Rhodesians as savages, no matter how civilised many of them had, in the meantime, become. And each new generation of whites was indoctrinated by their parents, from an early age, into believing that it was improper for white people to fraternise with *'the kaffirs'*.

So it was, at primary school and at home, that Michael Campbell was introduced to the social and political realities of his white cultural background. Nevertheless, this fact did not alter his attitude towards his Shona friend. He merely learnt how to circumvent conflict, and he survived the abuses of his peers by simply avoiding any discussion that included Daniel's name; or any reference, even, to his black friend's existence. And on the farm he never discussed these matters with Daniel.

Michael's mother tolerated the boys' friendship because she realised that her highly energetic son would otherwise have had no playmate on the farm. Understanding Michael's already, by then, fiery and headstrong personality she also realised that she really had no other choice but to accept the liaison. This did not, however, stop her from viewing the closeness of their relationship with a seriously jaundiced eye.

The black labourers who worked on the farm on the other hand, attached no stigma whatsoever to Daniel's friendship with the son of the *Changamireh*, the big white boss-owner of the farm. If they considered it at all, it was with approval because the boys' relationship had the potential to provide many positive spin-offs for themselves.

As far as old Joseph Moyo was concerned, Daniel's father, the most important benefit of the boys' long lasting friendship was the fact that Daniel learnt to speak English with a proficiency far beyond that of his elders. He was taught English as well as the three 'Rs' – reading, 'riting and 'rithmatic – in the little red-brick school house on the edge of the farm compound, all paid for by Michael's father. However, everybody knew that it was Michael's

influence, and not the dubious expertise of his unqualified black teacher, that caused Daniel to be so fluent in the white man's language.

In return Daniel taught Michael how to speak Chi-Zezuru, the Shona dialect of Daniel's tribal clan.

The December school holidays of the year the boys turned twelve were memorable for both of them. They had both completed their schooling at primary level, although the standard attained by Michael at his whites-only school was infinitely superior to that of his Shona friend. Nevertheless, they were both about to embark on the new adventure associated with attending senior school. Michael was going to Plumtree. Daniel was going to Waddilove Mission School which was not very far from Digglefold. At Waddilove Daniel was to be a boarder for the first time in his life. He came home most weekends, riding on his bicycle.

To afford Daniel's school and boarding fees that first year, Joseph Moyo had been obliged to sell one of his six prize cows. He owned a traditional tribal land allocation in the Soswe Native Reserve, which is what the communal Tribal Trust Lands were called in those days. There he kept eleven head of cattle of which six were breeding cows. He rarely saw these animals but they were well taken care of by his brother who tended them together with his own livestock.

To part with one of his vitally important breeding animals had been a difficult and heart-rending decision, but Joseph was determined that Daniel should be given the opportunity of a post-primary education. In those days it was rare for a Shona boy to receive any kind of secondary schooling.

Part of the motivation that caused Joseph to send Daniel to Waddilove stemmed from the fact that his son could, at the tender age of twelve, speak such erudite and fluent English. And for that Joseph would be forever grateful to young Michael Campbell.

Those final school holidays of their primary school year began in the usual manner with Michael erupting from the house as soon as he had unpacked his school trunk, thrown off his school uniform and replaced it with his *farm-gear*… a well worn khaki shirt and a pair of old khaki shorts. Daniel was waiting expectantly in the senior labourers' compound, an untidy assortment of pole-and-dagga thatched huts situated close to the farm dairy, for his friend's arrival. It was too late in the afternoon for an immediate sojourn into

the bush, so the two boys excitedly made plans to meet outside Michael's house at the crack of dawn the following morning.

In anticipation of Michael's restless need to hunt the giant cane rats in the reedbeds below the big dam, Daniel had re-set the rock-fall traps which they had laboriously prepared together during previous school holidays. They had used the same traps consistently now for many years but the animals were only hunted during the school holidays. This was a pact which the boys had made to ensure their elusive quarry was always plentiful when Michael was at home.

Daniel had spent the previous week canvassing the damp reedbeds to locate the new runways made by the big rodents. He had moved the heavy stones and had reconstructed the traps on the new pathways that he had found.

On the Gumbora river he had also laid out his bark-fibre snares for guineafowl and francolins. It was a good place to seek out the big game birds because they regularly frequented the thickets that grew on the rich alluvials of the river banks.

First light the next morning found the two barefoot boys walking stealthily through the reedbeds. Ahead of them they heard a resonant thud. It was the noise made by one of the big male rats thumping a hind foot hard onto the ground. This was the cane rat's warning of approaching danger to others of its species. The dull report was followed by a whistling squeak, then by the sound of animals stampeding through the heavy cane trash.

This was the moment that both boys had dreamed of throughout the three month long school term. Michael turned his head and smiled excitedly at Daniel behind him, the black boy's face was split in a wide grin, his white teeth and pink gums flashing brightly against his dark brown face.

The cane rats were out and about, and they were alert. They had heard the cautious approach of the hunters and from the number of new runways Michael could see, there were a good many to be caught this holiday.

The third trap they came across had been activated. The heavy fall-stone was flat on the ground and the back legs and the tail of a very large rodent protruded from one side. Michael spread his legs over the heavy rock and he lifted the leading edge using both his hands. Daniel dragged the dead animal out from beneath the heavy slab and he immediately began re-setting the stick-and-string trigger mechanism beneath the elevated rock.

“Down Michael… Pohleh-pohleh.” Slowly-slowly.

Michael gently lowered the heavy rock.

“Slowly… All right. It’s taking the tension…”

Michael could feel the weight of the rock beginning to ease. There… the trap was re-set. The flat heavy rock, its bottom edge firmly planted on the ground, was suspended at a thirty-degree angle over the well-used pathway.

“What did you use for bait in this one?”

“Sadza… again. We have no fresh vegetables at home, Michael.”

“O.K. I'll get some carrots from my mother's veggie garden this afternoon and we can re-bait all the traps tomorrow morning.” Michael looked down at the big rodent they had killed. “I think we got this one by mistake. He probably just ran into the trap without thinking, or else he was very hungry.”

Like rabbits, cane rats are entirely vegetarian. They don't touch the human detritus that scavenging rats eat. Their diet is comprised entirely of grasses and succulent cane shoots, and the rhizome-roots of the reeds that run in a complicated matrix just beneath the ground. They are very partial to carrots and potatoes, as well as other types of fresh vegetables, all of which draw them to baited dead-fall rock-traps like bees to a honey pot.

“I thought of raiding your mother's garden yesterday but I was too scared.”

Mike drew in his breath. “No… No. Daniel.” Michael said seriously “If she caught you raiding her vegetables we wouldn't hear the end of it. It’s bad enough when she catches me.”

“Do you have any chicken food at home… mixed grain?” Daniel asked.

“For the pheasants and the guineas?” Mixed grain scattered around the bird snares in the thickets was always a sure-fire way of catching the big birds.

Daniel nodded.

“I'll pinch some of that too.”

The cane rat they had caught weighed about ten pounds and its body was all of two feet long excluding the short tail. It was russet in colour and the tiny quill-like guard hairs stood out proud and prickly from the fur. It looked a bit like a giant hedgehog but for its short hairy tail and rounded nose.

The carcass was heavy and because the cane rat had only stubby legs it was not easy to carry. Nevertheless, the two boys man-handled it out of the reed bed between them, Michael leading the way.

At the edge of the reeds, with one of the pocket knives they both always carried, they opened the animal's gut and extracted its innards leaving the viscera on an open piece of ground. The entrails would be picked up by either a bateleur eagle or a yellow-billed kite as soon as the air was warm and buoyant enough for the aerial scavengers to get airborne.

One of Daniel's nooses had successfully snared a guineafowl near the river. The bird's dark blue feathers, with their white polka-dot spots, were widely scattered around the site of the snare. There were scratch-marks and scuffles on the ground to show where the hapless bird had fought out its final death throes. But the carcass was nowhere to be found. Instead, they discovered the tracks of a large civet cat that had come across the dead bird in the middle of the night. It had made off with its stolen booty.

The boys had become inured to failure just as surely as they were excited by their successes, and one cane rat was not a bad tally for the first day of the holidays.

They made their way to the wide granite shelf over which the Gumbora river fell thirty feet into a deep, clear pool below. On a flat shiny rock above the waterfall, they skinned the carcass, dividing it into equal portions, which they washed clean in the crystal clear water. They threw the head and the skin into the deep pool below the precipice. There it would be eaten by one of the giant catfish that lived amongst the rocks deep below the surface.

The river was running but the boys had no trouble wading through the shallow stream above the waterfall. Once across the river they made their way purposefully down a well worn path towards a jumble of granite boulders a hundred and fifty yards downstream.

In their wanderings the boys had long ago discovered an old Bushman's cave on the small kopje which they had claimed as their own. Access to it was not easy. A large ebony tree growing against the rear rock base had to be scaled first. This allowed them to scramble onto a narrow flat ledge that flowed round and through the granite boulders into the cave.

The cave itself was exquisite. It was the perfect hide-out that was beyond both of the boys’ wildest dreams. It was more of a rock shelter than a cave. In size it was about five yards long and three yards wide, with ample head room. It had a flat floor filled with small granite chips, tiny exfoliations that had flaked off the surrounding rocks over aeons of geological time. The long back wall was sheer and on its face there was a maze of red-and-yellow Bushman

paintings. Some of the stick-like human figures, and the more solid animal pictures, still looked new and crisp. Others were much faded in the background. The cave therefore, must have been used for a very long time by Bushmen now long gone into the oblivion of an unknown past.

The roof comprised a flat rock overhang, the underside of a huge rock sitting atop the mass. And there were large boulders at either end. The open front of the cave was a slab of polished granite that slanted gently upwards and outwards towards the Gumbora river. Where it ended, the rock fell a sheer one hundred feet to a pile of boulders at the water's edge. The roots of a giant rock-fig sprawled across the base of the cave's open front from which grew a screen of small branches with large and rotund green leaves. This obscured the boys' images from anybody looking up from below.

The cave reeked of dassie droppings and of their urine. It was a peculiar, not unpleasant smell, that Michael was to become very familiar with in later life. Strangely, the hare-sized rock hyrax is the nearest living relative of the elephant and the scent of an elephant's musth has an identical odour.

The cave had another intriguing advantage. It overlooked a large sand-bottomed pool in the Gumbora river. This was where the women from the nearby native labourer's compound bathed each day.

The pool was surrounded by high reeds on one bank, and by the sheer wall of the granite kopje on the other, giving the women total seclusion when performing their ablutions… or so they imagined. From their elevated position high above the water, however, the two boys, silent and unseen, were able to watch the women soaping their naked bodies and rinsing themselves as they stood knee deep in the slowly running water.

The culture of Daniel's people had inured him to sights of both youthful and flaccid breasts. Nevertheless, it was taboo for a male to gaze upon a mature woman's pubic region. And Daniel well knew that if he and Michael were ever caught watching, both of them would be in very deep trouble. Daniel made sure, therefore, that Michael never revealed himself at the front of the cave even when there was no-one in the pool below.

Michael, on the other hand, had not had Daniel's casual and constant exposure to a woman's naked anatomy. He, at first, had found the experience fascinating. Familiarity, however, soon bred contempt and the initial excitement the boys had enjoyed soon lapsed into boredom.

But the attraction of the lewd spectacle intensified as the boys approached the magical age of puberty. And there were times, of late, when they simply

could not keep their roving eyes from the sometimes exciting naked bodies of the younger women as they leisurely bathed themselves in the pool below.

Over the years the boys had rigged out the cave with simple furniture. Sawn off logs served as stools. A rickety table made from rough sawn planks was nailed together up against the back wall. Two palliasses, each made from four hessian grain bags sewn together, and stuffed with dry grass, made comfortable beds. And they had enough battered pots and pans, as well as tin plates and cutlery, to serve a small troop of boy scouts. It was all very make-shift but it was adequate for their simple needs.

At the beginning of every school holiday, Michael brought down to the cave two worn travelling rugs to cover the palliasses, and some old cushions for them to lounge upon. When not in use, these items were stored in an old tin trunk that was kept permanently in the cave for that purpose.

The trunk protected the rugs and the pillows from the attentions of the dassies which visited the cave in the boys' absence. Mike returned all these luxury items to his bedroom cupboards the day before his return to school at the end of each holiday.

The dassies on the kopje were the boys' constant enemies and they set thin wire snares on the animals' pathways amongst the rocks to catch them. They ate their strong musk-smelling meat or they sold the chunky carcasses for pocket money to the African labourers on the farm. Daniel's mother made a kaross from their soft tanned skins for Michael, sewing the pelts together with nylon threads which she stripped from old discarded motor car tyres. That kaross was Michael's most treasured possession. It, too, with the blankets and the pillows, would be coming to the cave later in the day.

Not surprisingly, the boys often camped out in their secret cave. Michael's mother, not knowing all the details of the boys' special hideout, allowed her adventurous son at least one three day exeat every school holiday. Daniel's parents, only knowing that he would be staying overnight with Michael, never objected.

Michael and Daniel skewered the fresh pink cane rat meat onto stiff wire forks and roasted it over a camp fire which they had made in the cave. They ate the pieces of tsendze, one at a time, as each portion was cooked. It was delicious meat and delectable when cooked over a hot bed of hardwood coals.

The smoke from the fire was drawn up and away in the drafts of air that constantly permeated the cave. It was quickly sucked into the various nooks and crannies, natural chimneys, between the granite boulders. It emerged

through the rocks at the top of the kopje. There it was dispersed by the wind and was rendered invisible to the unobservant eye, so their camp fires never betrayed their occupation of the cave. The cave was indeed a unique and secret hide-away.

By ten o'clock the two young friends were stretched out on the flat rock, just their eyebrows showing above the ragged rim of their grandstand position, and they peered downwards through the screen of giant fig leaves. The first of the older women was already stripped naked. She was standing in the river splashing her wrinkled body with cold water. Two other women were undressing on the river bank, carefully placing their discarded clothes in piles well away from the water.

There was a stream of yet more women, younger women, chatting volubly amongst themselves, as they moved in single file along the path that led down to the river from the thatched huts of the nearby compound. They wore a variety of brightly coloured floral skirts and blouses, or dresses. Expertly balanced on each of their heads was a brown clay pot which, once the women’s ablutions were complete, would be filled with water and taken back to their kitchen huts for cooking purposes.

In the shallow rapids below the women’s pool, several old mbuyas, grandmothers from the village, were supervising the younger girls, for pre-pubescent girls did not bathe with the matrons. Tradition dictated that the younger girls should wash their bodies at another site watched over by one or two elders. The chaperones were necessary in case any of the piccanins ventured out of their depths in the water; and because it was not unknown for crocodiles to venture up the Gumbora from the larger Macheke river which the Gumbora joined a few miles downstream.

For the time being, there was nothing going on in the pool below to excite the boys' puerile sexual fantasies, but the younger women were coming. The two young friends would just have to be patient.

Chapter 11

THE Christmas tree that year reached the ceiling of the sitting room. The Campbell family spent several happy days and nights decking it out with traditional Christmas decorations that Marion Campbell, Michael’s mother, had accumulated over many, many years. Some of the older baubles and the tinsel were showing signs of age but once they were on the tree their minor faults were not detectable. The boys thought it was quite the best tree that they had ever had.

Michael was very proud of his father. He had been a captain in the Desert Rats in North Africa during World War II and he had come home with a string of fancy medals. He had also come home with some impressive scars, from bullet holes and other shrapnel wounds that he had received in combat. These latter decorations gave him the status of a deity in his elder son’s eyes.

Jimmie Campbell was tall and dark. He was lean but with a solid frame well covered in hard-toned muscle. Michael's mother stood five feet six inches tall and she was plump and blonde. All three of the boys had inherited their mother's colouring and her deep blue eyes. It was too early then to know that the boys would all develop their father's physique as they matured.

The first cock that crowed heralded the start of Christmas Day. It saw the three boys bouncing out of bed and running helter-skelter to the lounge. During the night Jimmie Campbell had laid out all the bigger presents at the foot of the tree. His wife had committed the smaller gifts to the pillow cases which the boys had fastened to the wooden mantelpiece with drawing pins before they went to bed in excited anticipation of Santa’s visit.

Santa's beer had been drunk and the empty bottle stood at the side of the fireplace. Crumbs on the plate were all that was left of the biscuits the boys had left for their bearded benefactor. And old Saint Nicholas had left a note to thank the boys for his nocturnal repast.

Michael and Bobbie were beyond the Santa Claus stage but young Ian was not. Their mother had impressed upon the two older boys, therefore, the need for them to keep the mystery alive for their younger brother. So they played the game, making constant remarks to Ian about their mysterious visitor of the night before.

The boys' early morning furore aroused their parents and Jimmie Campbell

was not about to miss sharing his sons' excitement. Like an eager little boy himself, he led his wife by the hand into the living room, both wrapped up in their light cotton dressing gowns.

At the door mum and dad stood arm-in-arm and they silently watched the antics of their three boys. For a brief moment their eyes met and they smiled. Both felt enormously proud of their sons. Every Christmas since the end of the war, they gave their thanks to the universe that they were again able to be together on this very special day. The war had taken a great slice out of their lives. They had also been made to pay other tolls. Jimmie had experienced so much horror that he had come back doubting the very existence of God. This saddened his wife but she had come to accept the reality over time. She was thankful that, at least, she had got her husband back in one piece… even if the pieces were a bit bent and buckled. He might, after all, not have come back at all.

Now, together, they revelled in the excitement on their boys' faces and in their frantic actions as they explored the treasure trove before them.

The first parcel Michael opened contained a fountain pen and a propelling pencil. It was a present from his uncle and aunt in Salisbury. It was a gift in anticipation of his imminent promotion to Plumtree School. After closely examining the parcel's contents he placed the small flat box carefully on the carpet at his side. Then he explored the pile of parcels for another one that bore his name. His attention was drawn to a long flat box that was lying at the back of the pile beneath the tree. It was wrapped up in red Christmas paper. He reached over and lifted the label. The inscription read:

To Michael – Happy Christmas

With love from Mum and Dad.

It was the biggest and the longest parcel of them all. *'Whatever could it be?'*

Bobbie and Ian were already tackling their third and fourth presents, respectively. There was a pile of torn Christmas wrappings in the middle of the carpet behind them.

"Hey! You lot… Take off the Christmas paper carefully. Don't rip it off like bulls in a china shop. We can use that paper next year." Their mother exclaimed in a loud remonstrative voice.

After every Christmas celebration Marion Campbell would painstakingly smooth out any and all pieces of wrapping paper which were large enough to be used again. She would later carefully cut away the torn edges and fold the

salvaged pieces before putting them in a labelled box ready to be used the following year.

"That's showing your Scots ancestry," Jimmie Campbell laughed, slipping into an easy chair and pulling his wife down onto his lap.

"Waste not. Want not." Marion Campbell refused to accept her husband's mockery. Things had not been easy during the war and now, six years on, there were still many shortages.

Michael carefully pulled the long parcel out from under the tree. Jimmie Campbell caught his son's eye and he smiled a knowing smile. He nudged his wife and, with raised eyebrows, he silently indicated what Michael was doing

Michael tugged impatiently at the decorative paper. Then he slid the long cardboard box out from its wrapping. Along the length of the lid there was the picture of a rifle.

His heart began to race. 'A rifle! Have Mum and Dad, at last, given me a .22?' The idea was beyond his wildest dreams. 'Or is it just a pellet gun?'

During the war, when Jimmie Campbell had, for several months, been home on sick leave after being wounded in battle, he had taught Michael, still just a toddler then, how to use a .22 rifle. And since his father had returned from Europe Michael had practiced with him regularly during every school holiday. More recently Michael had accompanied one of his school friends, and his father, when they had hunted a grey duiker.

This year, he had used a .22 every Tuesday afternoon at the school rifle club range and had been awarded the top marksman's badge at the end-of-year trials. So, even at the tender age of twelve, Michael Campbell was not a complete novice with a rifle. Ever since he could remember, it had been his greatest ambition to own a .22 rifle of his very own.

Silently he opened the lid. And there the weapon lay snug in the cut-out of the box's cardboard packing. It was indeed a .22 rifle. It had blue-black metal work and the stock was a polished golden-brown wood. Then the image blurred because his eyes were filled with tears.

Michael shifted his position awkwardly so that his back was facing his parents. He also averted his face from his two young brothers for the tears were pouring down his cheeks. He felt ashamed and embarrassed at this outward display of emotion. Try as he might, however, he was unable to prevent a heavy sob escaping from his chest and he sniffed loudly to pull

back the running mucus in his nose.

A hush descended on the room. Jimmie and Marion Campbell looked across silently and contentedly at the happiness that had overwhelmed their eldest boy. Sensing the changed atmosphere in the room, Bobbie and Ian became silent. They forgot about their own presents and they looked down in awe at Michael's new rifle. Nobody had missed the sob or the heavy sniff.

"Wow!" Bobbie exclaimed as he moved over and covetously stroked the polished stock.

"Why is Michael crying?" young Ian questioned his mother worriedly. He peered round Michael's shoulder to better look at his big brother's tears. He was pushed away roughly.

"Shhhh…" Ian's mother cautioned him gently. The atmosphere was taut with a poignant, silent, tension.

Michael rose slowly from his position on the carpet and turned towards his parents. No longer able to control his overwhelming elation, his face was awash now with rivers of tears. And huge sobs of towering happy emotion erupted involuntarily from his aching throat. The smile that cut across his face was painful as he rushed over to where his parents were sitting together on one plush armchair and he threw his arms around them both, crying now with abandoned joy.

"Dad… Mum…" he said uncertainly, emotionally and in between sobs. *"Thanks… It's the greatest present… you could ever have given me."* No longer caring, he sobbed passionately and happily into his father's shoulder. And he wept until the fabric of the dressing gown was sopping wet beneath his cheeks. Tears welled up, too, in his father's eyes.

The two younger boys looked on uncertainly. They were utterly confused by their big brother's uncharacteristic show of unbridled and ecstatic happiness. And they were not at all sure how to interpret the tears in their father's eyes. Marion Campbell contentedly hugged her eldest son until her eyes, too, began to swim.

It was then that young Ian began to cry, to really cry, in his total bewilderment. His hesitant wailing broke the magic spell and the tearful emotions were replaced by laughter. Everyone began wiping their faces and, sniffing loudly, they smilingly hugged and kissed each other.

It was a happy Christmas from every aspect. In fact, it was the happiest Christmas that Michael Campbell was ever to remember in his whole long life.

Michael carefully, almost reverently, removed the rifle from its box and the two younger boys continued unwrapping their own gifts.

"Now I want you to remember, Michael," Jimmie Campbell intoned once everyone had settled down and regained their composures, "that you must use your new rifle with great responsibility."

"Yes Dad." Michael said absently. He was clearly far more interested at that moment in lovingly caressing the shining stock of his new weapon than he was in listening to what his father had to say.

"Michael! Are you listening?"

"Yes Dad. I'm listening."

"Well, look as though you're listening."

"Yes Dad," Michael said, forcing his eyes to look up at his father.

"Can I shoot with it, too?" Bobbie chipped in at that moment.

"Sshhh. Be quiet, Bobbie," his mother admonished him. "Your Daddy is speaking to your big brother. Don't interrupt."

"It's a single shot with no magazine so it's very safe." his father continued. "You can only fire one bullet at a time."

"It's the same as the ones we use at school," Michael said nodding his head. "A single shot BSA."

"That's why we bought you that particular model," his father continued. "Because you know the weapon and you've been trained how to use it."

"No problem."

"Except that you've got to learn how to use it off a rifle range now."

Michael nodded, his hands never leaving his very own brand new rifle.

"No shooting if there's anyone else about."

Michael accepted that advice. He nodded again.

"No shooting in the direction of any buildings or near compounds, or where people are working in the fields. The .22 bullet has a lethal range of about one mile. That's a long distance."

"Yes Dad." Michael said fighting to keep his gaze fixed on his father's serious face instead of allowing it to wander back to his new treasure.

"And no pointing the weapon at anyone even if you know it isn't loaded. You must get into the habit of thinking the rifle is loaded and that it is dangerous all the time."

"We were taught all that at school, Dad."

"I know. But I want you to hear it all again from me. Just so that we know

where we both stand." Jimmie Campbell raised his eyebrows expressively.

"And you don't put a cartridge into the breech unless you intend to fire it. I don't ever want to catch you walking around with a rifle that is loaded and on safe."

Michael nodded.

"Are you going to let him go off into the bush with that thing on his own?" Marion Campbell interrupted suddenly, the surprise ringing clearly in her voice. She hadn't realised that that was her husband's intention until this very moment.

"He's going to have to learn to be responsible with a rifle on his own sometime," her husband responded. "So he may as well start right now."

"But…"

"Sweetheart. Shhhh… No buts. Michael has been taught how to use a rifle properly at school. But nobody can teach him experience. He's just got to go out there and learn how to handle the weapon by himself now."

"But he's still so young, James."

Jimmie Campbell laughed. "I was nine when I was first allowed to go hunting on my own, my sweetheart," he said. "And I have been itching to get Michael this rifle since he was that age, too".

Michael's head was down and he held his breath while he anxiously listened to his parents' discussion. His wise mother very often persuaded his father to rethink certain of his decisions, but this time it seemed his father was not going to relent. Michael let out a quiet sigh of relief.

"I'm nine… Can I go hunting Dad?" Bobbie wasn't going to let that opportunity slip by.

"Shhhh," his mother silenced him gently.

Marion Campbell continued to look askance at her husband. She did not like the idea of letting Michael loose on his own with a .22 rifle one little bit, but it was clearly far too late to argue the point now. She knew her husband too well. His mind was made up. And it had obviously been made up a long time ago.

"He'll be O.K.," her husband reassured her. "'Cos if he isn't…" Michael's father looked at him sternly. "If he isn't, the first time I catch him behaving irresponsibly I'll confiscate his rifle for good." He paused pointedly to let that message sink in.

Michael met his father's eyes squarely. He did not flinch from that determined look. The implications inherent in their visual interaction told the

elder Campbell that his son would not let him down.

"And what about Daniel?" Marion Campbell asked hesitantly. "The two of them are thick as thieves."

'What about Daniel?' Michael did not understand what his mother was implying. But his father did… immediately.

"Now I want you to promise me something, Michael. You can take Daniel hunting with you but under no circumstances must you teach him how to shoot."

Michael looked puzzled.

"If we teach the natives how to shoot," his father persisted, "one day they will steal our guns and they will shoot us Europeans with them." His father was being deadly serious. "We've had native wars and rebellions before," he said resolutely. "So we should not tempt fate by teaching our black people how to use our guns."

Michael looked searchingly at the wonderful Christmas present that already felt so comfortable in his hands. And he thought about Daniel. He simply could not conceive of Daniel taking his new .22 rifle and purposefully shooting him with it. He and Daniel were friends… bosom buddies. He neither understood nor believed what his father was telling him.

Jimmie Campbell watched his son silently and intently. He sensed the great turmoil and uncertainty that was storming through Michael's young mind. And in large measure he understood.

"Michael," he said at last. "You are still too young to understand. The white man must always remember Africa's history. It is full of native wars and rebellions. The white man has earned a place to live in Africa only because he has always been able to win those wars. We must not ever lose a war to the black man. If we do we are finished. We cannot afford, therefore, to teach black people how to use our firearms. Not the Matabele. Not the Mashona."

"But Daniel would never want to shoot us, Dad." There was a hurtful plea in Michael's voice. "He's my friend."

Jimmie Campbell sighed.

"Yes" his mother said forcibly. "But if you'd had anyone else your own age to play with, a white boy, I'd never have allowed you to see Daniel Moyo. Not only is he black but he's also just the piccanin of your Dad's tractor driver."

"Muuu-ahm," Michael remonstrated angrily.

"Marion… Shhhh…" her husband calmed her rising anger gently.

Over the last several years Jimmie Campbell had witnessed one major confrontation between Michael and his mother over his son's friendship with the Shona boy. And there had been many minor skirmishes besides. The brewing altercation, now, had all the hallmarks of another eruption and he knew that neither his wife nor his headstrong young son would give in to the other.

Jimmie Campbell himself did not object to the boys' friendship. From what he had seen of him he quite liked the little black boy. He would have preferred, nevertheless, to have seen the friendship developed more on the lines of a master-servant relationship. That was how he had always conducted himself with the natives… even when he himself had been a small white piccanin like his own three sons were now. His father had taught him that the natives must always know their place… that they must always be kept in their place. And that whenever one was too friendly with them they always took liberties and the white man could not, and must not, allow that to happen.

"We don't want to get into another fight like the last one," Jimmie Campbell said softly and calmly. He raised both his hands in a placatory gesture.

"And I'm not taking sides…" he said, looking very purposefully at both his wife and his son. "But you are not to teach Daniel how to shoot with this rifle, Michael. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Dad," said Michael, still bewildered, still unable to grasp the concept that his best friend might one day want to shoot him.

"O.K. I'm going to accept your word on that." He would not belabour the point because he remembered his own childhood, and he believed implicitly that ammunition shortages alone would create their own kind of sanctions.

"Now… There are a number of other rules I want you to obey."

'More rules?' Michael waited patiently. Bobbie and Ian sat on the floor open-mouthed. They were listening intently. They did not understand all that was being said but that did not diminish their interest.

"Number One: Whatever you shoot you've got to eat… or somebody else has got to eat it."

Michael's brow furrowed as he tried to assess the implications.

“Would you eat a cormorant?”

Michael shook his head. The natives said cormorant flesh stank of fish and that it gave you diarrhoea.

“Or a vulture?”

Michael again shook his head. Vultures ate rotten meat and he could not conceive of himself eating such a grotesque scavenger.

“Yes he would,” Bobbie cut in abruptly. “Michael eats anything… He even eats cane rats… Yeuch.”

Jimmie Campbell smirked and he glanced at Bobbie in amusement. He did not object to Michael eating cane rats. He'd done so himself as a kid. He turned his attention back to Michael.

“Would you eat a stork?… A bateleur eagle?… A turkey buzzard?”

Michael shook his head to all these questions.

“Right! Then I don't want you shooting any of those birds. O.K.?”

“Yes, Dad.”

“And no buck bigger than a duiker.”

“So I can shoot stembuck and klipspringer?”

“And grysbuck. But not kudu… or sable… or reedbuck. A .22 is not big enough for them.

“And you don't take any running shots, O.K.? Only standing shots. You shoot them behind the shoulder into the heart and lungs.”

“Do we have to be so explicit?” Marion Campbell said screwing up her face.

Michael looked at her derisively.

“And no shooting of buck during the Christmas school holidays.”

“That's when they have their babies.” Michael said with understanding. His father smiled and nodded his head. *‘That was the reason, precisely.’*

“And no guineafowl then either… for the same reason. And I'm going to allow you only two small buck during each of the other two school holidays.”

“Two per holiday?”

His father nodded. “And, I think, only five guineafowl per holiday and five francolin. That's your quota.”

“You'd better write all that down for him, dear. He'll never remember it.”

“He can write it down himself,” his father said making that decision on the spur of the moment. “I'll correct it for him and I'll add to the list if he misses

anything out."

Michael nodded. His mind was racing, trying to remember all that his father had said.

"And you can stick the list onto the wall in your bedroom. I don't want you to forget it."

"Uh-huh." Michael nodded his head in agreement. 'It would be like having his very own ten commandments.'

Jimmie Campbell ran out of steam. He paused to think.

"And doves?" Michael asked.

"As many as you like. But remember always, whatever you kill you've got to eat. I want no wastage at all. Anything and everything you kill you eat. That's rule number one."

"Can I shoot dassies to sell to the natives?" Michael asked excitedly. "We can use the skins to make kaross blankets. It's a way to earn some pocket money."

The elder Campbell nodded his head. He smiled to himself. He couldn't see Michael tanning the skins and sewing them into blankets. '*He had a lot to learn*!' But he didn't comment on the idea.

"You can shoot as many dassies as you like," his father said, "especially in that kopje near the lucerne field. They come down at night and eat the hell out of the lucerne. They're a real menace."

"And you can use that pocket money to buy bullets," his mother interjected pragmatically. "Bullets cost money and it's about time you learnt that money doesn't grow on trees."

"Which brings me to the last thing." Michael's father said quietly. "I'll give you two packets of ammunition at the beginning of every school holidays."

He put his hand into his dressing gown pocket and extracted two small yellow cardboard boxes which he handed to Michael. "There's one hundred cartridges. They are not bullets… They're called cartridges. Bullets are the lead projectiles that fly through the air… And when they're gone they're gone."

"One hundred bullets. Wow! That's a lot of bullets," Bobbie chipped in.

"Can I buy more myself?" Michael asked.

"Cartridges?"

"Yes, cartridges," Michael said, using the correct terminology.

"If you can raise the money… Yes." His father agreed.

"We'll make lots of money selling dassies to the natives," Michael was

beaming now, very cocksure of himself.

Jimmie Campbell smiled. He knew otherwise but he again said nothing. Whatever he said now, he knew, would not be accepted. Michael was going to have to learn the hard way.

Chapter 12

“YOU'VE got to put the round bead of the front sight… nestling… into the bottom of the vee of the back-sight,” Michael instructed Daniel patiently. “Like this.” He drew the configuration of the rifle's sights in the sand.

Daniel looked at the drawing carefully. The black boy was half-lying, half-leaning, over the dead trunk of a fallen tree. He held the gleaming new rifle gingerly in his hands. His last shot had gone high and to the right of the target.

“You put the bead of the front sight onto your target… and you bring the back vee-sight up to snuggle around it.” Michael had explained this to Daniel all before but it seemed not to have sunk in.

“And then you squeeze the trigger.” Daniel said, mimicking Michael’s voice like a parrot.

Michael nodded with a smile, ignoring Daniel’s sarcasm completely. *‘At least he has got that right,’* Michael thought tiredly.

“And then you squeeze the trigger,” Michael confirmed. “If you pull the trigger you will pull the gun off target, too.”

Daniel nodded. He settled down again, snuggling into the rifle just as Michael had taught him to do. He looked down the sights at the big brown cardboard box which was a good two feet square. *‘How could he possibly have missed that big box?’*

Daniel had fired three shots already and he'd missed every time. He had missed the whole box… not just the small three-inch round charcoal bull’s eye that Michael had made in its centre.

The target was exactly fifty yards away. They'd placed the box on the top of a low boulder and even from this distance Daniel could clearly see the marks of the five holes in the cardboard. Those were from Michael’s shooting and they were all inside the bull's eye. Michael was a very good rifle shot!

All the holes were now marked with a black-ink ring… to identify them as Michael’s shots. Any new hole that appeared, therefore, would be Daniel’s. But, so far, there wasn’t any other hole in the box let alone inside the bull’s eye.

Daniel lined up the sights again then pulled the rifle onto the target. But in that movement the alignment shifted. He began to despair. He’d never get it

right. He tried again. Then, suddenly, everything seemed to be in line. He yanked at the trigger. The bullet hit the rock. It whined as it ricocheted away into the warm afternoon air.

"Yaagh!" he exploded in exasperation. "I'll never get it right."

Michael's shoulders slumped. He let out his breath in an explosive gush.

"Yes you will, Daniel," he said assuredly. "I'll teach you. All you need is a bit more practice."

"We'll run out of bullets."

"Uh-uhh." Michael said confidently. "I'll give you five cartridges a day until you get it right."

"We'll still run out of bullets before I get it right."

"They are cartridges Daniel…" Michael said irritably. "And you've got one more left for today." He ignored Daniel's despondent prediction. "This time try putting the front sight onto the target first… Then bring the back-sight up to fit around it… Then squeeze the trigger. That last shot you hauled on the trigger like you strike a fishing rod when you get a bite… Take it easy… Take your time… Squeeze the trigger gently. THAT is your problem, Daniel. You are not squeezing the trigger."

Michael lifted a single cartridge out of the box. *"Open the bolt,"* he instructed impatiently.

Daniel lifted the bolt-knob and slid the mechanism back. The empty brass shell ejected smoothly. It fell to the ground with a soft tinkling sound. Michael stepped forward and eased the fresh round into the open breech, pushing it home with the ball of his thumb.

"O.K. Shut the bolt and try again."

Daniel leaned into the weapon. This time he placed the bead of the foresight onto the bull's eye, then eased the outline of the back-sight around the bead. It all lined up perfectly. He was thrilled. This time he gently squeezed the trigger.

The short, sharp report was followed by the double duh-duh sound of the bullet striking home. It had passed through both the near and the far walls of the cardboard box.

"You got it!" Michael said triumphantly. "That time you got it."

"You mean I hit the box? But where?"

"Well… let's go and find out."

There were now six holes in the box. Five were from Michael's shooting and one from Daniel's last shot. All six holes were bunched together inside

the bull's-eye. The one without the ink-mark was Daniel’s last shot. It was fairly central in the bull’s eye and Daniel was elated.

“Let me have another shot, Michael… just one more… please… I really think I've got it now.”

Not teaching Daniel to shoot was one of his father's commandments that Michael simply could not bring himself to obey. When the two boys shared everything else in their lives it would have been churlish of him not to also share the thrill of using his new .22 rifle with his best friend. He would teach Daniel how to use the little weapon but they would tell nobody. They'd had secret pacts before and had never let each other down. This one was far more serious than any of the others, but they both knew their secret was safe with the other.

It was true that Michael consciously and blatantly disobeyed one of his father's cardinal rules. He did so, however, because he was not prepared to jeopardise his cherished friendship with Daniel. Both the boys accepted the importance of their close alliance. It was a fact of life. It was not something that could be changed, and Michael had long ago stopped trying to explain or to justify it to anyone.

All the white people that Michael knew, from his young friends at school to the adult farmers in the Marandellas district, had developed a mind-set about their superior racial status. It was an unconscious element of the white Rhodesian culture. It was a product of the country's brief and tempestuous history. Respectable white people simply did not fraternise with the natives.

Michael, however, felt that his friendship with Daniel was different. He at least did not entertain any racial thoughts about it. It was, nevertheless, a fact, too, that he was far too young at the time to truly comprehend the dogma of racism. Thus his relationship with Daniel was as innocent as it was natural and genuine.

Under the circumstances, therefore, Jimmie Campbell's one commandment… *‘do not teach Daniel to shoot’*… had been made to be broken.

A local farmer, Beau Lockhard, visited the Campbell farm on New Year's Day. He'd had a serious outbreak of alternaria in his tobacco seedbeds and he had been forced to destroy all of his fifty beds of seedlings. Alternaria is a tobacco disease that was as much feared within the Rhodesian tobacco-farming community as was the Big-C – cancer – a reason for panic in human

medicine. Since it was now too late to re-sow new seed beds, the farmer was placed in a desperate situation. If his neighbours were unable to help him out with seedlings surplus to their needs, his annual tobacco crop would have failed before it was even planted.

It was customary for most farmers in the district to plant more seedbeds than they required and Jimmie Campbell was, therefore, able to assure his neighbour of enough plants for ten acres which represented a quarter of Beau's intended crop. Both he and Jimmie, however, felt confident that he'd be able to obtain all the plants that he required from the other farmers in the district provided they, too, had not suffered a similar disease catastrophe.

Maintaining hygiene in the tobacco seedbeds, and keeping the susceptible young plants free of disease, was a constant source of concern to Rhodesia's tobacco farmers. It was also a matter of great importance to the government because, after gold, tobacco was the country's chief source of foreign currency. The seedbed attendants, therefore, were required to disinfect their hands and their feet before entering the fenced seedbed sites to carry out various jobs… such as weeding. Smoking in the nursery was strictly forbidden. But something this year had gone seriously wrong with Beau Lockhard's seedlings.

Nevertheless, it was an ebullient and relieved young farmer who left the house with Jimmie Campbell that morning.

Michael and Daniel were both busy in Marion Campbell's rose garden when the two men emerged from the house. The boys each had short garden forks in their hands with which they were extracting the flourishing weeds and, at the same time, digging in a powdery dry cattle manure.

Michael knew Beau Lockhard well and he liked him, but he felt embarrassed to be seen carrying out such a menial task. He would have liked to have gone over to greet the farmer. Instead, he made as though he had not seen him. He kept his head down and silently continued with his work hoping that the big farmer would not notice him. But that was not to be.

"Hello Michael," Beau Lockhart greeted him cheerfully. *"Are you your mum's garden boy now?"* He laughed.

Standing up politely, Michael blushed as he answered "Hello, Mr. Lockhard. We're working to get some pocket money."

"Tickey[xviii] an hour for Michael and tickey an hour for the pic." Jimmie

Campbell volunteered. “Mike got a two-two for Christmas and he's already run out of ammunition. A hundred cartridges gone in just seven days.”

“They cost five-shillings-and-sixpence a packet,” Beau Lockhard said. He was a hunter himself and he knew these things off by heart. *“…for fifty rounds.”*

“I know,” Michael replied. “That means eleven hours of heavy work for just one packet of bullets… I mean cartridges,” he quickly corrected himself.

‘At a tickey an hour… thru'pence an hour… each.’ This told the farmer that Michael and Daniel were to pool their earnings for the purpose.

“How's he involved?” Beau pointed to Daniel.

The two white men exchanged glances but the elder Campbell did not respond. He knew that his son's special friendship with Daniel was common knowledge in the district. In fact, it had become a subject of much gossip. Few people approved.

“He's my gun-bearer,” Michael said almost pompously. *“And he carries back whatever I shoot.”* This was the type of deceitful answer that he knew would be acceptable to a white Rhodesian farmer. Michael knew that as long as there was a master-servant relationship between the boys it would be acceptable. And, indeed, that explanation seemed to satisfy the big white man.

“And they've got to eat whatever they shoot,” Michael's father said determinedly.

“That's a good idea,” Beau said, nodding his head approvingly. “Stops the little blighter shooting the hell out of anything that moves.”

“That's the way I was taught,” Jimmie Campbell asserted.

Beau Lockhard paused then… turning an idea over in his mind. “Tell you what, Michael,” he said at last, “I've just built a huge aviary at the front of my house and I'm looking for birds to put into it. I'll pay you in bullets… in cartridges… if you can catch me the birds I want.” The farmer turned then to Jimmie Campbell. “That is, if that's all right with your Dad?”

“Its fine by me,” Michael's father smiled his approval.

“And that’ll get you out of the rose garden,” Beau said with a naughty smile. He felt certain his idea would appeal to the boys.

“Sure thing, Mr. Lockhard. What birds do you want?”

It was Daniel who knew what to do. In fact, he knew precisely what to do. By nightfall that same day the two boys had already completed two of the basic tasks of Daniel's bird catching plan.

The first of these was to fill a large paper packet with long tail hairs from the farm's Friesland bull. This was not difficult to do because the jagged spines on the barbed-wire fence around the bull's paddock were festooned with the longest and the strongest of the exact type of cattle tail hairs they required.

The second task was to prepare four hoops which they made from the thin stems of msasa tree saplings. The hoops were half again as big as a tennis racquet and they were bound into the correct circular shape with the raw cambium bark of the msasa tree. At two inch intervals across these frames they strung taut gusi-tambo… twisted bush-twine… which the boys made themselves from the same inner bark of the msasa.

The first thing they did the next morning was to dig out four open areas in the tall grassland that grew alongside the reed beds next to the farm dam. Under Daniel's direction they made the openings some five feet across and they flattened the ground in the centre. They then laid back, and trampled flat, all the tall grass that surrounded the cleared spaces.

This done, they overlaid the flat central area with an inch of fine sandy soil which they carried up in buckets from the high banks of the Gumbora river. Finally they covered this soft soil with a handful of coarse white mealiemeal.

Their trap sites thus well prepared, and pre-baited, the boys then set about completing the construction of their traps. The next chore was so tedious and laborious it took them what remained of that afternoon, and the following two days, to complete. The job comprised fastening one end of individual tail hairs, at two-inch intervals, along each of the cross-frame cords. When this was done, they fashioned the other end of each hair into a simple noose. It was exacting work which required great concentration and patience. And by the time their task was complete they had tied almost a thousand of the delicate snares onto the many strings that crossed the four frames.

Michael wanted to trim off the long ends of the hairs but Daniel showed him that these were important. He placed a finger in one noose and lifted his hand drawing it gently tight. Then he pulled at the loose end and the noose opened up again.

“We want the birds alive, don't we?”

Michael nodded.

“Well then, we must leave the noose tails on. We'll catch some birds around the legs and others around the neck. And we will only be able to get them out of the snares by pulling on the loose ends.”

It was all so very simple and obvious. Michael smiled to himself and he nodded his head with understanding.

“It also saves us breaking the hairs and having to replace them.” That, too, made sense!

“Where did you learn all this, Daniel?”

“In the olden days,” Daniel explained. “the Shona picannins used to catch small birds like this to eat. All the old people know how to make these traps. It was my uncle in the Soswe who taught me. As you know I sometimes go and stay with him when you’re away at school. He knows all about these things. One day I must take you to meet him.”

Every morning before the two boys began their work on the traps, they faithfully tended the trap sites, replacing the mealiemeal which had been eaten by the birds the previous day.

The first morning they discovered that very little had been eaten but, thereafter, all they ever found were the foot prints the birds had left behind. This told the boys the bait sites had been located, and by the time all four trap frames were complete, the birds had learnt that a good and consistent food supply could be found in the open areas amongst the grass.

Daniel was an expert bird catcher and Michael was to discover that their careful preparation of the trap sites was to pay handsome dividends in the days ahead.

On the fourth morning following the day that Beau Lockhard had made the birds-for-bullets proposition to Michael, the boys carried their completed frames down to the trap sites.

Daniel was responsible for setting the traps and he did this with great expertise. At each site he first gathered up and rearranged the scattered soft soil in the centre of the open area, smoothing it flat with the palm of his hand. This done, he extracted from his pocket a handful of coarse white mealiemeal which he sprinkled over the top of the loose soil.

Michael did not interfere. He stood back and he watched, making a mental note of everything that Daniel did. In this exercise, his Shona friend was the mentor and he the protégé.

Finally, Daniel placed a trap-frame over the prepared and flattened bait and, with a thumb and a forefinger pressing down on either side, he gently shuffled the hoop until all the cross-strings had disappeared below the surface of the soil. Carefully and gently he then covered the circular wooden frame with more of the sandy soil which he pushed up from the sides all around. When he had finished, all that could be seen was the veil of tiny nooses. They completely smothered the exposed white bait on the surface.

When they had set all four traps they went back to Michael's house to collect the wire-mesh-fronted wooden box which they had prepared as a holding cage. They returned with it to the vlei to wait and to watch from a distance. They visited the traps, individually, shortly after they saw a flock of birds descend to the baits. It did not take the birds very long to become ensnared. The caught birds were carefully released into the holding cage and the traps were reset.

"Red bishop birds," Michael identified the red puff-ball birds that flew about with their very ordinary-looking brown ladies. *"Mr. Lockhard wants some of them."*

"Orange-breasted waxbills," he positively identified another species as a flock descended onto one of the baits.

The Shona people did not have names for ordinary birds. To them all small birds were simply called inyonis. Only spectacular birds, like Chapungu the bateleur eagle, had special names. Daniel was always amazed that his white friend could identify what he looked upon as simply LBJs… the Little Brown Jobs. And Michael named them immediately with so much confidence. He had seen the pictures of the local birds in Michael's bird reference books and he had learnt some of their names, too, but he could never identify them in the field.

"And that one?" Daniel asked, pointing to an exotic-looking black bird with a long flowing tail and a crimson slash across its throat.

"Cut-throat widow bird. If we can get one of those it'll be worth at least ten bullets on its own."

With Daniel's expertise and with their combined work and patience, the boys soon had a consignment of birds ready. Then Michael's long-suffering mother drove him and his birds over to the neighbouring farm. It was the evening of the third day after they had begun trapping, exactly one week from the day that Beau Lockhard had made his offer to Michael.

The farmer was well pleased with his acquisitions. In the shipment there were several species of the birds that he had wanted. He was particularly pleased with the two male cut-throat widow birds. When he had made his offer to young Michael, he had had no idea that the boy would be so successful… and so quickly. His estimation of the Campbell lad, as a naturalist, shot skyward.

Michael, prudently, did not mention Daniel's superior role in their accomplishment.

"A hundred rounds?" Beau said, bartering, as he, Michael and Marion Campbell stood outside the huge aviary and watched the birds flying about in comparative freedom inside.

"Rounds?"

"Bullets… Cartridges… A hundred cartridges."

'A hundred cartridges!' The most Michael had hoped for was a single packet of fifty. *'A hundred bullets!'* He nodded his head in eager agreement. He was not a good negotiator.

"They're worth more." the farmer said relenting. "So… I'll tell you what, Michael. I'm going to give you a hundred and fifty for this first lot."

'A hundred and fifty bullets!' His conditioned mind automatically turned back to making him use the incorrect word for cartridges. He had to keep reminding himself that the word bullet referred just to the lead projectile.

"But from now on we're going to have to start getting a bit more choosy," the farmer said in a more business-like manner. "You've given me six male red bishops, and eight females. I don't want any more of those. I'd like a few more cut-throats, though, and some more orange-breasted waxbills.

"And some blue waxbills… They live in the dry bush veld away from the vleis. Do you think you can catch me some of them?"

Michael nodded. He wasn't at all sure if they could catch blue waxbills but he was not going to admit to that fact.

"And some bronze mannikins. They should be easy. Masked weaver birds… both male and female. And some…" The farmer ran through the names of a series of common seed-eating birds that he thought the boy would be able to catch.

Michael listened carefully. Silently he nodded his head at the mention of each species.

"And," Beau Lockhard added quickly, his eyes gleaming, "if you could catch me some paradise wydahs… They'll be worth a packet of fifty each."

Michael stared at the man. What he was saying was incredible. *'One packet of bullets for one bird!'*

"You know the paradise wydah?"

Michael nodded. They were bigger birds than the cut-throat widow birds, with orange breasts and they had a very long, hump-backed, pointed black tail. *"The Mashona call them sakabulas."*

"That's right. All right then… We have a deal. One paradise wydah… one packet of fifty cartridges."

He'd have to consult with Daniel how best to capture the exotic-looking birds. And if Daniel didn't know they'd have to ask his friend's uncle in the Soswe. He seemed to know everything.

Michael thought then of Daniel. His young Shona friend had certainly earned all the practice cartridges that he had so far used… and more. And it seemed he would be earning all those that he would use in the future, too.

The boys had discovered a gold mine in Beau Lockhard but the farmer was obviously going to impose more and more limitations on the birds he accepted. Their task, therefore, would clearly become harder and harder as they satisfied the man's requirements for the more common species on the list.

Chapter 13

THE rifle lay on the table. There was half a packet of cartridges left. The yellow box lay on the rough planks of the table in the cave next to the little weapon. The boys had spent the morning shooting dassies and three of their dark brown bodies lay on the floor at the entrance to the cave. One of them had been shot by Daniel. It was his first kill.

They'd later take the carcasses to the rock above the Gumbora waterfall where they'd gut them and skin them out. Then they'd take the meat and the skins to Daniel's mother who had agreed to make Michael another kaross blanket in exchange for the meat. It was a fair deal and the boys had agreed to sell the new kaross to buy more cartridges.

The procurement of more and more ammunition had suddenly become the most important factor in their lives. But it was not the only one. There were still the women to ogle.

The boys lay on the flat rock watching the women bathing. Michael's mind, however, was preoccupied with devising a plan to catch those elusive paradise wydahs. They never seemed to be in the same place twice and Daniel had no special ideas on how to catch them. But there must be a way… a simple way. Michael wanted to discover it quickly for they were running out of ammunition again. They needed more cartridges and that meant more birds had to be caught.

Michael had delivered only that one consignment of birds to the farmer's aviary. Since then he and Daniel had become totally engrossed in using up the one hundred and fifty rounds that Beau Lockhard had given them. Now it was time for a resupply. But the frame-traps they had made all needed re-noosing, a long and tedious job for which neither of them had much heart.

Michael had increased Daniel's daily target practice to ten cartridges a day. He deserved it, but that number used up a lot of rounds very quickly. And, just as Jimmie Campbell had predicted, the hunting had not been as easy as Michael had at first imagined.

The crafty dassies had very quickly learned the young hunters' intentions and they disappeared down the crevices between the rocks whenever the boys

appeared on the scene. To kill just one dassie they had to crawl about the kopjes on their hands and knees, stalking the little animals as they imagined a big game hunter would stalk a lion. The youngsters had to catch the dassies unawares and within easy rifle range or they came home empty handed.

The boys had discovered that stalking dassies was just as much an art as it required, also, an ability to shoot straight. And the more they hunted their elusive quarry the more difficult the task became. To effect a kill they now had to shoot at ever greater distances and they began to experience many, many misses. That meant vital bullets were wasted. This morning they had been very lucky. Five bullets fired, three dassies killed. It was not always like that, however, and they were forever conscious of the scarcity of their ammunition.

The boys knew there was really not enough time left in the holidays for them to fix the bird traps and then to use up the bullets that they would earn. There were only six days left.

'It may be better,' Michael thought more pragmatically at last, 'simply to eke out the thirty-one cartridges that remained.'

Michael had not forgotten that his father had promised him two packets… one hundred rounds… with which to begin the next school holidays. That meant they would not be short of ammunition at the start of that holiday period. And in Michael's absence during the school term, Daniel promised to repair the old bird traps and to make some new ones for use during the next school holidays.

"Anna Mashonganyika," Daniel said quietly.

"What?" Michael was on a different plane… in another world.

"Anna Mashonganyika," Daniel repeated. He looked at Michael and silently pointed with his face and raised eyebrows towards the pool below.

"That new girl… the slim one with the hard tits and the big nipples. That's Anna Mashonganyika. She is in my class at school."

Michael looked down into the bathing pool and for the first time he saw the nubile young woman standing in the water. He was quite sure he had not seen this girl before. He would most definitely have remembered this girl.

There were several older women in the water, their bellies and their bosoms sagging. Some had slabs of fat hanging in grotesque folds from the broad frames of their older bodies.

The women were in various stages of completing their ablutions. Some had just soaped themselves. Some were squatting in the water rubbing their pubic and anal regions vigorously with bars of blue mottled soap. Yet others had already rinsed off and were wading back to the sandbank where they had left their clothes.

Anna Mashonganyika was different. She had a hard flat belly, her hips were rounded but not fat, and she had the most incredible breasts that young Michael had ever seen. They were small by comparison with the older women, but they were firm and round and the upward pointing nipples were encircled by broad, dark areolae. They moved together… like two hard jelly moulds… shifting and changing shape with her every movement.

This was the kind of body that Michael Campbell, in all his puerile fantasies, had only ever dreamed about. Certainly he had never actually seen such a body in his short and sheltered life. The sight of the girl standing naked below him now, dipping her body into the water, and rubbing soap over that exquisite physique, caused an explosion in his stirring hormones. In his groin his pubescent manhood began to writhe involuntarily with delirious ecstasy.

"Wow!" Michael exclaimed after a short pause. *"Look at those boobs."*

The eyes of both boys were riveted on the young woman as she carefully and innocently bathed her body unknowingly in their full view.

"Her father was a Chinaman. You should see her eyes."

"What did you say her name was?"

"Anna. Anna Mashonganyika," Daniel replied.

The Shona boy looked with some attention at Michael's face, surprised by his friend's obvious interest. *"Her step-father is a pure Shona. He's your Dad's foreman in the tobacco grading sheds."*

"Whew…" Michael could not take his eyes off the girl's voluptuous young body.

"She's ready for the bull…" Daniel said with feigned adult authority.

Michael looked at him askance.

"Don't you see," Daniel explained. "She has just joined the group of older women. She's no longer bathing with the junior girls in the lower pool. That means she's bled."

"She's had her first period? The curse?"

"That's what I mean. Yes! Now her father will be looking for a husband for her."

“A husband?”

“Yes. Anna can have children now so she's ready for marriage. She will fetch a good bride price.”

“Lobola? Her father will sell her for cattle?”

“Yes. She'll fetch maybe five cows… and then probably twenty-five pounds in cash, too.” Daniel spoke like a man who was something of an authority on the subject. And indeed he was because this was a subject that the older Mashona spoke about quite openly in front of their children.

“Now the Amais… the older women… will teach Anna all about adult life. How not to have babies when she doesn't want them. How to carry her babies safely in her belly when she does want them… and how to look after her babies when they are born. And they will teach her all about the other tribal taboos of the mZezuru people.”

Michael looked down again at the young woman… unhappily now. He felt a great and surprising despondency. He tried to visualise all that Daniel was saying. Unconsciously he thought: *‘What a waste’*. Somehow he could not conceive of Anna whatever-her-name-was being sold to an older man like some beast on a cattle sale.

“Would you like to meet her?”

“Uh-uhh.” Michael said quickly… too quickly… shaking his head.

Daniel raised his eyebrows quizzically. He had hit a nerve. This was one facet of Michael's personality about which he knew absolutely nothing.

Michael Campbell was not afraid of very much in this life. He was one of those little boys who had always dared to venture where angels feared to tread. But there was one thing of which he was scared. And that was *girls*. He didn't know how to conduct himself in their company and he felt inadequate and awkward when he was forced to speak to them. As a result, even in the school classroom, he treated girls as total nonentities. He ignored them and he avoided those situations in which he would be required to address them. Nevertheless, like all other little boys his age, he still entertained naively romantic and sometimes childishly erotic fantasies about girls. At least, in that regard, he was quite normal.

“You like her breasts?”

“Huh-Huhh… What a question?” Michael answered in all honesty.

“Wouldn't you like to feel them?”

“Uh-uhh.” Again Michael's response was quick… too quick… in the

negative.

Daniel now knew he had his young white friend on a strange and tender hook.

“Michael,” Daniel remonstrated. “Do you not want to touch her breasts because she is a Shona? Or is it because you are shy? Have you never touched a girl's breasts before?”

“I suppose you're going to tell me that you've felt her breasts?” Michael swung the subject round adroitly… almost belligerently.

Daniel laughed. *“Yes… of course.”*

Michael's mouth dropped open.

“I told you,” Daniel continued. “She is in my class at school. All the boys in my class have felt her tits. I've felt all the girls' tits… those that have any. There's nothing wrong with seeing, or feeling, a girl's breasts. It’s the bit between her legs you mustn't touch. mZezuru custom forbids anyone to touch that bit. Only the woman's husband may do that.”

Michael did not know what to say.

“Are you sure you wouldn't like to feel her tits?” Daniel persisted. “I can arrange it.”

Michael looked down at the young girl in the water. She was making her way towards the sand bank now. Her body was fantastic. He thought about Daniel's proposition… about feeling those delectable breasts. The idea intrigued him. It excited him. But he shook his head negatively knowing that he would never be able to screw up enough courage to do that.

Nevertheless, the lascivious suggestion affected Michael strangely. He felt light-headed and his breathing became very shallow. Just the thought of such a wanton experience left him weak at the knees.

“No!” he said at last… resolutely. “No. I don’t want to touch her breasts!”

They did not catch any more birds that school holiday and they rationed their ammunition to the very last day. That was also the last school holidays either of them trapped cane rats. Michael's fabulous Christmas present, the .22 single-shot BSA rifle, was the vehicle that transported the two boys from infancy into sub-adulthood.

There was much more to follow as the natural flow of time brought both boys into and through their periods of puberty. Sexual maturity brought many natural changes to their bodies and it transformed their physical needs. It also radically changed their value judgments.

The day before both boys left the farm for their respective new high schools, when their excitement and their anxieties were bubbling to the surface with equal passion, Daniel dropped an unexpected bombshell into Michael's lap.

Michael had been occupied all morning with his mother. They had marked all his new school clothes with his name in an indelible ink. They had together checked each item off on the clothing list she had prepared. Then they had packed the clothes neatly into the big black metal trunk that would accompany him on the steam train to Plumtree.

He still, nevertheless, had to collect the travelling rugs, the pillows, and his kaross from the cave. He had agreed, therefore, to meet Daniel in their secret hideout later that last afternoon. There they were then to bid each other a final farewell until the next school holidays… and good luck for the coming year.

Daniel, as expected, was waiting for him in the cave. Michael, however, was astounded to find that he had brought someone else along with him. It was Anna Mashonganyika.

The two of them were lying down together on the flat rock looking down at the women’s bathing pool. As Michael entered the cave they backed away from the precipice and rose to their feet to meet him. They were holding hands.

Anna wore a dark blue skirt that reached down to her calves and her pointed young breasts, with their erect sharp nipples, stood out hard against her red and blue floral blouse. Her breasts looked like two emergent volcanoes. At that moment Michael recalled Daniel's suggestion that he should feel them. He almost panicked now at the thought.

Her feet were bare, as was her head. Her hair was much straighter than the normal tight, wiry wool of the full-blooded Mashona. She had, however, cut it very short.

This was the first time Michael had seen Anna close up and despite his disapproval of her presence in the cave he was intrigued by her unusual features. Her face was a picture of attractive oriental planes. Her lips were full, but not as thick as Daniel's, and when she smiled she displayed two rows of perfect white teeth. They looked like symmetrical white maize pips on a mealie cob.

Despite her youth, Anna already had the tall and developing lithe body of woman. When she moved it was with a natural grace and her hips flowed with an adult sensual promise.

It was her eyes that held Michael's attention. He remembered Daniel telling him she had a flush of Chinese blood in her veins. It showed most strongly in her eyes. Her strikingly high cheekbones seemed to push the outer corners of her eyes backwards, towards her temples, giving them a fascinating almond shape. The pupils were bottomless pits of dark amber which sparkled now as she looked at him. And they shone with a captivating mischief.

Despite her outwardly bold appearance, Michael could sense the girl's inner nervousness. There was an intriguing timidity hiding behind her composed facade. She was not accustomed to being in the company of a white person… even a young white person… let alone one who was on apparent equal terms as Daniel clearly was with Michael.

Michael stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Anna. Despite his immediate attraction towards the beautiful black girl, there was also a conflicting rejection of her presence in the cave. His face blanched turning instantly into a cold and unbelieving mask. His whole demeanour projected hostility. Despite this, he still felt strangely drawn to the Shona girl. His mind was awhirl with conflicting emotions.

Nevertheless, he immediately understood that what Daniel had done was unforgivable… sacrilegious. It was bad enough that Anna now knew of their unique hideaway… their secret cave… but Daniel had also shown her their lofty perch overlooking the women's bathing pool. He wondered what others of their special secrets he had betrayed.

"Michael…" Daniel said, smiling diffidently. *"This is Anna Mashonganyika."* He spoke in Chi-Zezuru. It was a language that all three of them could understand.

Michael said nothing. He simply stared at Anna… embarrassed. He was having trouble comprehending the fact she was really standing there in the cave in front of him. He was aghast at Daniel's disregard of their sacred trust… but in spite of this his fascination for the girl persisted.

"Daniel," he said softly in English. His amazement, his disappointment and his confusion rang clearly in his voice. *"Why did you bring her here?"*

"She is my girlfriend, Michael. From now on she will be part of us."

Michael shook his head. *"No Daniel. She cannot be part of us."* He continued to speak in English. He suspected Anna was not a student of the language and he did not want her to understand what he was saying.

"I cannot be seen with her, Daniel. I cannot be seen with her by anyone. Can you imagine what would happen if my mother or my father were ever to

hear that I had been seen in the bush with a Shona girl?"

Daniel had clearly not thought of that possibility. He now gripped his bottom lip between his teeth and considered the implications carefully.

"We hunt all the time in the bush, Daniel," Michael persisted. "What would people think if they saw her and me together in the bush? They'd think…"

"She needn't come into the bush," Daniel interjected abruptly. "She doesn't have to come hunting with us. She can meet us here in the cave. She can cook our food and she can keep the cave clean. She will be our woman. It could be fun…"

"Not for me… I don't want anything to do with this girl, Daniel." Michael was inflexible. "You have spoiled everything we ever had by bringing her here."

Michael remembered then, the many happy and mischievous hours that he and Daniel had spent lying on the rock looking at the naked women in the bathing pool below. *'No! Things would not be the same again. Not ever again. Daniel had ruined it all.'*

Then Michael realized, with a shock, that he had enjoyed many mental sexual fantasies with this fresh and nubile black girl. Since he had first seen her, he had made love to Anna Mashonganyika, passionately, many, many times in his imagination… in his dreams. Suddenly he felt embarrassed and ashamed.

"Come on Michael. Don't be a stick in the mud. We can work something out."

"No, Daniel. I don't want anything to do with it… with her." Michael said stubbornly… curtly. The angry tones in his voice created a bellicose ambience that was unmistakable.

"You don't like me because I'm a Shona." Anna understood more English than Michael had given her credit for. She spoke the language haltingly but with some confidence. Anna had picked up the hostile vibes astutely. She then expressed her correct interpretation of his attitude… tersely… again… in clear Chi-Zezuru.

She had a pleasant, well-modulated voice and, for a moment, Michael was distracted.

"You are just like all the other marungus." Anna exclaimed angrily.

He watched her lovely eyes, fascinated by the flashing signals that betrayed her ire.

He shook his head slowly… negatively. ‘No,’ he thought. ‘No! It isn't that. It isn't that at all… Or is it?’

“Daniel said you were different from the other makiwas. He said you were like a white mZezuru.” She was challenging him boldly. Her eyes flashed. Her anger finally overcoming her timidity. “But you're not. You're no different at all from the other marungus, are you Michael? You don't really like us Mashona at all.”

She was standing proudly erect at Daniel's side. She was taller than both Daniel and Michael at that time. It was now very clear that her earlier fear of the white boy had been replaced with a glowering anger.

Michael as usual did not know how to respond to this girl… to a real live girl standing right in front of him. The fact that Anna was black made no difference to his usual feelings of inadequacy and discomfort when in a girl's company… any girl’s company. Whatever her colour, Anna Mashonganyika was still a girl.

A great, urgent and passionate need to act… to do something… overcame him. He simply had to do something… anything… to displace himself from the awkward mental anguish that had suddenly overwhelmed him. The time for talking was long past.

“Haaghhh”, his emotions exploded suddenly with a bewildering exasperation. He, too, had become very angry. He was not about to argue-the-toss with a girl… and an ignorant black girl at that. But his chagrin was not directed at Anna. Inwardly he was fuming… raging… at Daniel.

Churlishly he pushed passed Anna. As he passed Daniel he looked his Shona friend in the face with a furious and silent malevolence. Without another word he gathered up the two travelling rugs and his kaross from the palliasses. He made no attempt to fold them but flung the blankets roughly over his shoulder. Then he grabbed both cushions in one hand and he stormed, in a blustering fury, out of the cave.

He raced along the path towards the waterfall, his anger and his confusion swamping his common sense. With every step he told himself, resolutely, that his long standing friendship with Daniel Moyo was over. It was finished. Kaput! Daniel had committed the unforgivable. He had broken their trust. He had revealed their special secrets to another… and to a girl no less. He remembered that it was Daniel himself who, over the years, had insisted that no one should ever know about their spying platform. His Shona friend had broken the code and in so doing he had shattered the close bond that had held

them together for so long… and all because the silly ass had found himself a bloody girlfriend.

PART THREE

THE SVIKIRO NEHANDA
MOZAMBIQUE
1970

Chapter 14

MBUYA Nehanda was very old. Her body was wasted and her stretched loose hide hung in wrinkled folds from her skeletal frame. Fresh green cow dung was smeared over the exposed parts of her fragile black skin to protect it from the ravages of the sun and the wind.

She was dressed in a length of plain black cloth, the two top corners of which were tied in a rough knot above her right shoulder. A black sash of sorts was wrapped around her midriff.

Her left shoulder and both her arms were bare, as were her feet. Her thin white hair was wild and fuzzy. Grass bangles adorned her wrists and she had a narrow goatskin amulet tied tightly above her left elbow.

Despite her decrepit state and deeply crenellated face, the old svikiro had the eyes of a young woman. They were dark brown and bright, reflecting great intelligence. When she was in a trance, as she was right now, they came to life with an intensity that had to be seen to be believed.

The séance was well advanced and the mbuya sat stiffly erect on her simple cane mat, her legs stretched straight out in front of her. She did not move. Her eyes were cast directly to the fore. The copious sweat on her face glistened in the mottled sunlight that filtered down through the canopy of a giant mahacha tree above her head. The large group of people sitting and standing in a semi-circle at the edge of the clearing watched with rapt attention, gripped by the significance of the occasion. The silence was palpable.

Then, abruptly, the spirit was amongst them. No one doubted it. They knew the instant it arrived. Its invisible presence was tangible and everyone present could feel it. Even the wind ceased its blowing and the birds fell quiet as the svikiro's old body began to quake.

In a sudden, violent action, the old crone's back was wrenched powerfully erect. Then she fell precipitously onto her side in a paroxysm of thrashing convulsions. She gagged grotesquely… spluttering… juddering… and foaming at the mouth. Her head thrashed from side to side and it appeared that she could not breathe.

The four matrons, who were sitting in attendance at the edge of the mat,

scrambled forward to grab hold of her wrists and her ankles. They held her firmly spread-eagled on the mat, as the svikiro's ancient body contorted, twisting and shaking with an astonishing strength and ferocity.

Suddenly, her body stiffened… and then relaxed. And Nyamhita-Ne-Handa penetrated the ancient and fragile shield that protected the svikiro's mortality. For several long moments the senile old lady lay in a shivering, quivering heap. Then the great spirit from the past quietly took possession of her inner soul.

When the convulsions finally ceased, the four matrons gently released the old medium's limbs. Then, crawling backwards on their hands and knees, they retired to the four corners of the mat. There they knelt, their buttocks resting on their heels, facing inwards towards her. For a long while the svikiro lay on her side breathing heavily. There was a strange new vibrancy in her eyes as, from her supine position she looked at the people sitting all around her. She lifted her head and looked through the crowd as though she were looking for someone in its midst. Her eyes focused on Rex Mbudzi. It was obvious to everyone present that the old crone was now possessed.

Presently the mbuya sat upright again. She was calm and composed and she stretched her legs out straight in front of her as before. There was no sign of her previous agitation. She seemed strangely rejuvenated. She cast bright shining eyes of approval over the bolts of black cloth and the many trussed live black chickens that had been laid out in front of her. These were the offerings brought to her by the village headmen who now sat in a circle, several men deep, all about her.

The svikiro's native visitors were dressed in an assortment of European clothes. Some wore jackets and ties. Others were dressed in open neck shirts. Most had *manyatellas* on their feet. Some wore shoes. One thing they all shared was dishevelment in their general appearances. They were all simple traditional tribal leaders.

When the mbuya finally settled down, Rex Mbudzi stepped inside the ring of old men and he boldly… almost arrogantly… confronted the now vibrant svikiro. He was dressed in Soviet grey-and-silver camouflaged battle fatigues. The black butt of a Russian Togarev pistol protruded from the holster on his belt.

"NEHANDA," he called out boldly in a loud voice. *"ARE YOU WITH US?"*

The old woman looked the guerrilla commander squarely in the eye. She answered him with a confident and powerful voice. It was not the voice of the old crone that replied but that of a strong young woman. *"I am with you nkomana of ZANLA."*

"GHHHAWWW…" The involuntary chorus from the old headmen clearly expressed their awe, and their fearful acceptance of the great spirit's presence.

Daniel and Anna, standing in the background, were rooted to the ground. They were both utterly spellbound. An eerie sensation crawled up and down their spines. It wandered over their arms like a flush of the measles. Neither of them had witnessed anything like this before and they felt, strangely, very much afraid.

Mbudzi had attended one previous such visitation of the spirit. It had occurred only three weeks earlier in the Svikiro's own village on the banks of the Musengezi river. On that occasion Nehanda had told the northern Mashona chiefs that she supported ZANLA and that she expected them to do likewise. On that occasion Nyamhita-Ne-Handa had instructed Mbudzi to take the old svikiro out of Rhodesia's north eastern rural districts. It was the spirit's wish, so Mbudzi and the chiefs had been told, that the ZANLA commander should take the old woman to a place of safety far from the battle zones of the coming war.

Mbudzi had heeded that instruction. And, much against the wishes of the mbuya herself, he had had her carried to Chifombo on a *mashiela*… a bed made of sacking that was lined with softer blankets and strung between two stout carrying poles. Four strong young men had carried her all that way. And Mbudzi, Muliloh and Motoh had escorted the Svikiro and her Musengezi matrons on the long journey.

Chifombo was FRELIMO's main rear-base in Mozambique. It was three days' march north of the Zambesi River, not too far from the southern border of Malawi… still known to the Tawara Mashona as Nyasa. So this gathering of the Mashona elders was taking place five full days of arduous travel north of the closet point on Rhodesia's northern border.

Mbudzi had been shaken after that first encounter with the supernatural. He had been reluctant to discuss his sentiments regarding what he believed of that experience, even with Daniel. His sudden transformation, from a total skeptic to a hesitant believer, had been inexplicably eerie. It was obvious that,

after his engagement with the spirit, he was confused and that he did not really know what to believe. Nevertheless, a change in his attitude was clearly evident.

"Rex is putting on a good front." Daniel whispered softly. He knew that Mbudzi was now truly fearful of this strange spirit of the underworld.

"Shhh…" Anna was absorbed.

She now understood why Rex had been so affected by that first experience. The Mbuya Nehanda really *did* appear to be speaking with the voice of the spirit. There was no doubt that it was the old woman who was speaking, neither was there any doubt that it was a younger woman's voice that emanated from her toothless maw. The fragile old woman could not possibly have faked that vibrantly strong and clear young voice.

Mbudzi looked around at the faces of the old men in the congregation. There were three hundred and forty-three elders present. They were all senior village headmen of the Tawara Mashona. Their grey and balding heads proclaimed their unquestionable age. And their absolute silence, their total immobility, their unwavering concentration, and the wild look in their staring eyes, bespoke of their unqualified belief in the presence of the great Nehanda.

Mbudzi looked confidently back at the old woman. "Nehanda," he said in a clear and powerful voice. "You spoke to the chiefs at Musengezi and there you commanded that they instruct their senior sabookus to come to Chifombo. They are all here now… from the Dande… Muzarabani… Gutsa… Mukumbura… Chiswiti… Kandeya… Masoso…" Rex ran slowly through the list of Mashona chieftainships that existed along Rhodesia's north-eastern border with Mozambique. "Except for those who are seriously ill or dying, and those who cannot walk, all the senior village headman of the Tawara Mashona people are present here today. And as you instructed, the Great Chief Chiwashe is here again, too. Do you have a message for them, Nehanda?"

"Tell Chiwashe to come forward." The terse instruction took Mbudzi by surprise. But he made no comment.

Chiwashe was a middle aged man of heavy broad stature. He came forward reluctantly to stand by Mbudzi's side, nervously turning his soft felt hat around in his hands.

The chief wore a grey three-piece suit, with a white shirt and a dark tie. He had polished black shoes on his feet. It was an incongruous ensemble for the

rough guerrilla bush camp and he was sweating profusely… the result of both his fear of the great mhondoro and of the heat of the lower Zambesi sun.

"Chiwashe is the senior chief of the Tawara Mashona," Daniel told Anna in an undertone. "If he provides a lead the others will follow."

The big man looked subdued. He was cowed in the presence of the great spirit. He hung his head and he looked from beneath lowered eyebrows at the shrivelled old svikiro.

"I am here, Nehanda," he said in hoarse voice, clearing his throat volubly.

"Nkomana ne ZANLA," the spirit addressed Mbudzi with an arrogant authority. "You may leave the circle now. I shall speak to my people through Chiwashe."

The guerrilla commander had been dismissed!

Mbudzi turned and quietly stepped back through the circle of old men. He was sweating and trembling visibly as he joined his two comrades. And despite his outward facade of equanimity, inside himself he had again been deeply moved. Silently he nodded to Anna and to Daniel and he raised a hesitant hand towards the nearest of the several hundred FRELIMO soldiers who looked at him from the surrounding throng.

Since the start of the ceremony the FRELIMO fighters had stood in absolute silence, watching the proceedings with awe and respect. The black people of Africa accept that it pays to respect the spirit world whether you believe in it or not.

The ZANLA commander sighed loudly… unconsciously. Anna and Daniel noticed a strange, incredulous look in his eyes. He turned away from them and watched the continuing ceremony in silence.

"Chief Chiwashe," the spirit said… then she paused. Nehanda was clearly ignoring the presence of the elders knowing full well, however, that they were listening.

"Yes, Nehanda?"

"As I told your chiefs at Musengesi, you will now tell the sabookus that the time has come to drive the white man into the sea."

"Yes, Nehanda. I shall tell them."

"You will tell them that the vakomana of ZANLA are my soldiers. They will hold the spears of Nehanda in the war against the white man that is soon to come. And you must tell the people they must help the vakomana of ZANLA to win that war."

“Yes, Nehanda. All the sabookus are present. They can hear you.”

“They must help my soldiers by feeding them and by hiding them from the marungus. And they must help them by hiding Nehanda's spears which the vakomana of ZANLA will bring to them.”

“I shall tell them all this, Nehanda.”

“I shall speak to them through their midzimus. The village spirits will tell the sabookus what other things they must do to help the vakomana of ZANLA.”

“I hear you, Nehanda.”

The strident young voice of the spirit continued. “And finally, Chiwashe, you must tell the people that the vakomana of ZANLA will use my spears on any Mashona man… or woman… or child… who fails to support my soldiers.”

“The sabookus have heard every word you have said, Nehanda.”

“No one must betray the vakomana of ZANLA to the white man, Chiwashe.”

“It shall be as you say, Nehanda.”

“That is good, Chiwashe. And you, Chiwashe, must help my people to remember all this… for all time… after I return to the spirit world.”

“I shall so remind them, Nehanda.”

“Tell my children to fight well, Chiwashe, for the coming war will surely see the white man driven out from the land of the Mashona.”

“I shall tell them to fight well, Nehanda.”

There followed a prolonged silence. Everyone stared at the old woman. They were waiting, open-eyed and open-mouthed, for Nehanda's next words. But there were to be no more words. Without any warning, the mbuya suddenly shrivelled back into her former self. She began to shiver and to quake as the spirit slowly wrested itself from its mortal anchor.

The old woman's four disciples quickly returned to help her. They laid her gently back onto the mat, and prepared to add their own strength to her scrawny limbs as the mhondoro brutally detached itself from its crucible in the svikiro's soul.

Abruptly the old woman began to convulse… violently and savagely. She grunted and groaned… and she screamed, as if she were wrestling fiercely with the supernatural power that possessed her. The physical turbulence she now experienced was much worse than that she had endured before… when

the spirit had come to her. Nyamhita-Ne-Handa was clearly having great trouble extricating herself from her medium's earthly grip.

“She can't take much more of that,” Anna said worriedly. “How much longer can her weak old body withstand that kind of punishment?” She was now genuinely concerned for the frail old woman.

Neither Daniel nor Rex Mbudzi responded. So transfixed were they by the scene unfolding before them it was doubtful they even heard her. Anna looked at them and saw their faces were set in moulds of terrible torment. Their wide eyes were swimming with tears. Both men were staring… wild with terror and anguish at the old woman's berserk contortions. Broad rivers of sweat poured from both their faces.

Finally the spirit broke free. The old woman's deranged body crumpled abruptly into an amorphous heap of quivering flesh. She was spent… utterly exhausted. Her chest heaved convulsively with every breath, and the cow dung plaster on her skin sloughed off in soggy sheets as the sweat beneath poured out of her every pore.

It was over. Nehanda had spoken to her people and she had returned once more to the world of the spirits. She left behind her an eerie atmosphere which cloaked the assembled congregation in absolute silence. Even the FRELIMO soldiers were standing like statues, their faces displaying their fears and their new belief in what they had witnessed.

The wind that had been strangely still began to blow anew. It started as a gentle breeze. It gathered strength with each passing moment until once again, the leaves of the mahacha tree began to rustle and bustle, and the birds began to chirrup.

Chief Chiwashe stood immobile and mute. He looked down, bemused, at the enfeebled old woman. But he did not see the mbuya. He was thinking of Nehanda and her message. The great-spirit had placed a heavy burden on his shoulders and he was confused. He felt proud that the mhondoro had seen fit to charge him with such responsibility. Yet he was fearful, too, of the consequences of the war that he now knew was going to come.

The escalating murmur of subdued voices from the gathered elders returned Chiwashe, with a start, to the present. He quietly put his felt hat back onto his head and he turned and walked slowly and thoughtfully back into the throng.

The convocation broke up rapidly as Chiwashe moved away from the gathering. The old men, animated now, discussed the important visitation of

the great mhondoro Nehanda. And they spoke fearfully of the coming chimurenga war, and of ZANLA. Most of them knew nothing of ZANLA and Nehanda's disclosures were the first they had heard about a coming war. On the morrow they would begin their long trek back to Rhodesia, taking back with them the great-spirit's message to her people.

"Think they swallowed it?" Daniel asked.

"Absolutely… That experience was unreal." Anna was deeply moved. She reluctantly had to admit that now she herself did not know quite what to believe. Her objective self laughed the seance off… but emotionally and spiritually, she was beginning to believe that there just might be something real about the strange ancestral spirits of the northern Mashona.

"If you're right, and I'm sure you are, then we've won. We've won the war."

"What do you mean?" asked Anna.

"Have you forgotten already what I told you? All the old men who attended Nehanda's visitation here today, Anna… when they die… will become the next midzimu spirits. The people who live in the village lines from which these old headmen have come know that. And they revere them because of it. The villagers will do nothing to offend these old sabookus, because when the sabookus die the people will want them to enter the spirit world with a good impression of those they leave behind.

"Remember. It is the midzimus who look after the immediate interests of the villagers. So the younger people in the villages will do anything and everything to please their elders. Anything these old men tell them to do they will do… to the letter. Especially if they are told the instruction comes from Nehanda."

"Including helping ZANLA?"

"Including helping ZANLA!"

"And the chiefs… the one's Nehanda spoke to before?"

"They are even bigger fish… even more important. We've netted the whole damn shoal, Anna. Everybody in northern Mashonaland that counts, is from this day forward, on the side of ZANLA."

PART FOUR

North Eastern Rhodesia
1972

Chapter 15

DANIEL sat atop the small rocky kopje watching the farm boss-boy as he wound his way through the boulders towards him. Although he was a ZANLA soldier, Daniel was dressed in ragged mufti. He looked no different, therefore, from the approaching black foreman himself. ZANLA planned to fight in civilian clothes. Merging with the rural people in all respects was to be the guerrilla army's greatest camouflage in the coming chimurenga war.

A group of black labourers were working in the brown fields far below, cultivating the white farmer's young tobacco crop. They knew nothing of their foreman's mission. In fact, most were quite unaware of his departure from the cropland.

The man was breathing heavily by the time he reached Daniel. He flopped down exhausted onto a flat rock beside the soldier, his chest heaving. As a greeting, he waved his hand in recognition of the ZANLA guerrilla's presence and he smiled bravely through his breathless fatigue. Daniel waited patiently for the man's composure to return.

“Six… I've got you… six recruits,” the foreman said at last.

“What are they like?”

“They are all fit young men… They will make good vakomana for ZANLA.”

“When will they be ready?” Daniel asked.

“At the end of next month. They will all resign this evening… after work. But they are under contract. They must give one full month's notice.”

“That's all right. But when the marungu signs them off I want them to bring their situpas[xix] to me. I must have those work certificates.”

“They have agreed.”

Daniel smiled. It was all beginning to happen. And it was happening so much easier than he had ever imagined.

“The marungu farmer will not be happy. He will not like losing six men in the middle of the season.”

“Go with them to the marungu, Comrade Jacob. Tell the marungu that you can get him six replacements without any trouble. We must not let him

persuade these young men that they should stay."

"And will that be true, Comrade Commander? Will I be able to get him six replacements?"

"I shall have six men ready for you by the end of next month." Daniel smiled at the thought. They would all be young freedom fighters fresh from the ZANLA training camps in Tanzania.

"Will they have papers? Situpas?"

Daniel nodded. "The situpas will show that the men all resigned recently from white farms in the Mount Darwin area."

The boss-boy smiled slyly. Daniel had appointed him the ZANLA contact man in the local white farming area. His title gave him a level of importance that was much exaggerated in his own mind. He understood the recruitment strategy.

"The whites are stupid," the foreman opined. "They never check situpas. They never check to see that the fingerprint on the situpa matches that on the man's thumb."

"And that is how we must encourage the marungus to remain, Comrade Jacob… Stupid… The longer the government keeps the black man's identity document simple the better will it be for ZANLA."

Jacob smirked.

"How are the four vakomana you placed for me on Spring Farm doing, Comrade Jacob?"

"They have settled in well, Comrade Commander. None of the other farm labourers there know anything about the men's background. They are simply four ordinary men in the farm labour gang."

"That is good. Visit them, Comrade, and tell them that Comrade Detachment Commander Muliloh sends them greetings. They must just be patient. I shall call upon them once the shooting war starts. But for now they must simply work quietly on the farm."

"I can see they are good men, Comrade Commander. I am sure they will not let you down."

"But we must keep in contact with them as our forces are being built up, Comrade Jacob. Encourage them and tell them our strength gets better every day. Soon we shall have a huge army in the country, one that is being housed, fed and paid for by the mabunu farmers."

The foreman laughed.

"Next week I shall introduce you to another man from ZANLA, Comrade.

And from then onwards I want you to operate through him."

"You are leaving us Comrade Commander?"

"*No. I am moving temporarily to another place where I will be selecting and appointing new contact men."*

"*And you want me to work through this other ZANLA man*?"

"*He shall have my authority, Comrade Jacob. And I shall visit you myself from time to time*."

"*I hope to have at least another three recruits for you by next week… from Mountain View farm."*

"Good. They can be your first consignment with Comrade Havana."

"Havana. That is his name?"

"His chimurenga name, Comrade. That is all you have to know. Now go back to your people and help any of them who might have seen you to forget that you ever climbed this hill today."

Chapter 16

MIKE Campbell could only catch rhinos during the dry season. During the rains the veld was a quagmire and the gravelled roads were not much better. Even the very powerful Mercedes Benz four-wheel-drive recovery lorry could not reach the sometimes peculiar places where the big animals went to sleep after being darted.

A year had gone by since Mike Campbell and his capture team had first started the rhino capture operations in the north-east. They had translocated forty-one animals to the Gonarezhou the previous dry season, but there were still more wandering the Ruya hills. There were also others in the very rough country of the Umfurudzi farther east.

The rhinos in both areas knew the score now. They had been flushed repeatedly the previous year. Every one of those remaining had narrowly missed being darted then… many times. It did not take long, therefore, for these animals to reawaken to the danger posed by the hunters when the capture operations resumed in the winter of 1972. Despite their reputations, black rhinos are far from stupid.

The local Masoso chief had undertaken to keep an eye on the mopani-pole stockades during the intervening rainy season. He was happy to do that because the capture operations gave many of his people a well paid job for many months. The rhino camp at Nyamasoto, therefore, required very little repair when Mike and his game rangers returned. And when they did, the capture team was very quickly back in business.

The third rhino of the year was a juvenile bull. The animal had been darted easily in the field and Mike anticipated no trouble with him in the pens. During the off-loading procedure, however, the half-drugged rhino had barged into Ben, squashing his injured arm up against the poles of the stockade wall. Some of the pink scar tissue on the once-gaping bullet wound scraped off. It was not a serious injury but it subjected the little Bushman to some pain and discomfort.

As soon as the rhino had received the antidote and was safely back on its feet inside its pen, Mike brought the tracker over to the officers' mess tent. There he gently washed and disinfected the abrasion, and he applied an antiseptic salve. Finally, after wrapping the arm in a soft crepe bandage, he

sent Ben back to the camp compound.

This was the first time Mike's young rangers had really seen the result of that terrible injury. When they saw it exposed now for the first time, in all its gory detail, they were aghast at the extent of the shattered muscles. The huge, jagged scar ran from Ben's elbow to his wrist.

Everyone in the department had heard one story or another about the circumstances of the tracker's horrible wounding in 1968. Most stories were hearsay. Some were the product of extravagant imaginations. The rangers knew that Mike and his Bushmen had been tracking ZIPRA terrorists at the time and that there had been a contact. It was rumoured that a white game ranger had tried to kill Ben, and that Mbuyotsi had shot the ranger. But the facts were still shrouded in heavy mystery and Mike wanted to keep them that way.

"I don't want to talk about it," Mike refused to answer their pointed questions. He flung his empty beer bottle angrily into the darkness behind him. *"Anyone for another beer?"*

Tsindi… Jorjo was back to being Tsindi… brought them each a beer.

"Would you tell us then, Mike, about the army tracking you did at Binga… in more general terms?" Peter, being the more mature of the three rangers, pushed the subject confidently. "Let's forget about Ben's arm and how it happened. What was it like tracking ZIPRA terrorists? What was it like being a hunter of men?"

Mike took a deep breath. He let it out slowly… allowing his patience to gather strength.

'Shit! These bloody kids! They looked upon the multiple short ZIPRA battles of 1967 and 1968 as a big adventure. Like hunting elephants and catching rhinos. And they lamented the fact they had missed the experience.'

Mike shook his head sadly and with some degree of exasperation.

"You had a number of contacts with ZIPRA, didn't you, Mr. Campbell?" Richard prompted.

"Seven."

"And what were they like?"

"Fucking frightening," Mike retorted. He experienced a strange, simmering anger at their questions. "You think it's a big bloody game, don't you? I can see it written all over your faces," he rasped impatiently.

The three young rangers remained silent. Nevertheless, they continued to look expectantly at the game warden… willing him to continue. This was the

first time they had ever heard of Mike Campbell opening up to his staff on this subject. They were jubilant and expectant even it if had made him angry.

"Well, let me tell you this…" Mike said shortly. "It's not. It's not like shooting elephants or buffalo you know. The bloody gooks have machine-guns. They shoot back."

Mike paused briefly. He looked at each of his young rangers in turn. They were silent and fidgety, and not convinced.

"You can thank your lucky stars the bloody war's over." Mike paused again… thinking… He looked once more into their excited faces and noticed, with some frustration, that all three of them continued to project a quiet eagerness. They obviously did not accept his opinion on that score either. One after the other they took long swigs of their beers. All the time they watched the game warden and they silently waited for him to continue.

Mike took a long gulp of his own beer. Then he inhaled another deep breath. This time he let it gush out with an explosive whoosh. He snorted.

"I've never been so fucking frightened in all my life. When you use trackers like Ben and Mbuyotsi… and you all know they are two of the best in the country… you also know that, sooner or later, you're going to catch up with the terrs. With good trackers, you know that you're not going to miss them. And when you do catch up with them, it's you and your trackers who walk into the bloody ambush first. You're always the ones up at the point no matter how many army sods you've got to protect you."

"But you never got shot up," Peter remarked.

"More by good fortune than by good management," Mike said crossly. "But you've just seen what happened to Ben. That's for real, you know? Nearly blew his fucking arm off. It wasn't funny."

"It must have been a hell of an experience though, Mr Campbell… hunting down terrorists." Richard said innocently. "Most guys in the department are very envious of you. You know that?"

"How many gooks did you yourself kill personally, Mr. Campbell?" Even timid little Jack Parker was getting into the act now.

Mike shook his head sadly.

"Look chaps… Forget it. I'm not going to glorify the war for you. And I'm not going to talk about it anymore. The subject's closed. But for all your sakes I'm very glad the bloody war is over. Let's hope it stays that way."

Chapter 17

“CAN you hear me, Mack?”

The white farmer was dressed in a bright checkered shirt. His ample paunch hung over his baggy khaki shorts and he wore ankle-length veldskoen boots without socks. Even in the house he kept on his wide-brimmed and grease-stained felt hat.

The telephone box was fastened to the wall, at shoulder height, in the passage of the rambling old farm house. He leant against the well-used dirty patch on the white-washed wall and he shouted into the mouth piece. The connection was very bad. He pressed the handset firmly to the side of his head closing off his idle ear with a forefinger.

“Yaah… Fine. I can hear you fine this end, Tom. Must be the Centenary exchange…”

“Damn telephones!”

“What's that, Tom?”

“I said… Damn telephones.” The farmer shouted into the mouth piece again. “Look… What I phoned you about was this. You signed off three black chappies at the end of last month.”

“I actually signed off five. What about them?”

“Well… Three of them have come here looking for work and I could do with a few more helping hands at the moment. But before I take `em on I'd like to know why you fired them.”

“I didn't fire them, Tom. They asked to be signed off.”

“I'll be damned! At this time of the year? Did they say why they wanted to leave, Mack?”

“Yes. They said the local witchdoctor had cast a spell on them… or something. You know what they're like about their damn spirits in this neck of the woods. Couldn't persuade them it was all a load of baloney.”

The farmer humphed. “Strange people these black fellows! Were they any good?”

“What are their names?”

“Hang on a minute.”

The farmer picked up the three situpas that were lying on the table beneath the telephone.

The old Rhodesian registration certificate gave the name of its legal owner, and his tribal and family affiliations. The man's work registration number appeared in the top right hand corner. There was a square box beneath this number in which appeared the print of the owner's right thumb. There was no photograph. The remainder of the simple single-sheet document comprised a series of columns whereon was listed the man's record of employment, his remuneration and any other benefits that he might have enjoyed. It was a legal requirement that an employer applied his signature to the document when the man commenced work; that his remuneration be recorded; and that he be signed off when he left the farmer's employ.

Except for the thumb print, therefore, it was not possible to determine whether or not the man possessing a situpa was actually its rightful owner. But there was such a time-consuming rigmarole involved with the police in getting the thumb-prints verified that few farmers bothered. When a farmer needed labour, he wanted it 'yesterday'. Therefore, as long as a black man who was looking for employment possessed a situpa, he was usually signed on. It was, nevertheless, a common practice for farmers to phone the work applicant's previous employer to learn something more about his record.

"George Mazwiti?" the farmer shouted into the phone.

"He was quite good, Tom."

"How about… Eliot Kachuta?"

"Now… he was very good. I was sorry to lose Eliot, Tom. He was an excellent worker."

"O.K. And the last one is… Mutega Chisunga?"

"Chisunga we called him. There was nothing wrong with him either. He got pissed a bit at the weekends sometimes, and he was forever getting the clap, but otherwise he was all right."

"Well then, it looks as though I'll sign all three of them on. Thanks Mack."

"Funny thing around Mount Darwin, Tom. There's been a hell of a lot of labour movement recently. Black guys leaving for no apparent reason and others suddenly appearing out of the blue looking for work. What's it been

like at Centenary?”

“Now you mention it… very much the same. I find it a bit disruptive, ‘specially at this busy time of the season. Much prefer to have a steady and happy work force. But at least there's no shortage of labour.”

“Yaah… Here, too. Anything political at Darwin?”

“Naauw… It’s all very quiet, thank God. I think that as long as the government keeps Nkomo, Sithole and Mugabe in detention it'll stay that way. It’s only when those black nationalist bastards are allowed to stir the political shit that we end up having trouble. I hope the government keeps them under wraps forever.”

“Yaah… well. I suppose all three of them want to be our next prime minister. Anyway, what's your crop been like this year?”…

Three more ZANLA freedom fighters had been placed in employment!

Chapter 18

DANIEL eased the heavy back pack from his shoulders, dumping it unceremoniously onto the dusty ground. He settled his weary body gratefully onto the sabooku's hard plank chair. It felt heavenly to be off his feet.

He stood the butt of his AKM assault rifle on the ground at his feet, leaning the barrel against his knee. The flesh ached where the pack straps had eaten into his shoulder muscles. He rubbed them solicitously, grateful that the long journey had at last come to an end.

Other men came into the village in single file. They dropped their burdens with equal gratitude onto the dusty ground. They sat down, exhausted, where they had stopped.

The moon was low on the western horizon but there was enough light for Daniel to count the porters in. There were twenty villagers, three of his own men and himself. Twenty-four in all. The untrained locals had done very well. It had been a long, hard slog from Chifombo.

This load comprised 10 more RPG-7 rocket launchers; 10-by-three racks of RPG rockets plus propellants; 20 new AK-47s still wrapped in their greased plastic sleeves; 10 000 7,62 mm intermediate rounds – for the AK-47s; 20 Togarev pistols; 2 500 rounds of 7,62 mm shorts for the pistols; 20 TM-46 land mines; and sundry slabs of plastic explosive, fuses and detonators.

"The hut is ready, Comrade Commander," the Sabooku addressed Daniel solicitously.

"Thank you, mdala. But have you not got any mahewu ready, too? A bit of refreshment will do us a lot more good just at the moment."

"The women are organising that now, Comrade Muliloh." Indeed, even as he spoke, the women emerged from the murky surrounds carrying clay pots of the unfermented nourishing brew.

The villagers had dug a deep pit in the floor of the headman's kitchen hut. It had been lined with stout mopani poles, and before the first cock crowed that morning, all the arms had been safely buried in the cache.

By midday the pit had been roofed with yet more mopani poles and the women had laid a thick layer of fresh clay over the entire floor. Finally, fresh cow manure was smeared over the clay surface like a polish, and the hut was vacated. It would take a week for the clay to become firm enough for the family to again use the hut for its original purpose.

Another load of arms had been brought into the country. Another arms cache had been concealed by another village headman.

Chapter 19

ARCHIE MacDonald looked through the open doorway of the old pump house. His eyes ran over the people working on the tobacco seedbeds nearby. The borehole's old diesel engine had badly needed the de-coking he had just given it. Archie, feeling self-satisfied with a job well done, smiled to himself as he cleaned the grease from his hands with a petrol-soaked rag.

The workers were weeding. Tobacco and weeds seemed to go together. If the labour wasn't weeding the seedbeds they were weeding the lands. Fighting weeds was a never ending battle.

Suddenly he froze. A small cloud of blue-white smoke drifted across the compact rows of emerald-green seedlings to his left.

"Shit!" he exclaimed angrily. One of the several labourers who were working on the seedbeds was smoking. He stormed out of the pump house, his eyes ablaze. His face was set in a grim mask.

A ripple of alarmed murmurings ran through the workers as they each, in turn, looked up and recognised the farmer's choleric mood. It warned the offender.

Without moving his position in the slightest, the smoker surreptitiously took the burning cigarette from his lips and, with his middle finger he pressed the butt deep into the soft damp ground amongst the growing plants. This action immediately and effectively hid the material evidence of his crime. But he was too late. Baas MacDonald had seen him.

"You're smoking, you bastard," the enraged farmer screamed.

"Aikona, baas. Me no smoking. Me no smoke, baas."

"You're fucking lying, you black bastard."

The farmer was standing over the guilty worker who, submissively, cowered beneath the white man's immense size. The now terrified black man did not shift his position. He remained squatting on the edge of the seedbed he had been weeding.

"I saw you, dammit. And I saw you push the cigarette into the seedbed… amongst the plants."

Archie MacDonald looked into the mass of seedlings at his feet. But he could not find the place where the man had immersed the glowing reefer. The young plants were packed together very tightly, and they had all been disturbed by the weeding action of the workers. He'd have to rip up half the

damn seedbed to find the evidence.

The farm workers all smoked home-made cigarettes rolled in pieces of newspaper. They contained cured scrap tobacco recovered from last season's grading shades. Alternaria was the contagion that tobacco famers feared the most, and it was often passed on from one year's crop to the next via the labourers' cigarette-smoking habit.

Two seasons before Archie had had to destroy all his infected seedbeds and he had had to beg, borrow and scrounge seedlings from other farmers to secure a crop that year. Financial ruin had then stared him in the face. So he was now meticulous about maintaining good hygiene in his seedbeds. Finding one of his workers smoking in the secluded I.C.U. seedbed area, therefore, had the same effect on him as waving a red rag at a bull.

"Where's it? Where've you put the bloody thing?"

"Aikona ahzeh." I don't know! The black man protested his innocence. *"Me no smoke, baas."*

"You fucking liar," the farmer's voice was shrill. He lashed out with his booted foot, ferociously catching the black man in the pit of his stomach as he began to rise. The man lurched backwards. He fell gasping for breath onto the narrow aisle between the long rows of tightly packed seedbeds.

Somehow, even in his frightened state, the worker had contrived to collapse on the pathway. He well knew that had he fallen on one of the seedbeds, had he squashed any of Archie MacDonald's precious baby tobacco plants, his life would not have been worth living.

"You know the fucking rules, you cretin. No smoking in the fucking seedbed area."

The farmer kicked the man again, stomping downward this time into his exposed groin. His victim grunted and doubled over with the pain. He made no other sound. He could not. He was desperately fighting to regain his breath.

"You'll bring fucking disease into the whole crop, you stupid… fucking… kaffir."

Archie MacDonald kicked the man again… and again… and again. And the toe-cap of his heavy boot sank into the man's midriff with every blow. There was a sharp cracking sound as ribs broke.

The farmer's victim, however, felt no further pain. He had by then blacked out.

Chapter 20

CHIEF Chiwashe sat down on the rock next to Daniel and together they surveyed the small farming town of Mount Darwin in the distance. They were located half-way up a high granite kopje which gave them a magnificent view of the countryside all around. From their elevated position they were able to see both the District Commissioner's office and the police camp. Daniel handed his binoculars to Chiwashe.

"Chief," he smiled broadly. "We are going to win this war… We're going to win it."

"Yes, Comrade Muliloh." the chief smiled back. *"I really think we are. With Nehanda's help, we're going to win the coming new chimurenga war."* The elderly tribal leader pressed the field glasses to his eyes and he inspected the people… black and white… coming and going in the distant white man's village.

'With Nehanda's help!' Daniel thought about the chief's pointed remark. He was still not sure what to think about Chiwashe's strange ancestor-worshipping cult.

"With Nehanda's help," he agreed belatedly. 'When in Rome do as the Romans do!'

"You are still not sure about Nehanda?" The chief pulled the glasses down from his face and looked searchingly into Daniel's eyes. "I can feel it in the way you avoid talking about the mhondoro. And I can hear it in your voice when you cannot avoid responding to references about her."

The guerrilla commander held the chief's gaze steadily. "The truth, chief? The truth is that when I first came here I thought it was all a hoax. I really thought old Mbuya Nehanda was taking us all for a ride."

"But after Chifombo…" the chief said with understanding. He knew that everybody who had experienced Nehanda's visit there had been convinced. *"After Chifombo you don't know what to believe, do you?"*

Daniel nodded. "Yes… you're right. Now I don't know what to believe. I was deeply moved at Chifombo and have been troubled ever since. At Chifombo I totally accepted the reality of Nehanda's visitation." He paused

then and he tried to think of something more sensible to say. Nothing came to mind. Finally he shrugged and repeated softly: “Now I don't know what to believe.”

“She is real enough, Comrade Commander. She is very real, indeed, in the hearts and in the minds of the northern Mashona. I believe in her, and I believe in the midzimu spirits, too. And one day the spirits will talk to you, my friend, and you will be convinced also.”

“Is it really important what I believe, chief?”

“Yes, comrade. It is important. It’s important if you want Nehanda to help you and to protect you. You must have faith in her if you expect to gain those benefits.”

Daniel thought deeply about the wisdom in the chief's statement. If he was the spirit called Nehanda, and if he was real, he would expect no less from every ZANLA soldier.

“That's a fair bargain, chief,” Daniel agreed. “I must try harder to think of Nehanda as a living spirit.”

“That would be wise, Comrade Commander. Look how she has helped you thus far. You have been operating for over a year now… bringing your guns, your ammunition and your land mines into Zimbabwe. All the people have been helping you… willingly. And they all know about ZANLA's presence here in the north-east now. And you have not once been betrayed. The African messengers from the District Commissioners' offices at Bindura, at Centenary, at Mount Darwin, at Rushinga, and at Mtoko have been working continually amongst the people. They have been working in all the districts where ZANLA has been operating. And not one word of your presence has filtered back to the white man's government. Not one word! And your trained fighters have lived and worked in all those districts, too, right under the noses of the BSA police.

“Your soldiers have been truly swimming-amongst-the-people,” the chief smiled at the hackneyed cliche. “What more could you ask, Comrade Commander?”

“Nothing, Comrade Chief. Nothing. The people have been magnificent.”

“Yet they are fearful of the coming war, comrade. We are a peace-loving people. We do not want war. But Nehanda has instructed the people to support you… to help the vakomana of ZANLA. And they have been carrying out her wishes without question.”

There was a clatter behind the two men. They both turned to watch

Daniel's second-in-command approaching them over the rough, rocky slope. Like Daniel, the ZANLA soldier was dressed in ordinary civilian clothes.

"Comrade Commander," the man addressed Daniel politely and without any trace of military servility. "The weapons are hidden away. And chief, we did not disturb the bones. We replaced the stones in the grave walls very carefully."

Chiwashe nodded.

"Thank you, Comrade Havana," Daniel said. "Get the men to hide up here amongst the rocks until the sun sets. They must only go down to their villages after dark."

"They have already been so instructed, Comrade Commander."

"Good! Comrade… Here, take the binoculars." Daniel handed the rubberised field glasses to his subordinate. "The chief and I will go down the hill now. I shall see you at supper time."

The old chief and the ZANLA commander made their way slowly down the broken hillside.

"What spirit of any other religion would recommend that your arms of war be hidden in the graves of the dead, Comrade Commander?" Chiwashe said pointedly.

"You have made your point, chief. You have made your point."

"Good, Comrade Commander. Good! I have been meaning to discuss this matter with you for some time. And remember, if you really cannot bring yourself to believe in Nehanda you must not let it show. The people would be most aggrieved if you ever gave them reason to think that you did not believe in the great mhondoro spirit who is helping you so much."

"You are a wise man, Chief. I respect your advice."

"It is well that we understand each other, Comrade Muliloh. If we are to work together in the coming war it is very important that we understand each other."

"You will be leaving for home in the morning, chief?" Daniel asked, changing the subject.

"No… I must leave here this afternoon, Comrade Commander. This afternoon! I must sleep in Mount Darwin tonight and catch the bus that leaves first thing in the morning for Centenary."

"And from there?"

"As you know, my village lies a little way to the south of Centenary. My

nephew, who works at the garage there, has a car. He will drive me home tomorrow afternoon."

The chief smiled to himself. "I have a new wife, you know. She is only seventeen and she is as sweet and as beautiful as they come. I am looking forward to getting home."

Daniel looked obliquely across at the old chief. He noted the self-satisfied smirk on his ageing face. The old man must be sixty… at least… Daniel guessed. But he carried his age very well.

'Nevertheless, Chief Chiwashe is a lecherous old goat if he has a new wife of seventeen,' Daniel thought sourly.

The grapevine had it that the ageing Lothario already had eleven wives. The new acquisition would make it twelve.

"How has Comrade Motoh settled down?" the chief asked suddenly. He was one of the few people in the district who knew the guerrilla commander's true relationship with Anna.

"She has now been the wife of Chief Rushinga for four months."

"Not in reality I hope?" Chiwashe chuckled.

"She lives in his village," Daniel said, ignoring the ribald implications. "And she has a hut all to herself. But she travels around the district a lot. As our Detachment Political Commissar for that area she is very busy preparing the people with ZANLA's political orientation programme."

"I meant no offence, Comrade Commander," the chief said slapping Daniel on the shoulder.

"And none was taken, Comrade Chief."

"Rushinga is a long way from here, Comrade Muliloh. Do you get to see her very often?"

"Not as often as we'd both like, chief," Daniel admitted. "But hopefully that will change soon."

"Oh?" The chief paused in his slow descent of the hill. He looked directly, quizzically, at the guerrilla commander. *"Am I to assume from that remark that ZANLA has decided to begin the war at last?"*

Daniel nodded. "We are ready to begin hostilities now… but we intend to wait for the rains to begin. We want the bush to get its summer leaves first. Then we shall select a suitable easy target… a farmer, perhaps, somewhere in the Centenary Block… and we shall watch carefully how the mabunu soldiers react. This first attack will tell us something of the mabunus' preparedness for war, and their tactics."

“That is still three months away… the coming of the rains.”

“Four…” Daniel corrected him. “We intend to begin hostilities just before Christmas. By then the rains will have set in and the bush will have thickened up nicely. We need that cover to shield our fighters from the mabunu helicopters.”

“And in the meantime?”

“In the meantime we continue to bring in and to cache our arms of war. And we continue to recruit new fighters and to place our trained men in employment on the farms. By Christmas time we shall have a large and well-equipped army which is either employed by the mabunu farmers, or which is integrated with the people in the tribal areas.”

“You have done very well, Comrade Muliloh,” the chief conceded, nodding his head sagely. He resumed his slow descent of the hill. Daniel followed.

“You have prepared the ground well… with Nehanda's help!” The old man turned and smiled mischievously up at the ZANLA commander behind him. “And with some more of Nehanda's help, I can see you are going to win this war.”

“You are wrong, Chief. With Nehanda's help WE are going to win this war.”

“Yes… Yes… Of course… We… the people… with ZANLA, and with Nehanda’s help, we will win the coming war.”

“And after Christmas, Chief, you will not see very much of me I am afraid.”

“Why is that, Comrade Commander?” The chief paused again. And he again looked back at Daniel begging an answer to the obvious question.

“Comrade Commander Mbudzi will be coming down from the training camps in Tanzania to take over full command of the Nehanda Sector of the war zone. That is, from the Ruya river westward to the Dande.”

“And where will you be going, Comrade Muliloh? I have enjoyed working with you… even the little bit we have done together.”

“I shall be taking over the command of the Chaminuka sector. That is between the Ruya River and the Mazoe River. East of Comrade Mbudzi's war zone.”

“Which includes Chief Rushinga's area… So that is why you placed Comrade Motoh as one of Rushinga's wives.”

Daniel nodded. He tried to remain complacent but he could not keep the

twitch from his outer lips. They began to curl.

"And, if I am not mistaken, it means promotion for you, too. Does it not?"

"From Detachment Commander to Sectorial Commander." Daniel admitted that fact with some pride. "It puts me on a par… rank-wise… with Comrade Mbudzi."

"Well, Comrade Muliloh. Congratulations. After all your hard work preparing for the war you certainly deserve it."

"Thank you, Comrade Chief. But you've got me for the next few months. And I still have an important task for you."

"I am always ready to help, you know that, comrade. What is this task you have for me?"

"I want you to start thinking about a target in the Centenary district for ZANLA to hit at Christmas time. It must be a soft target… one that will not hit back at our soldiers."

"A white farmer?" The chief asked.

"A mabunu farmer would be fine. If it is a farmer then we shall hit him in his house late one night when he is asleep. But I'd like you to choose one whose homestead can be overlooked from a distant kopje. Comrade Commander Mbudzi and I would like to observe what happens on the day after the attack.

"And to make the people hereabouts happy" Daniel continued, "it might be a good idea to choose a farmer who has particularly bad labour relations. A man who is known to beat up his black staff."

"And it must be in the Centenary district?"

"That is Comrade Mbudzi's instruction. Centenary is inside his Nehanda Sector of the war zone. That is where he wants the war to begin."

"Then I do not have to look very hard, Comrade Commander, I already have a target for you."

Chapter 21

ARCHIE MacDonald and his wife retired to bed early. They were early risers and it was routine for them to be bathed and in bed by eight o'clock. As was their habit, before taking up their novels, they listened to the BBC's World Service news broadcast on their transistor radio.

The MacDonald's teenage children, two girls and a boy, were all home from their boarding schools for the Christmas holidays. They had disappeared into their bedrooms after supper and were already dead to the world by the time their parents did the rounds of the house… locking all the doors.

After the news broadcast, the farmer switched off the radio and picked up his book. But it was not long before his eyelids began to droop.

"You ready for lights out, Martha?"

Martha MacDonald responded by placing a marker between the pages and closing her book.

"If you're tired Archie, switch the lights off." She placed her book on the bedside table.

"I'm completely buggered," he said coarsely. "Twenty acres is far too much to plant in one day."

"Then stop the generator, darling."

At this time of the year, Archie MacDonald pushed himself far too hard. And he pushed his black labourers far too hard, too. In that respect, however, he was no different from any of the other white tobacco farmers in the country. The breaking of the rains heralded the start of the growing season. This was the period when everyone raced against time to get the tobacco crop into the ground.

The farmers would all be going non-stop now, night and day, for the next six months. First the crop had to be planted, fertilised and grown out. Then the ripe leaves had to be picked and cured in the wood-fired barns. This required, in addition to their daily chores, that the farmers visit their barns two or three times a night to check that the temperatures and the humidity levels were correct. It was back-breaking work, but it was all well worth the effort when the prices on the Salisbury tobacco auction floors were right.

Tobacco had made many hard working farmers in Rhodesia well-deserved millionaires.

Archie had promised Martha and the family that he would take them on a fortnight's holiday to the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius when this year's crop was sold. She was looking forward to that. And she blanked out from her mind all the hard work that her husband would have to endure to pay for that special kind of holiday.

Archie reached up and pressed the red button on the rough, home-made switchboard above his head. Immediately the lights began to dim. Outside, the monotonous puttering beat of the generator's diesel engine slowed down.

The blackness of the night and the utter silence that followed were eerie. In the far distance the melodious, liquid call of a fiery-necked nightjar cut through the stillness of the night. The bird had clearly been singing all night long but neither of them had heard it. The background drumming of the generator’s engine had drowned it out.

The bird's song went on and on and on. It sounded peaceful and tranquil in the heavy darkness. It was very soporific.

Archie reached over and grasped his wife's hand. She squeezed it gently. Almost immediately she felt his fingers relax. A matter of seconds later her husband, dead beat, was snoring quietly in the bed beside her.

Chapter 22

COMRADE Jairos had spent the better part of the afternoon carrying out a thorough recce of the MacDonald's homestead. Dressed in ragged civilian clothes he had walked about in full view and no one had suspected who or what he really was.

After dark he and his detachment attack force waited patiently on the small kopje that overlooked the farmhouse. Despite the warm day-time temperatures, the night air was decidedly chilly. A storm had been brewing all afternoon so he was thankful for his thick jacket. He hoped it *would* rain… but only during the early hours of the morning. *'Rain'*, he thought, *'would be the perfect tool to hide our tracks.'*

When Archie MacDonald switched off the generator that night the guerrilla leader grinned to himself as he watched the lights dim before they finally gave way to total darkness. The second Mashona Chimurenga War was about to begin. Jairos felt honoured that his sectorial commander, Rex Mbudzi, had chosen him to be the man to fire the first bullet.

There were nine heavily armed guerrillas with him. Three of them had been drawn from Archie MacDonald's own labour force. Three had come from a neighbouring farmer's compound. The remaining three, like Jairos himself, were part of Rex Mbudzi's elite headquarters detachment.

The half moon did not rise until a few minutes after midnight that night. It took another full hour before it provided enough light for them to see what they were doing, and to find their way confidently down the rocky hillside. By then the threat of rain had gone.

When the group reached the edge of the garden, Jairos, with hand signals and whispered commands, slowly and quietly positioned each man in the exact location he had chosen for them that afternoon. The two rocket launchers he placed in the centre of the group, and he pointed out to the rocketeers those sections of the house walls that he wanted them to hit. These were the outside walls behind which, one of the MacDonald's house servants had told him, lay the four occupied bedrooms.

The two RPD machine gunners, and the rest of the guerrilla band, all armed with new Chinese-made AK-47 assault rifles, were instructed to direct their fire at the exposed windows and doors. And later, at the openings which the rockets blasted through the walls. He had carefully

worked out a controlled and synchronised attack.

The whole group lay in a shallow arc around the bedroom wing. They could shoot at their targets, therefore, without having to be concerned about hitting any of their comrades on the other side.

There were two final tasks to be carried out before the new war could begin. The telephone lines were cut and two TM-46 land mines were buried, half a mile apart, in the dirt track of the roadway that led to the house. It was Rex Mbudzi's intention that the new war should begin with a big bang.

When Jairos' single bullet shattered the glass of their bedroom window, Archie and Martha MacDonald erupted into a shocked state of instant wakefulness. The steel slug bounced off the wall opposite their bed and it ploughed through the closed bedroom door into the passage beyond.

"What was that?" Martha asked.

Both of them were sitting bolt-upright in bed. The noise had awakened them, instantly, from a very deep sleep. Whatever it was, it had broken a pane in their bedroom window. The tinkling sound of glass shards falling onto the cement floor was fresh in their waking subconsciences.

"Shhhh," Archie replied… listening… placing a hand on Martha's arm.

For fully ten seconds there was an eerie silence.

"I'll get a torch," Martha said, getting out of bed.

That, of course, was the purpose of Jairos' single first bullet. It was supposed to get the occupants of the house out of their beds and onto their feet. In that position they were much more vulnerable than when lying in bed.

At that moment the peace was shattered as a deluge of bullets poured in through the window, smashing more panes of glass and hammering into the wall opposite the bed. The air was suddenly filled with choking dust from the pulverised plaster, and with the whining scream of distorted, ricocheting bullets that hit and caromed off the steel window frames. And they bounced off the bedroom walls all around them.

Martha MacDonald instinctively flung herself to the floor. Archie rolled off the bed, crashing heavily to the floor on the other side.

There was an interlude in the fusillade. For a few brief moments no more bullets came their way. But the staccato automatic gunfire outside continued. There were interrupted burps from the AK-47s and the repetitive beat of the RPD machine-guns. And there was the continuous dull thudding and whirring sound of bullets hitting and rebounding off the walls in other parts of the

house.

"We're under attack!"

Archie MacDonald's voice was drowned out by the whooshing roars of two flighted RPG-7 rockets. This was followed by the stupendous detonations of the hollow-charged warheads as they exploded against, and demolished, the outside walls of the children's bedrooms.

"Oh, my God… The children…" Martha got to her feet and, with no thought for her own safety, she twisted round the big bed and ran for the bedroom door.

"Get down!" Her husband grabbed at her legs and pulled her to the floor. In that instant bullets began flying round the bedroom again.

"The children," Martha shouted at him hysterically. "I must go to the children."

"Keep down, Martha," he screamed into her ear, using his immense weight to pin her to the floor.

"Archie… Get off me." Martha shouted as she frantically struggled to extricate herself from beneath his enormous body. *"I've got to go to the children, Archie… PLEASE… LET ME UP."*

The cacophonous roar of the attack was deafening. "O.K.," he shouted. "Let me open the door. You go to the kids. I'm going to get the shotgun. But stay down Martha… crawl on your belly."

A child began to scream.

"Get the kids into the passage… by the phone." Archie said to his wife. He was trying to get everybody to conform to the plan of action they had decided upon two years ago… just in case of a terrorist attack.

The passage was the safest place in the house. There they would have two walls, on both sides, between themselves and the garden outside.

The MacDonald's two Doberman Pinschers raced round the house outside, barking furiously. One of them managed to get through the hail of bullets. Over the noise of the heavy firing the farmer could hear it savaging one of the attackers.

A man began shouting. There was a single flat-sounding shot. The dog yelped… once. After that there was no further sound from either dog.

'They've killed the dogs!' Archie registered that fact subconsciously.

He and Martha reached the safety of the passage on their hands and knees. Behind them there was another huge explosion. The wall against which the headboard of their bed had rested burst inwards. A second detonation rocked

the room. Bricks and mortar showered down onto the big double bed, the weight of the debris collapsing it. A mushroom of choking dust billowed through the open doorway into the passage.

"Shit!" Archie exclaimed.

Bullets came flying through the huge hole of the demolished wall. Several found their way into the passage. The MacDonalds began crawling away from each other down the passage in opposite directions.

Outside a man shouted loudly. Archie recognised the language. It was a Shona voice. The firing stopped. There was more shouting. The farmer paused to listen.

The eerie silence that followed was terrifying. *'Were they going to storm the house?'*

There wasn't a sound. Not of running feet. Not of voices. Even the monotonous litany bird had ceased its lament.

Inside the house the air was vibrant. The anaemic light from the half-moon shone through the shattered windows. It bounced off the dust from the pummelled wall plaster that hung in the air like a shroud everywhere. There was the cloying stink of cement dust, of hot steel, and of burning tracer.

Both the farmer and his wife remained where they were in the passage… on their hands and knees… frozen… listening. There was not another sound. Nothing! Silence reigned.

In the sudden and bewildering hiatus the children had stopped their crying.

For several long moments the hush persisted. Then one of the children began to sob and to wail. It was the trigger that set Martha MacDonald in motion again. Without hesitating she got to her feet and began running down the passage. Her maternal instincts had overridden all her fears for her own safety.

Archie MacDonald, too, scrambled up and raced to his study. There his hunting rifles and his shotgun were locked up in the firearms cabinet. Its key was amongst the bunch that he kept in the right hand drawer of his office desk. It took him some time to find the right key and to open the gun safe. When he had the loaded shotgun in his hand he felt a little more confident.

But by then the attack was over. The guerrillas had gone, melding silently into the silver darkness.

Chapter 23

DANIEL and Rex Mbudzi sat side by side on the same flat rock atop a distant hill. They had a good view of the MacDonald homestead and through their powerful binoculars they could clearly see the huge holes that three of the four RPG rockets had blasted into the outside bedroom walls. What they did not know was that the fourth rocket had ranged right through a bedroom window and it had detonated on the inside wall opposite the window. All over the outside white-washed walls were the pock marks of several hundred bullet holes.

The solid old farm house looked derelict in the colourless pre-dawn light. Nothing moved in the garden. The stiff black body of a dead Doberman lay on the lawn.

Only in the native compound, on the far side of the tobacco barns, was there any sign of life. A number of native labourers were moving about amongst the thatched huts. They had obviously heard the sounds of the attack for they were talking amongst themselves and pointing in the direction of the homestead. None had yet had the courage to go and investigate.

Pale grey wood smoke filtered through the thatched roofs of the compound's kitchen huts. It drifted gently into the cold morning air. Smoke from the many fires mingled above the huts and layered fifty feet above the ground. Like a pale shroud the blue/white flat blanket of smoke drifted over the adjacent wet vlei.

"Nothing yet, comrade," Mbudzi said, the impatience evident in his voice.

"The attack took place at two o'clock on schedule, Comrade Rex," Daniel opined. "And the telephone lines were cut. So it may take some time for the mabunu to react."

Daniel noticed the inane grin on Mbudzi's face as he continued to peer through his binoculars.

"Something amuses you, comrade?"

"No," Rex smiled, dragging the glasses away from his eyes. "I am not amused, Comrade Muliloh. I am just happy. The war has begun."

"At last!"

"At last… Yes. But the long preparation we have put into it will pay dividends, my friend. You will see."

“I am sure you are right, Comrade Commander. We have enough freedom fighters in the country now, and enough weapons to arm them, to take on the mabunu in a conventional war.”

Mbudzi looked askance at his companion. “I trust you are joking, comrade? We must never try to fight the mabunu head on. We must never forget what happened to ZIPRA. They still haven't found enough aspirins to cure the headaches that policy gave them.”

Daniel laughed. “Yes, Comrade Rex. Of course… We must not fight the mabunu head on. I was merely expressing an opinion.”

“Here they come,” Mbudzi returned the field glasses to his eyes. The excitement in his voice was suddenly vibrant.

The first sign of military activity was the arrival of two air force helicopters. They cautiously circled the homestead then touched down briefly on the farmhouse lawn. Each machine deposited four armed and camouflaged soldiers on the open grass.

“They look like dragon flies dipping their tails into a pond… the helicopters…!” Daniel commented vacantly.

“Mmmm,” Mbudzi responded absently. “They are going to be our biggest problem.”

“What? The helicopters?”

“Yes,” Mbudzi affirmed. “The mabunus learnt a lot from their war with ZIPRA. Besides machine-guns I'm told some of them are now armed with 20 mm cannons.”

“Where'd you learn that?” Daniel looked at him quizzically.

“From our intelligence service in the Rhodesian Air Force,” Mbudzi said… smiling. He was clearly pleased with himself. He continued to survey the developing scene through his binoculars.

The soldiers had dispersed. One helicopter was now hovering steadily over the farmhouse. The other one circled the garden and the surrounding bush. It was clearly looking for sign of the attackers.

“Where's the injured girl?” the soldier said abruptly. He carried a NATO FN automatic rifle in his one hand. The other hand steadied a brown canvas satchel that hung from a strap over his shoulder. There was a white patch, embossed with a big red cross, on the flap.

“You a doctor?” Martha MacDonald asked.

“Paramedic Ma-am.”

“Come,” she said, leading the way towards the only undamaged bedroom. “I've cleaned her up as best I could with Dettol and hot water. And I've covered her wounds with Vaseline gauze.”

“Has anybody else been injured?”

“No,” the woman said positively. *“Just Jilly.”*

Jilly MacDonald was fourteen years old. She was lying face down on the bed, her head turned sideways on the pillow. She had been crying and her eyes were red-rimmed. Despite that, however, the fact that her eyes were bright told the medic she was in no immediate danger.

“Hello there young lady,” he beamed. She began to sob. “There… there…” he cajoled kindly. “Everything's going to be all right now.”

The soldier leant his weapon against the wall and dropped the medical pack onto the floor at his feet.

“Let’s have a look at you now,” he said. He gently lifted the blanket from her back and peeled it back to the foot of the bed.

“She can't hear a word you're saying,” her mother explained sadly. “It was a rocket, I think. It burst through the wall of her bedroom just above her head. She's stone deaf.”

“Bastards!”

The girl was naked, except for the patch-work of Vaseline-impregnated gauze dressings that covered her body. She was shivering from both shock and the early morning cold. A gentle bouquet of Dettol filled the air. Slowly and gently the soldier lifted the dressings… one by one… laying them back over the wounds just as tenderly.

There were shrapnel wounds where pieces of the exploding rocket had savagely ripped into the girl's flesh. And there were other lacerations as well as holes that had been gouged out by bits of flying masonry. Some of the injuries were superficial. Others were deep and would require surgery. They extended from the nape of her neck to the back of her ankles. The bleeding, thankfully, had stopped.

“You did a good job,” he said finally to Martha.

“Thank you. I trained as a nurse at Salisbury General.”

“You the girl's mother?”

She nodded.

The soldier gently pulled the blanket back over the injured girl's body.

“Must keep her warm… So you went through the whole attack, too?”

Again Martha nodded, this time biting on her lower lip. The soldier looked

at the woman with respect. She was taking it all very calmly. *'But then,'* he thought, *'so she would. Her mother's psyche would not allow her to succumb to her emotions until her family was out of danger. The shock would hit her once the situation was under control.'*

"Your other little girl. Are you sure…?"

"She's dead." Martha said in a quiet matter-of-fact tone.

"Are you sure? I'd like to have a look at her…"

"She's dead."

"I'm sorry…"

Martha MacDonald dropped her eyes to the bedside carpet. She screwed her eyelids tight, fighting back the tears. Then she bit her lower lip and bobbed her head silently in acknowledgement.

"Look, Mrs…"

"MacDonald… Martha MacDonald."

The soldier picked up his medical pack and placed it on the bed. He began to unfasten the buckle on the satchel's flap.

"Mrs. MacDonald," he said sympathetically. "I'm going to give your little girl here some morphine now. It will ease the pain. I'm also going to give her a shot of antibiotics. These types of wounds can very quickly go septic." He began tearing the plastic sheath from a disposable syringe. "Then I'm going to transfer her to a stretcher and I'm going to send her by helicopter to hospital in Salisbury. She's going to be all right. But I want to take no chances with infection."

Martha MacDonald gnawed again at her bottom lip. She nodded. As a qualified nursing sister she agreed with all that the young soldier said. She watched him dispassionately as he administered the narcotic and then the antibiotic.

"Now I want to give you a little something, too."

Martha MacDonald recoiled.

"It's only a mild sedative," he said reassuringly. "As a trained nurse you will know that the shock of all that has happened will hit you like a ton of bricks once your adrenaline levels drop." He began to fill a new syringe with a different drug.

The sound of vehicles in the distance, their engines revving as the drivers changed gear, filtered into the room. Martha MacDonald looked up expectantly.

"That'll be the army" the medic said. *"They left the base at Mount Darwin*

sometime before the helicopters." He applied a swab to her upper arm, plunged the needle into a heavy muscle and slowly depressed the plunger.

"There… That'll sort you out."

The soldier packed up his medical kit and slung the satchel over his shoulder. He picked up his rifle. The sound of the army transport was growing louder.

"And now, Mrs. MacDonald… Before I get the helicopter down, can I have a brief look at… at your other little girl?"

Martha MacDonald turned away from him for sudden tears had flooded her eyes. She sobbed. *"She was only eleven years old…"*

At that moment, in the near distance outside, there was a cataclysmic explosion.

"SHIT!" the soldier shouted out spontaneously. *"They've hit a fucking mine."*

He barged past Martha MacDonald and began to run.

"BA-DOOM," Rex Mbudzi yelled joyously. "They've hit one. The leading Land Rover has hit one of the mines."

Daniel saw it all through his binoculars, too. Two loaded Land Rovers and a lorry full of troops had reacted to the attack. Turning off the tarmac road the vehicles had wasted no time in racing down the old dirt track to the stricken farm house.

The leading Land Rover had a compliment of one white officer, six white soldiers and a white army driver. It was engulfed instantaneously in a mushroom of red-and-white shock flashes from the explosion. Then it disappeared in the huge pall of thick black smoke that immediately followed.

The explosion threw the light vehicle high into the air. From the centre of the dark holocaust a number of distorted bodies were blasted skyward, dragging trails of the inky black smoke behind them. They crashed brokenly onto the open ground nearby like sodden rag dolls.

A few seconds later the resounding detonation reached the two guerrilla commanders. For several long moments the reverberating sound of the explosion echoed and re-echoed down the valleys of the granite mountains that surrounded them.

"Hah!" Mbudzi exclaimed jubilantly. *"We draw first blood."*

Ian Allen arrived at the farm just after half past eight. He had been alerted by the member-in-charge of the Centenary police station in the early hours of the morning… just a few minutes after Archie MacDonald had telephoned them.

The farmer, after realising the attack was well and truly over, and that the telephone lines to his farm had been cut, had run two miles through the bush to his nearest neighbour to raise the alarm. Then, acting against telephonic police instructions, he ran back to his own farm again. He was back home long before dawn.

The District Commissioner drove past the mangled wreck of the Land Rover, and around the big rocks that demarcated the discovered location of the second mine. The army engineers had been summoned to lift it.

There were soldiers in camouflaged uniforms, and policemen in khaki shorts and grey-blue shirts, everywhere. Inspector Harry Johnson was speaking to an army major on the verandah of the shattered homestead. He waved at Ian as the D.C.'s Land Rover station wagon drew up with a squeal from its dusty brake-linings.

“This is Major Brian Stokes, Ian,” the Member-in-charge introduced the D.C. “Brian is officer commanding the Mount Darwin army base.”

“And this, Brian, is Ian Allen. The D.C., Centenary.”

The two men shook hands.

“What have we got, major?”

“It’s not a happy scene, Mr. Allen. Not happy at all.”

“I believe young Patricia MacDonald was killed in the attack? And looking at the mangled wreck of the Land Rover back there, I'd say your boys hit a land mine?”

“That's right, sir,” the officer confirmed gravely. “We lost four men dead and four seriously injured. Two had minor injuries.”

The D.C. shook his head, his face grim. “I'm very sorry, Major. I've been there myself, you know. Went through the whole ZIPRA war in Binga in the '60s.”

“I'll be honest with you, Mr. Allen, they caught us flat-footed. We had no idea there were any terrorists about here. Had you any inkling?”

“No.” The D.C. took a deep breath. “Nothing. Not a squeak.” He turned then to the policeman. “Were any of the other members of the MacDonald family hurt?”

“Young Jilly took a pounding on her back,” the inspector answered.

“Multiple lacerations… But they say she'll be all right. They've taken her by chopper to Salisbury. Otherwise the rest of the family's O.K. They are all a bit shaken up of course.”

“They in the house?”

The policeman nodded.

“I'd better go in and see them.” Ian then turned to the army man. “If there is anything I can do for you, Major…”

“There might be, Mr. Allen. Do you know of any farmers hereabouts who are big game hunters? Ones who might have good trackers?”

“The army still not using tracker dogs?”

The soldier shook his head. “We've tried several times. They're bloody useless unless you've got a really hot scent. When you're onto last night's spoor, the sun burns off the scent by about nine or ten o'clock in the morning.”

“We found the same thing at Binga. And when it’s really hot in the valley the dogs’ feet blister, too… But… hang on. Didn't I hear somewhere that the army has established its own tracker units now?”

“If you can call them trackers.” The soldier was not shy to admit his unit's deficiencies. “We've got one tracker stick here now. They located ten firing positions on the edge of the garden and they took up the spoor. Then they promptly lost it. It seems the gooks split up when they left the scene.”

Ian Allen thought deeply for a moment. Mike Campbell was the man the major needed. The last he had heard of the game warden was that he was still catching the few rhinos that remained in the Mfurudzi. He'd said he was going to continue catching this year until the rains forced him out. He might still be at his camp at Svisyamoyo.

“I don't know of any farmers who employ trackers that are really worth anything, Major. But I think one of the finest trackers in the country may still be working in the north-east here. He was catching rhinos on the Ruya a few months ago. Then he moved across to the Umfurudzi. I think he might still be there.”

“Who's that, Mr. Allen?”

“Game Warden Mike Campbell. He uses two superb Bushman trackers. I can vouch for them personally. They did some fantastic work for the army at Binga.”

“I've heard of him, Mr. Allen. Colonel Tom Hubbard speaks very highly of him.”

“Tom a colonel now?” the D.C. smiled.

“Since last November. He's based at Army GHQ now.”

“Yes… Tom would know. It was Tom that Mike tracked for at Binga. Look… why don't you get on the blower to Tom Hubbard. I take it you've got radio comms with Army GHQ?”

“Yes.”

“Well then. Get Tom to contact the National Parks head office in Salisbury. Find out if Mike Campbell is still at Mfurudzi. If he is, it would pay you to send a chopper to pick him up… and his trackers. His camp can't be much more than an hour's flying time from here. Believe me, if anyone can find the terrorists responsible for this attack he can.”

Chapter 24

THE camouflaged Alouette III helicopter, with Mike and his trackers aboard, arrived at the McDonald farm just after midday. The game warden was immediately briefed about the attack by Major Stokes. Mike and the Bushman trackers were then taken directly to the spoor.

It was very late to begin such a tracking task and Mike expressed his misgivings. The terrorists would be long gone and nightfall was not far off. They wouldn't catch them today… that was for sure… and by dawn tomorrow the hunted men would have gained another twelve hours on their pursuers. Nevertheless, the more they dallied the greater would the gap between them grow.

Despite the urgency, Ben and Mbuyotsi took their time examining the terrorists' shoe prints at the ten firing positions they were shown. Mike did not push them. He well knew that a little time used constructively at this stage would save a lot more time along the way. Like sponges the Bushmen's minds indelibly catalogued the details of the shapes and the sizes, and the patterns of the attackers' shoe prints.

The leader of the four-man-stick of black army trackers, a big Matabele corporal of the Rhodesian African Rifles, led them along a corridor of trampled vegetation. Some had been stamped down by the soldiers themselves, but the core of the route contained the footprints of the terrorists. It disclosed the general direction they had used to vacate the area. Then, at the base of the small kopje behind the house, the tracks simply disappeared.

“At this point they bomb-shelled,” the corporal said.

“Bomb-shelled?” Mike was perplexed.

“They split up and moved off in different directions.” The corporal explained.

‘Bomb-shelled! That was an apt way of describing the situation,’ Mike thought.

Mike had never come across that tracking term… nor had he ever seen this tactic used before. None of the ZIPRA terrorist groups he had followed in the 1960s had bomb-shelled. Their objective had been to get through the

Zambesi valley as a group, intact, and as quickly as possible. It was their purpose to penetrate to the populated areas of Matabeleland where they would have found a place to hide amongst the villages of their own people.

'What on earth would these ZANLA terrorists have wanted to achieve by bomb-shelling?' He wondered. 'What could have been their reason? To hide their tracks! That was the only explanation he could think of. But why…?' He racked his brain for another answer. None was forthcoming. The issue plagued his mind for the rest of the day.

Mike explained to the two Bushman what the corporal had said had happened. They shrugged noncommittally. Then, individually, they systematically set about trying to find the lost tracks in the surrounding bush. Wherever they went they found the heavy tread marks of the soldiers' boots. This severe disturbance obliterated the faint sign left by the dispersing terrorists.

The Bushmen were then forced to increase the sweep of their 360 degree search pattern.

The soldiers began searching too.

"No… No… No corporal," Mike stopped them very quickly. "Tell your men to wait here. Leave my trackers to find the spoor alone."

Morosely the soldiers complied, unwilling to admit their lack of tracking proficiency. They remained with Mike at the point where the terrorists had split up. And there they watched and they waited for the Bushmen to relocate a positive sign. The trackers disappeared silently into the surrounding vegetation.

Mike was armed with his big .458 Magnum rifle. It was the weapon he had used to shoot nearly all the many hundreds of big elephant bulls he had killed in protection of native crops; and during the tsetse fly operations of the middle 1960s. Ben carried Mike's automatic shotgun. Mbuyotsi had his faithful government issue 9.3 mm Mauser. These were not arms of war but they were familiar weapons that would not let them down.

Ben found some sign. It was just a small part of a single footprint that he had seen at the farmhouse. It was heading north.

"Who-whooee, who-whooee, who-whooee." The tracker sent the piping, far-reaching whistle of the lost guineafowl through the scrubby bush land.

The first call brought the game warden's head erect. The second and third gave him the direction he must take to reach his tracker.

"Who-whooee."

The single reply was enough to tell Ben that his signal had been received. The tracker would not call again unless the game warden could not locate him. Mike would then himself whistle three times… signalling his need for re-direction.

"Let's go," Mike said to the corporal. "They've found the tracks."

He stopped for a short moment to brief the army trackers. "I want you guys to hang back from me… please! You can be our protection stick. Keep us covered with your automatic weapons. If we find the gooks you can take over and lead the fire-fight. Until that happens, however, don't go anywhere near my trackers."

All four of them looked at the game warden silently and sullenly.

'What the hell…' Mike thought. *'Bugger them… They'll just have to do as they are damn well told.'* He turned and set off in Ben's direction. The soldiers followed in a bunch behind him.

Mbuyotsi had already joined Ben by the time Mike and the soldiers reached them.

"Kanjani?" What have you got? Mike asked succinctly.

Ben withdrew from his mouth the long grass stem that he had been chewing. He used it to point casually and silently to the half-footprint in the loose dust at his feet.

"Yaah! Yaah! That's it. That's one of the magandanga's tracks" the big Matabele corporal confirmed.

Ben then indicated the faint, but to him distinct line of disturbed grass that ran off through the bush ahead of him. The grass here was knee-high and dense. The tracks of the farmer's cattle – new and old – zigzagged through the tight sward. The fleeing man had been in a hurry. He had progressed directly through the heavy ground cover, his feet and his legs forcing a straight passageway through the grass.

The soldiers fell silent. They looked at one another sheepishly. They had thought they had known it all. Now they understood they were in the presence of a master.

"Zingaki?" How many?

Ben held up a single forefinger.

"Ipi loh munyeh?" Where are the others?

Ben shrugged.

"As I said, Sir," the big Matabele soldier explained. "They've bomb-shelled. They've all gone off in different directions."

"Landah." Follow. Mike instructed as he had always done when following elephant or black rhino or buffaloes. Today they were hunting a terrorist but the technique they had to employ was just the same.

"One…?" Ben pointed this fact out to Mike again… raising his one finger again. The implication of his question was easy to interpret. Ben was used to following groups of terrorist tracks not just one. *'What about the others?'* was his clear implication.

They were wasting time. The only thing they could do now was to follow the one set of confirmed tracks they had. Maybe it would join up with the others later.

Immediately that thought crossed his mind, Michael thought of Daniel. He remembered Daniel telling him how the Mashona villagers ran away and dispersed when the Ndebele impis had come raiding; and how they all reunited later to pick up the pieces of their lives.

The two trackers followed the spoor for about an hour. They lost it in places then picked it up again and continued. Once on that one set of tracks, Ben and Mbuyotsi travelled at a steady walking pace. It was probably at the speed the terrorist himself had been travelling. That meant they were not losing time… but neither were they gaining any. They remained all the while, therefore, far too many hours behind their quarry.

The tracks were nine hours old when they had taken up the spoor. It never got any fresher. Hunting terrorists was not like hunting elephants. When hunting elephants the tracks got fresher and fresher as the day progressed until you caught up with your quarry, at rest, during the heat of the day. There was no certainty about anything when you were on terrorist spoor.

It seemed a hopeless task. Mike knew that unless the man went to ground they hadn't a hope in Hades of catching up with him. And if he went to ground – and hid up in some bit of thick bush – there was then the possibility of walking into a hail of bullets when you closed the gap. But there were still a few hours of daylight left. They would follow the tracks until sunset… then they'd have to sleep on the spoor. They could share the rations in the soldier's ration packs. They could keep going like that for several days if needs be.

Ben stopped dead.

"What's the matter, Ben?" It was not often that Mike addressed his Bushmen in English.

"Yena shanganileh na loh munyeh two." Two other tracks had joined the one they were following. Mbuyotsi nodded his head in agreement.

"Ghhhawww," the corporal exclaimed in admiration. 'This funny little Bushman was, indeed, an astounding tracker.'

The sign was clear to them all when Ben and Mbuyotsi pointed out the evidence. But it took the Bushmen some little while to find all the confirmatory clear footprints. When they did they discovered that all three shoe impressions matched those they had seen back at the farm.

"Landah."

The two Bushmen took up the tracks again. Following three men made their task a whole lot easier. They quickened their pace.

Not long afterwards Mbuyotsi began to take a more than normal interest in the countryside around them. He conferred with Ben repeatedly. Finally the two trackers stopped again. They turned to face the game warden.

"Yena tshayileh khonah." They are walking in a circle.

Mbuyotsi used his right hand to illustrate his point, moving it explicitly in a wide arc across the front of his body.

Mike looked at the hills in the distance, and he looked backwards the way they had come. They had been travelling through high rough country, avoiding the ploughed fields and the crops on the bottomlands. This was where the cattle grazed… where few people ventured. Mike realised the trackers were right. The men they were following had, indeed, moved in a big wide circle.

'What the hell?'

"Landah." They were wasting time. He would think about the matter further as they moved along.

It was after six o'clock when the tracking party descended the long slope towards the MacDonald homestead. The tracks were still those of the night before… just before the dawn Mbuyotsi told Mike. The three men they had been following had covered six or seven miles of the most inhospitable country in the area.

As they made their way down the long slope towards the farm the Matabele corporal moved up alongside Mike.

"We have been following old tracks," he said unhappily and quietly to the game warden. "We have been following the spoor of the terrorists when they

came in to carry out the attack."

"Uh-uhh," Mike shook his head. "These tracks are the right ones… These terrs came past here just before the dawn. They were made after the heavy dew. Have you not seen the sand their feet kicked up sticking to the grass leaves and stems? That happened because the grass was then wet with dew. "

The soldier's jaw dropped open.

"The grass was wet with dew when the terrorists passed this way. Their feet kicked up sand and it stuck to the wet grass. And last night the dew began to fall just before midnight. If this was their incoming spoor – before the attack – there would be no sand sticking to the vegetation."

"Ghhaaaaw."

Mike smiled at the big black man. He must obviously be able to follow sign… after a fashion… or he would not have been given tracker status in the army. But he had an awful lot still to learn about interpreting what he saw.

"These tracks were made at about dawn this morning, corporal. Just about the time the sun was coming up."

"But they are going back to the farm?"

"Yes, corporal. So they are… They are going back to the farm."

"But what does that mean?"

Mike shrugged. *"You tell me…"* he said with raised eyebrows. They continued their grinding trudge down the slope. All the while Mike was thinking deeply. And he continually and carefully looked down at the farm complex from their elevated position as they walked along.

The attackers had run off from the far side of the homestead… on the far side from this angle, that is. Three of them… at least… had completed a huge circle. They had returned to the scene of their crime from the exact opposite direction. The homestead was, from this position, on the far side of the farm complex… beyond the central workshop, the barns and the tobacco grading shed. And directly in front of them lay the sprawled pole-and-dagga thatched huts of the farm compound.

"What it means, corporal…" Mike said to the black soldier after a while, "What it probably means… is that at least three of our magandangas live in the farmer's own compound."

At precisely that same moment in time Comrade Jairos walked quietly into Chief Chiwashe's village. He still wore nondescript civilian clothes but now

he carried no firearms. And he was alone. Anyone who might have by chance observed him would have assumed that he was just an ordinary villager returning to his home in the evening. He proceeded directly to the chief's big family hut.

Inside the hut Chief Chiwashe and Comrade Sectorial Commanders Mbudzi and Muliloh were waiting for him. The hut was dimly lit by two paraffin storm lanterns hanging from long wire hooks below the thatch.

“Welcome back Comrade Jairos.” Mbudzi shook the guerrilla's hand heartily. “You did well last night.”

Daniel and Chiwashe grinned at him silently.

“Have you heard any results of the attack?” Jairos asked eagerly.

All night long – after the attack – he and his three headquarter-group companions, carrying all the attackers' arms, had laid long and tortuous individual trails, just in case they might be followed. They had finally cached the arms, all together, in a well hidden cave high up in the nearby granite hills.

“Have we heard the results?” Mbudzi was ecstatic. “Yes, Comrade Jairos, we have heard the results. You did a very fine job last night.”

“What were the results, Comrade Commander?”

“In the attack itself, Comrade Jairos, you killed one marungu and badly wounded another. They had to fly the wounded one to Salisbury by helicopter.”

“And the mines? I heard one of the mines go off this morning.”

“It blew up an army Land Rover, comrade,” Mbudzi said, grinning fixedly. “Comrade Commander Muliloh here… and me… we watched it go up.”

“BOOM.” Daniel interrupted enthusiastically. “It was magnificent… All that black smoke…”

“Casualties?”

“Eight,” Mbudzi said briefly. “It killed four mabunu soldiers, comrade. And it wounded another four… badly… so I'm told.”

“White soldiers?”

“All mabunus. Yes… All white soldiers.”

“And the farmer? Was he one of the two people killed in the attack?”

“No,” the senior guerrilla commander said without emotion. “One of his daughters was killed. Another daughter was wounded, comrade. But it doesn't matter that they were girls. They were marungus… mabunus.

“The attack last night will put the fear of God into all the other whites in the country. That's what matters, comrade. We must terrorise the whites until they hand over the country to us. From this day on lots and lots of mabunus will be leaving the country. They will emigrate to South Africa where they will feel safer. And that will only be the start of the exodus. Soon the whites will be leaving in their droves…”

Jairos was smiling like a Cheshire cat. “I must get that farmer, Comrade Commander. I must kill that farmer. He is a bad man.”

“Another time, Comrade Jairos. Another time.”

Chiwashe moved over to a deal table at the back of the hut. He picked up a bottle of brandy and poured out generous tots into four glass tumblers. Daniel handed them out.

“Now it’s time to celebrate our first victory. Comrades… To Zimbabwe.” Sectorial Commander Mbudzi held his glass high.

“To Zimbabwe.” Everyone repeated the toast.

“Pamberi ne Chimurenga.” Forward with the Revolution.

“Pamberi ne Chimurenga.”

“I can't get over the job you did today, Mike. It was fantastic. Three gooks in the bag inside eight hours.”

Major Brian Stokes, Ian Allen and Mike Campbell were seated at one end of a long trestle table in the officers’ mess tent. It was part of the temporary JOC-HQ centre which had been set up under canvas on the

extensive lawns of the MacDonald's farm garden. They, the army officers, several policemen, and the air force liaison officer, had just demolished a plain but wholesome army meal. And the rows of empty brown dumpie bottles on the table testified to the numbers of beers they had consumed before and after that event.

“You should be saying that to my two trackers, Brian,” the game warden averred. “It was they who did all the hard work.”

“Yes, indeed. But, from what my men tell me you had a great deal to do with it, too.”

“You mustn't be too hard on your own trackers, major. Under the circumstances they didn't do too badly at all. That corporal of yours at least had the common sense to recognise the fact that the terrs had split up… bomb-shelled… when they did. I've never come across that tactic before.”

“Oh? I thought you tracked ZIPRA gooks in Binga?”

“Yes I did… WE did.” Mike corrected himself, holding his glass up to salute the D.C. “But they were always going hell bent for Matabeleland.”

“The BaTonga people of the Binga district have no love for the Matabele,” the D.C. interposed. “In the old days the Matabele impis used to raid their villages and carry off their women…”

“Like they did to the Mashona…”

“Right major… Like they did to the Mashona. The Tonga also hated the idea that the Matabele called them Maswina… which quite literally means ‘pigs’. So when the ZIPRA gangs came over the lake, or over the Zambesi river, from Zambia, and the BaTonga found their tracks, they came in right away and told us.”

“And, if we're really truthful, Ian, the one-hundred dollar reward for making the report helped, too,” Mike laughed cynically. “That was a fortune to a raw Batonk.”

“It’s now a thousand dollars a head,” the major said. “And that's just for supplying information that gets results. A thousand dollars is one hell of an incentive for a local to just report the presence of gooks.”

“Yes it is,” the D.C. agreed. “Anyway Brian, the ZIPRA terrorists knew that the BaTonga were on our side so when they crossed the border they high-tailed it for Matabeleland. And depending on how heavily laden they were, that could take anything from three to five days. It was Mike's job to track the groups down before they reached their destinations – which were deep inside Matabeleland.”

“They travelled at night,” Mike explained, “in the moonlight. All the crossings we ever had took place over the full moon period. Some groups even travelled on a compass bearing. So once we had worked out which direction they were heading we were able to cut for spoor well ahead of where we were tracking. That meant soldiers on foot looked for tracks along the soft road verges that cut across the terrorists' general route far ahead. Then the choppers leap-frogged us trackers forward to the fresher sign.”

“So it was easy. And they did not split up because they were on a forced route march to reach Matabeleland.” The D.C. told the soldier.

“With good trackers it was a cinch,” Mike agreed. “Except for the ambushes… ZIPRA were very conscious of being seen by the BaTonga during the day… or by an aircraft… so they walked at night and went to ground during the day. And we tracked them during the day. So when we

caught up with them… following their last night's tracks… we often walked straight into their daytime encampments."

"Shit!"

"Exactly, major."

"Major!" A white army subaltern came into the tent at that moment. "Special Branch has got one of them to talk. The one we found with the bite marks on his arm. He admits he was mauled by Mr. MacDonald's dog during the attack on the house last night."

"Ha-haaah… Progress!" The major was exuberant.

"It seems Mr. Campbell was right," the young officer said. "The three men his trackers identified from their shoes are all trained ZANLA terrorists. They were part of the group of nine who attacked the house last night… and they were all three employed here on the farm."

Mike smiled to himself. 'So… Today's hunt had not been fruitless after all.'

"This guy's starting to sing like a canary, major. Inspector Ritchie says you might like to be in on the interrogation."

"I most certainly would." The major turned to his two companions. "You gentlemen coming?"

"It's getting a bit rough, Sir," the young officer said quickly. "I don't think it would be a good idea for the D.C. or Mr. Campbell to witness what's going on."

"Did Detective Inspector Ritchie tell you to say that, Rudi?"

"No, major."

"Well then… you guys can come along. As JOC Commander I take full responsibility."

"Ahhh… with respect, major," Mike responded quickly. "I don't particularly want to witness an S.B. interrogation. I'm sure the police Special Branch will do exactly what they have to do to get the information they need. And those terrorists undoubtedly deserve every bit of what they're getting. But I don't have to be a party to what is none of my business."

"As you wish, Mike."

"And I think I'll stay out of it, too, Brain," Ian Allen declined as well. "As the local magistrate it would be better if I didn't go along."

"O.K. Ian. I understand that, too. But I'm going. Four of my men were killed today… Another four were seriously injured…" the major let the innuendo hang in the air. He wanted retribution! "If you'd like another beer

just help yourselves. Now gentlemen, if you will excuse me…"

"Just one thing, lieutenant…?"

"Hanks… Mr. Campbell. Rudi Hanks."

"Rudi… Did the man say how long he had been employed on the farm…? The terrorist with the bite wounds…"

"Eight months, Mr. Campbell. About eight months."

"Thank you Rudi." Mike bit his lower lip gently as his mind went into top gear.

"Gentlemen…"

"We'll see you in the morning, Brian," the D.C. said waving the major out of the tent.

'Eight months!' The information set alarm bells ringing in Michael Campbell's head.

"Eight months is a long time for a bunch of trained terrorists to be employed on a white man's farm without me getting wind of it," Ian Allen said, stating Mike's thoughts exactly. The D.C. was clearly just as worried as Mike was about the situation.

"Have you had no inkling at all, Ian? You've really had no idea that there has been any political activity going on in the district?"

"Nothing… Not a whiff."

"How loyal is your black staff?"

"Totally… Some have been employed by government for thirty… forty years. I'd bet my bottom dollar on their loyalty. And, as you may know, it is the policy of the Department of Internal Affairs, and of the police, not to employ African staff in the regions where they have family connections. It reduces bribery and corruption.

"You know what the blacks are like, Mike. George, uncle of the D.C.'s chief messenger, needs a favour… Constable Joseph's nephew, Moses, must be told that he is under investigation for stock theft… If you don't employ people in regions where they have family connections you cut out the possibility that they may have to make a choice between their loyalty to their jobs and government, and their loyalty to their extended families.

"Not one of my black staff comes from this neck of the woods, Mike."

"And they've reported nothing out of the ordinary to you?"

"Nothing!"

"But here we've had three fully trained gooks employed on a farm not

twenty miles from your office… for eight months."

"Mmmm… I know. Looks bad doesn't it."

"It could be very bad. It could be just the tip of the iceberg, Ian."

"We've had nothing of a political nature happen here for over a year…" Ian Allen said in all earnestness. "Since August or September last year."

"And what happened then, Ian?"

"Just an isolated… unconfirmed… incident. Rumour had it that some ZANU politicians had abducted a female witch doctor… a Rain Goddess I was told. It was said they took her into Mozambique against her wishes. But when the police investigated they couldn't confirm a damn thing. Nobody seemed to know anything about it."

"Rain Goddess? Was she a nyanga… a witch doctor… or a svikiro, Ian?"

"They say she was an old svikiro. A spirit medium."

"Her name wasn't Mbuya Nehanda by any chance, was it?"

"That's right," the D.C.'s eyebrows lifted in surprise. 'How the hell would Mike Campbell know about that?' "They say she was a very powerful Rain Goddess."

"She is also the most powerful and influential svikiro in the whole goddam country," Mike added solemnly. "I'm surprised you didn't know that, Ian. The Svikiro Nehanda is the Mashona people's chief intercessory with their ancestral mhondoro spirits."

"That may have been true at one time, Mike. But few Shona believe in that sort of thing anymore… except when it is convenient. They all know that spirit worshipping is a load of bunkum."

"Not to the northern Mashona, Ian. Not to the northern Mashona." A cold shiver ran up and down Mike's spine. "It's as real and important to the raw villager hereabouts as beer and biltong is to the average white Rhodesian." Mike nodded his head sagely. "There's your problem, Ian. There's your problem in a nutshell."

"How do you know so much about Nehanda?"

"Never mind that now, Ian… But if it was the Svikiro Nehanda they took last year, then I'll bet my bottom dollar that what we have revealed here today is, indeed, just the tip of the iceberg… A huge iceberg… God help us if I am right."

PART FIVE

MARANDELLAS FARMING AREA
CENTRAL Rhodesia
1956

Chapter 25

MICHAEL peddled his bicycle to the low bridge over the Macheke River. He held his now-battered .22 rifle across the handlebars, his forefingers firmly crimped over the barrel and the pistol grip, respectively.

There was an open ploughed field on the far bank and beyond that loomed the high broken hillside of a gigantic granite kopje.

He looked to the south and located the salient mountain acacia on the skyline where Daniel had suggested they should meet. It was characteristic of him to select such a prominent feature as a rendezvous. The tree was huge and unmistakable.

It was, in fact, a common Shona practice to choose such features as RVs. Daniel had explained to him how, when the Mashona villages had been attacked and pillaged by raiding Matabele regiments in the 19th century… when the people had scattered to avoid being killed or captured… they had pre-selected such obvious features as rendezvous points where the scattered clans could reunite.

When taken by surprise, as they ran off they would shout to one another: *"We'll see you at the mtondo tree below the waterfall… or at the sleeping-lion rock… in two days time!"* And when they came together again they'd pick up the pieces and rekindle their lives. It was a means of survival in those days and the practice was now indelibly imprinted in the Shona psyche.

Michael thought about that ancient Shona custom now as he gazed at the big Mountain Acacia tree. 'Those must have been exciting times to live in…' he thought '… if you were a Matabele warrior! But even if you were a Shona it must have been exciting too, provided you were never caught.'

He stopped and climbed off his bike. He picked it up and carried it into the woodland at the side of the road, hiding it behind a well-bushed anthill. He returned to the road and walked over the bridge.

At seventeen, Michael Campbell was six feet tall and big boned… and he hadn't stopped growing yet. There was a breadth to his shoulders that suggested he would grow into a very big man. He was lean and handsome, too, in a boyish way. And the effects of a life-long exposure to the sun had given him a boy-man ruggedness… bleaching the surface of his wavy blond hair and darkly tanning his fair skin.

His eyes were his only features that had not changed over the years. They

were just as bright and just as blue as they had ever been. And they still flashed with the same urgent vitality.

When Michael arrived at the tree, he found Daniel seated on the ground, his back leaning against its bole. Daniel had grown, too. He was shorter than Michael… by as much as four inches… but he was much broader across the shoulders.

"I saw him again this morning." Daniel came straight to the point. *"and he's a beauty. His horns must be half as long again as his ears."* He was referring to a male klipspringer he had seen here the previous day.

"Same place?"" Michael sat down heavily on a nearby rock. He was breathing hard from the steep climb.

"Same place… Just a little further up the gully. There is a female and a three-quarter grown youngster with him."

"Same as before then?"

"It's the same group."

Daniel got up and they walked off together, slowly and quietly, up the narrow rocky ravine.

The first the boys knew of the little buck's presence was a brief warning bleat. It had been standing, immobile, on a high boulder watching them proceed up the exacting rocky slope. Had they not been approaching it directly, the little ram would have probably held its position and silently watched them until they moved out of sight. But that had not happened. The hunters had moved continually, inexorably, directly towards its position and the handsome little animal had finally deemed it necessary to warn its family of the approaching danger.

When the boys heard the buck's quiet alarm call they stopped and they cast their eyes up the hillside seeking out the little antelope. But the buck's immobility kept him hidden. The female and the juvenile had been feeding alongside the stream below the ram's position, however, and, alerted, they skipped over the rocks to his side. It was a dead giveaway.

There stood the little ram, his head held proudly high, his two long spiky horns thrust erect towards the sky. And he looked down almost arrogantly from his lofty perch at the toiling intruders down below.

'Eighty… ninety yards… Forty-five degree upward angle.' Michael thought, assessing the range and the elevation. 'The bullet would lift perhaps three inches at that rising angle.'

"Think you can take him from here, Daniel?" Michael spoke in a hushed

voice, still panting, not once taking his eyes off their quarry. “At this angle, you’ll have to aim two-to-three inches below where you want the bullet to hit.”

“Uh-uh.” Daniel declined. “You have a go, Michael. You're a better shot than me.”

“But we agreed, Daniel. You found him. He's yours.” Michael looked at Daniel angrily. Now was not the time to argue.

“Uh-uh… This one’s not for me, Michael. It’s a difficult shot. And I'm breathing too hard.”

“We can stalk him… Get closer.”

“We won't get any closer, Michael. You know that. He's seen us now. He won't let us get any closer than this. Take him before he goes.”

“You sure?”

“Take him, Michael. Take him quickly… before he runs off.”

The tiny lead bullet took the little klipspringer just behind the left shoulder. It raked through the top of the animal's heart and it tore a hole in the right lung before lodging up against a far rib.

The shock of the impact caused the buck to leap violently into the air. Then it raced off at great speed, its body stretched out flat across the jumbled rocks.

The female and her young one ran along behind. They did not race off headlong as the stricken ram had done. They bounced from rock to rock, with great agility, occasionally bleating their disapproval at the unexpected disturbance.

“You hit him.”

“Yaah… I hit him. Watch him. He'll go down just now.”

No sooner had those words left Michael's lips than the little buck folded its front legs and it tumbled down the hillside.

“Moyo…” Daniel beamed. A heart shot! It was, indeed, a typical heart shot. A mad dash for thirty yards after the strike… then instant death.

Daniel recognised the heart shot. And he knew all about moyo in another context, too. It was his family name, his tribal totem, and because of that he was forbidden, by tribal custom, to eat an animal's heart.

The intrusion of Anna Mashonganyika into Daniel's life eventually served to prove the depth and the durability of the boys' friendship. During the school holiday following the one when Michael had first met Anna, he had

tried his damnedest to get Daniel to jettison the attractive young black girl. But he had failed and for a very good reason. Daniel and Anna, even then, were a lot more than just good friends. Before they were fourteen years old they had become lovers and they did not try to conceal that fact from Michael.

The factor which cemented Anna and Daniel's bonding was the customary down-payment of an ox… provided by Daniel's uncle in the Soswe… to Anna's step-father on the farm. It was the promissory tribal bride-price. That ox was the start of a long lobola payment that Daniel and his family agreed to honour in full in the years ahead.

Slowly and reluctantly, therefore, Michael had come to realise that if he truly wished to retain Daniel's friendship… which he did… he would have to become part of a trio. He did not like the idea at all but he had no option in the matter. Daniel was besotted with the girl and his constantly erect penis had no conscience.

For more than a year after she and Daniel had become lovers, Anna remained deeply conscious of Michael's begrudging agreement to their school holiday relationship. Over time she developed a detached acceptance of the situation. Not once, however, did she ever suggest that she accompany the boys on their hunting forays. She knew *that* subject was *really* taboo. And she was always circumspect about her meetings with the boys at their secret hideout. That fact earned her Michael's respect.

Michael, in fact, secretly grew to like Anna… very much. And as the years passed he took pleasure in teaching her how to speak proper English; and in learning from her, and from Daniel, how to speak a perfect Chi-Zezuru. But for a long, long time he had remained obstinately unapproachable.

Michael's early association with Anna was patronisingly amicable. It had all the hallmarks of the typical colonial master-servant relationship. And Michael had been determined to keep it that way. After all, he repeatedly told himself, he only tolerated Anna to retain Daniel's friendship. In time, however, familiarity caused both Michael and Anna to moderate their respective hostilities until finally they became truly genuine friends.

In the beginning Anna was careful to keep a respectful distance from Michael. She spoke to him only when he addressed her directly, and inwardly she had festered, deeply resenting what she considered to be his superior white-racist attitude.

Nevertheless, she was also a normal, sensual young woman whose

maturing sex hormones bubbled and frothed naturally within her. It was inevitable, therefore, that she had become more and more physically attracted to Michael… more than was good for either of them in that day and age in Rhodesia.

And as her body grew in height and in feminine charms, so Anna began to entertain extravagant fantasies about making smouldering love to the handsome and highly charismatic white boy. But she kept her erotic feelings under tight control. They were very private thoughts about which she never spoke to Daniel. They were, in any case, clearly doomed to remain mere inventions of her mind because Michael's continuing outward aloofness brooked only a limited degree of companionable familiarity.

It took nearly four years, from their first encounter, for Michael to finally break down all the barriers that he had erected between them, and to accept Anna as an equal partner of the triad.

Anna and Daniel were in the cave when Michael eased his now large frame through the narrow entrance. The smell of cooking venison permeated the air. Anna was stirring a pot full of maize meal which was bubbling thickly on the fire. They were going to have maize meal sadza and tender klipspringer stew for supper. There would undoubtedly be other dishes of native relish, too. Anna was a good cook.

“Hello, Michael,” Anna said brightly. “Sadza and… Ighoghoh stew for supper… And some extra isisheboh.”

“I can't wait,” Michael said, laying his rifle on the table.

“Where've you been?” Daniel asked. “We expected you an hour ago.”

“Filling in forms… My application papers for the air force have arrived. But now that they are here I'm not sure that I want to join up after all.” He flopped down onto the dassie kaross on his palliasse.

“You're lucky. I wish I had the opportunities that you've got, Michael. I wouldn't mind being an officer in the air force.”

“You? Fly an aeroplane?” Anna laughed.

“If I had the opportunity… Yes.” Daniel was indignant.

“You'd probably try to fly it underground and aeroplanes are not designed for that,” Anna joked.

“Still… I wouldn't mind trying.” Daniel retorted.

“Why don't you want to join the air force, Michael?” Anna's question was straight forward, but the hidden look she gave Michael was contrastingly

coquettish.

She also casually undid two buttons on her blouse, revealing her tantalising cleavage, whilst innocently continuing to stir the thick porridge. She added more meal to thicken it further.

Anna's blatant come-to-bed eyes and her regular seductive gestures… always hidden from Daniel… had a disarming way of disturbing Michael's mental equilibrium. She knew it and she plied her secret weapon with a superior feminine guile.

"'Cos, above all, I want to be a game ranger, Anna. You know that."

"But you said you're too young?" she replied. "How old have you got to be…?"

"Twenty-two… Government won't take me on as a game ranger until I'm twenty-two."

"So… You've got five years to go before you can become a game ranger," Daniel remarked. "What's the problem?"

"Four-and-a-half," Michael corrected him.

"But doesn't the air force belong to government?" Anna sounded perplexed.

"That's different," Michael explained. "You can join the air force, or the army, or the police when you're seventeen. In fact, if I don't join the air force now I'll have to do nine months national service in the army anyway; or three years in the police. One or the other is something us white Rhodesian males have just got to do. One form or another of national military service is compulsory."

"And how long will you have to stay in the air force?" Anna asked him.

"Two years. I'll have to sign up for a two year short service commission."

"And you'll actually be driving an aeroplane?" Anna's eyes were alive with excitement at the prospect.

"You pilot an aeroplane, Anna. You don't drive it"

"O.K. So. You will be… pi-lot-ing… an aeroplane, Michael?"

"Yes, Anna… and as an officer. But if I do my military service in the army I'll have to go in as a buck-private… as an ordinary soldier."

"Seems to me you've got two choices… and they're both the same," Daniel retorted.

"Yaaaah. I suppose you're right. I may as well sign up for the air force."

"And then you can become a game ranger later on… after you leave the air force." Anna said brightly.

“Unless I can get the Game Department to take me on as a cadet… Some government departments take on cadets at twenty.”

”What's a cadet?”

“It’s a junior position, Anna. It gives you no rank and you don't receive full pay. But at least you get to do the job you want to do.”

“And you hope that you can become a cadet game ranger… Is that how you say it?”

“Yes, Anna, that's how you say it… And, yes, that's what I mean.”

“You know you whiteys are lucky,” Daniel said morosely. “When you leave school you've got all these different jobs you can do. We black Shona kids don't have that. We don’t have any of those opportunities.”

“You can join the army, Daniel… the Rhodesia African Rifles… the RAR,” Michael said positively. “Or the B.S.A. Police Force.”

“Yes… But as what? As a private soldier in the army… or as a constable in the police with little chance of any kind of promotion.”

“Some black guys become sergeants and warrant officers.”

“But not officers, Michael. Not real officers. If you're a Shona you've always got some white man telling you what to do for the rest of your life.

“For example: If you, Michael, decide to join the air force now, inside six months you'll become an officer… at eighteen years old. Then you'll be telling old Mashona men what to do; men as old as your own father who have been working as ordinary air force subordinates all their lives.”

“That's not fair,” Anna agreed, buttoning up her blouse.

“But that's the way it is, Daniel,” Michael said lamely. “That's the way it is.”

“But Anna's right, Michael. It’s not fair. And the white fathers at the Waddilove Mission say it’s not fair, too.”

“I don't make the rules, Daniel.”

“I'm not blaming you, Michael… but however you look at the situation it’s not fair. Just look at the opportunities you've got as a school leaver… just because you're white. You can join the army… AND you can become an officer in the army. Or you can join the air force … AND become an officer. Or you could join the police… as a patrol officer. Or you can become a game ranger. Or you could, if you want, become a farmer like your father.”

Michael nodded.

“You know, I would also like to become a game ranger, Michael. I'd be good at that job.” There was a ring of chagrin in Daniel’s voice.

“You can't, Daniel. You know that. In the Game Department, or the National Parks Department, you could only become a game scout…”

“…Which is worse than being a constable in the police,” Daniel retorted quickly.

“Yaah… well…” Michael continued, not feeling that he was winning this argument. “So why do you worry about it? You've made up your mind to be a school teacher, anyway. Why don't you just stick to that idea?”

“I don't exactly have much of an option, do I…? And there's only one teacher-training school that I can go to. That's at a mission station near Fort Victoria.”

“There isn't a teacher's training college for white Rhodesians either.”

“YET… But then white Rhodesians can go to South Africa for teacher training… or to England.” Daniel had his blood up. He was getting more and more convinced by his own arguments.

“…Which means you Shonas are better off than us whiteys. At least you can get training as a teacher in your own country.”

“Hardly better off, Michael…”

“Look… At least you can become a teacher, Daniel. And you can become a headmaster, too.”

“…Of an inferior black school… if I'm lucky.”

“You want to become headmaster of a white school?” Michael was beginning to get angry. Over the last year or so… ever since he and Daniel had started to probe career prospects… their arguments on this topic had always ended in heavy acrimony.

Daniel tutted in exasperation. He rolled over on his palliasse and, breaking off the discussion, silently and moodily he watched Anna at her cooking. He liked the fluid flow of her big rounded breasts and he liked looking at those huge pointed nipples pressed up against her flimsy blouse. It calmed his rising temper.

“I'm sorry, Daniel,” Michael relented after a while. “I know how you must feel. But, really, there's nothing I can do about it. I don't make the rules.”

“You know what really annoys me, Michael?” Daniel rounded on his friend again, propping his body up on one elbow.

Michael waited.

“You know us Mashona once had a great civilisation here in Zimbabwe?”

“In Zimbabwe?”

“Here in Rhodesia then… We Mashona used to call the country Zimbabwe.”

“That's a new one,” Michael interjected derisively. “The Zimbabwe Ruins?”

“What you white people call the Zimbabwe Ruins was once the centre of an old Mashona civilisation.”

“Who told you that?”

“The leaders of the Zimbabwe Youth Wing.”

“My father says that is a political organization… and that it’s corrupting the minds of the Mashona youth.”

“He says that, Michael, because your father is a white man.”

“I don't believe it… about a past Shona civilisation. I've been to the Zimbabwe ruins – to what they call the Zimbabwe temple outside Fort Victoria – and nothing you can say will convince me that black people meticulously cut those oblong granite-bricks out of the kopjes or built those gigantic walls. There are books available that tell us those buildings were constructed by the people of Saba… who were Arabs. This country was the biblical Land of Ophir. It was not called Zimbabwe then… which is a Makaranga word meaning ‘stone buildings’. This was where the Queen of Sheba got all the gold that she sold to people like King Solomon.”

Daniel laughed. “Now that’s a load of rubbish. Michael. You white people believe that because the white man wrote those books.”

“I suppose your Youth Wing leaders told you that, too?”

“Yes they did… And they also told us that we once had a great king… Mutota. You white people call him Monomatapa.”

“I believe there was a great paramount Shona chief called Monomatapa, Daniel. But I'll never believe the Mashona people built the Zimbabwe temple… or any of the other hundreds of stone ruins in Rhodesia.”

“That's because you don't want to believe it, Michael.” Daniel smiled cynically. “Our own people are now starting to write the real history of Zimbabwe. And hopefully, one day, you might believe in the true history, too.”

“Hummmph.” Michael could just imagine what a black Shona person would write about when recording the ancient history of the country. It would glorify the Mashonas whilst ignoring all the hard archeological facts.

“You white people don't like the idea that us Mashona were once a great civilized nation. You don't like to think that we were wearing clothes like the

Romans did, with all the gold trimmings, at a time when your ancestors in England were still running around in animal skins."

"That's crap!"

"No, Michael… It's true… It's true."

"Now I know my dad was right. That Youth Wing of yours is turning your brains into porridge. It's corrupting your mind. You're mad in the head if you believe that kind of nonsense."

"The Youth Wing leaders are going to pay all my teacher-training fees, Michael… They can't be that bad."

"And what will they get out of it, Daniel? Don't you see? They'll want something back from you. My dad told me about them paying for training courses for young Shona boys. But he says they're not doing that for nothing… There will come a payback time… You'll see."

"They want us to get a good education. That's all… which is more than your Rhodesian white government is doing for us."

"My dad says the government is worried about your African Youth Wing… and what it's doing to Mashona boys like you, Daniel. He says the Youth Wing leaders are giving young people like you many, many favours now and they are hooking you onto their political band wagon. He says that one day they'll want their pound of flesh… a return on their investment."

"Like what?"

"Like using you as cannon-fodder sometime… He says there's trouble brewing and that the Youth Wing leaders will one day ask the young people they are helping now, to repay their debt to them."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

"Riots… War maybe… between the black people and the white people. He says that one of these days the Mashona people who now run the Youth Wing will want to take over the government"

"Now that's nonsense, Michael. There has been no talk of them wanting to take over the government."

"But they have been telling you that the black majority should be running the country… Haven't they?"

Daniel's silence was eloquent.

"You see…! And my dad says that one day, Daniel, your leaders in the Youth Wing will expect you to riot… or to fight a war… for them. So be very

careful how you become involved with them."

"They haven't said a thing about riots… or a war."

"But they will… one day. My dad says he can feel it in his bones."

"Your dad is getting old… It's arthritis that he feels in his bones!"

"Listen you guys…" Anna intervened. *"Supper's ready. How's about you putting away the boxing gloves for a while."* She began to ladle heavy dollops of the thick sadza onto a large wooden platter.

"You know…" she said then… almost absently. "I remember the time when you two were the best of friends. All you ever argued about was me joining the gang. Now when you fight it's about stupid things."

"They're not stupid things," Daniel retorted crossly.

And so the evening wore on… Their intercommunication was a typical reflection of how their relationship had developed, matured and changed over the years, and how each of their thought processes was being structured.

These were the kinds of young people in the country that were soon to shape its future.

Chapter 26

AT the end of that last August school holiday, Daniel left for Waddilove two days before Michael was due to catch the train for Plumtree. For both of them the next school term was to be their last. There loomed ahead of them the same final examinations – the British Overseas Cambridge School Certificate. Thereafter the exciting world of adulthood would lie at their feet.

There were other changes afoot, too. Jimmie Campbell had, some years ago, been granted an ex-serviceman's farm by the government. It was five thousand acres in extent and it was located in the virgin tropical farming area of Karoi, two hundred-odd miles away to the north-west. Ever since he had been told of the gratuity he had been keen to move but he had sensibly waited. He was not prepared to simply relocate his family from a well-developed farm into virgin bush. Three years later the district's infrastructure had finally been developed enough to satisfy his previous concerns.

The government had wanted the new farming area to be occupied and developed quickly after World War II but many of the ex-serviceman farmers, like Jimmie Campbell, had refused to move until the arterial roads had been completed, until the most important bridges had been built, and until their farms had had borehole water supplies completed. By the time all this had been done the little town of Karoi also boasted a police station, a doctor’s surgery and government clinic, a garage and petrol station, a butchery, a bakery, and there were several shops and stores supplying the other basic necessities.

Jimmie and Marion Campbell had then sold their old Marandellas farm for a reasonable price. They planned to use the monies they received from the sale as development capital for the new property, together with the new bank loans that had been made available to them. The two of them were prepared to live in tents and under tarpaulins to begin with, but planned to have the shell of a new farm house completed and roofed before Christmas. They were determined to at least have a proper roof over their heads by the time the boys came back from boarding school. All the mod-cons would come later.

Jimmie had travelled back and forth from the old farm to the new one, on a weekly basis, for months. He had started his new year's farming development programme at Karoi months before he was due to relocate. He had employed a nucleus of Nyasa boys – imported black labourers from Nyasaland (later to become Malawi) – to begin the process. Some, under the direction and control of his Shona foreman from the old farm, had established his new tobacco seedbeds. Others were stumping new lands out of the virgin msasa and mfuti woodlands. He had purchased new tractors, trailers and farm implements and had them operating on the new farm.

Many of the core elements of his black farming staff agreed to go with him to Karoi – tractor drivers, mechanics, builders and cattlemen. Others remained behind, not because they did not want to work for their old white boss any more, but because their traditional family homes were located not too far away in the Soswe Tribal Trust Land reservation. Daniel's father and Anna's step-father were amongst those who were not prepared to go.

The Campbell family planned to move permanently – lock, stock and barrel – just as soon as their three boys had returned to their respective boarding schools at the end of the August school holidays. The week they left, the new owner and his family would be moving into their old house.

At the end of the next school term, therefore, before either of them started training for their respective adult professions, Michael would travel to his new home at Karoi, and Daniel would return to the old farm at Marandellas. Daniel's early departure for Waddilove had already started a process of circumstances that would see the two boys irrevocably separated for the rest of their lives.

During those last two days of the school holiday Michael felt Daniel's absence poignantly. It was not so much that Daniel wasn't there with him during those last two days, but rather he experienced a great sadness in the knowledge that he and Daniel would never again enjoy their carefree holiday companionship on the farm – *huntin', shootin' an' fishin'*.

Nevertheless, there was a temporary but most salutary counterpoise that Michael was determined not to squander. It concerned indulging the one secret passion of his life that he had never shared with anybody… not even with Daniel. Especially not with Daniel! It was one that he *dared* not share with Daniel. And throughout the morning of that last full day he waited anxiously and impatiently for the hours to pass.

After lunch he cleaned and oiled his .22 rifle for the last time and he placed

it almost reverently in the glass-fronted gun cabinet in his father's study. Then he hurried down to the Gumbora river. He waded through the shallow water above the waterfall and made his way, as fast as he could, to the old Bushman's cave on the kopje.

The travelling rugs and his dassie-skin kaross blanket were still in the old tin trunk in the cave. His last visit to his and Daniel's secret hideout… as had been the case at the end of every other school holiday over the past ten years… would be to recover these items and to return them to the cupboard in his bedroom at home. This was his reason for visiting the cave on this occasion, too. But this time there was also another reason.

Anna was in the cave when Michael arrived.

Prior to taking the short walk to the cave, Anna had prepared herself with meticulous care for this final assignation with her lovely young white man. She was determined to leave him with an indelible impression. She had bathed, liberally washing her body with a sweet smelling soap, and she had dressed in only a simple blouse and short skirt, purposely omitting underwear from her ensemble. And she had brushed out her hair, waving it with a light and glistening gel. She did not have the short crinkly hair typical of the Mashona people. The Chinese blood in her veins had given her longer and straighter hair than her half-sisters and Michael had often told her that she looked much better when she fashioned her hair in a way that mimicked the long-haired style of the white women. She had done that today especially to please him.

The stolen-love game Anna had developed with Michael over the past twelve months, all discretely behind Daniel's back, was the successful result of her purposeful and relentless seduction. She knew that Michael would *never* have succumbed to her wiles had she not taken the initiative. So she pursued him like a wanton whore. He had been just too shy and too reticent a young man to make the first advances.

She had suspected he was shy of making female contact, generally. Plumtree was a boys-only boarding school in the bush, far away and sixty miles south of Bulawayo. At school Michael was never in schoolgirl company and when he came home his friends comprised just Daniel and herself. So, psychologically, she had him very accurately mapped out.

Anna had suspected, too, that because she was essentially a black Shona woman, Michael would have forever kept his distance. She understood…

without any malice… that he would not have consciously solicited an affair with a girl like her because, not far beneath the surface of his skin, there lingered an instinctive racial barrier. Racism was part of Michael Campbell's culture and cultures are deeper seated in a person's psyche than most people understand. She knew intuitively that his culture, deep down, was something that he could not deny.

But Anna had *wanted* Michael Campbell. She had wanted him desperately in every possible way that she could think of. Her physical need for him had become her secret passion. And she would not countenance failure. A few short months after Anna decided she was going to have him, she had him hooked securely.

Michael simply could not resist her. He became Anna's willing victim and her eager pupil. By nature he was a sensual young man with a high level of testosterone in his veins. He was also of an age where all his hormones were naturally highly active. All this drove him, ultimately, to fully embrace Anna's unfettered and voracious appetite for all things carnal… despite his initial and natural inclination to resist.

Anna Mashonganyika was an instinctive seductress. She calculated exactly how to manipulate Michael's natural lust for life. Sensing that he had the same sexual desires of any young man his age… no matter the colour of his skin… she set about using her natural beauty and her rampant sexuality to arouse his superficially dormant physical appetites.

She began by bumping into him *accidentally*… brushing her body hard up against him… letting him feel her voluptuous young breasts pressed against his naked arms. She rubbed the hardness of her large and protruding nipples against his back when she squeezed past him in the confines of the cave. She carefully took note of all his various reactions to these seemingly innocuous contacts. And she looked at him surreptitiously, all the time, with her big beguiling dark brown eyes, making sure that he saw her looking at him with obvious lustful intent.

Anna very quickly ascertained that her subtle touches aroused him. This fired her machinations. And as the frequency of the *accidental* contacts increased, so Michael began to realize she was doing it on purpose. But, because she did it only when Daniel was not conscious of the fact, he did not object. His hormones, Anna realized, had started to bubble.

Then, one day, she took the bull by the horns. When Daniel had left the

cave on some important errand, Anna walked straight up to Michael and she kissed him directly and lasciviously on the mouth. And she did not move away. She curled her arms around him and she locked her breasts and her lithe young figure tight against his body.

She held him close for many long moments and, after the kiss, she looked up into his face with her large, doe-like, deep brown eyes. Anna probed Michael's eyes looking for a message. She tried to interpret the bland expression on his face. She needed, urgently, to know what would come of this, her boldest approach to him yet. Her eyes were sparkling… her heart beating fast. She did not want to break the magical spell. She said nothing… letting the moment speak for itself. And she kept her arms about his body holding him tight against her own.

Michael did not object. He did not resist. Instead, for the first time ever, he wrapped his arms around Anna's shoulders and he pulled her even tighter up against him. He smiled at her… softly… hesitantly. He looked down admiringly into her magnificent eyes… his eyes roaming over her beautiful face. Anna could feel his body trembling. He was quaking gently all over and she could feel his heart thumping heavily in his chest. In that moment Anna knew she had caught her man.

The magic had begun.

Thereafter Michael Campbell had been firmly hooked to Anna Mashonganyika's wagon. And on that day, on one of the hessian palliases in the cave, with Anna's careful guidance, Michael Campbell willingly lost his virginity. On that day he made love to Anna Mashonganyika for the very first time.

Michael Campbell was drawn to Anna as a moth is attracted to a flame. Her demanding and animalistic sexual tendencies both shocked and fascinated him. He became obsessed, forever craving more and more of this mysterious and beautiful woman. It was she who gave him wings to soar to the euphoric heights of orgasm with a woman. It was she who taught him the art of love-making. And, as so often happens with young people, in his mind this bound them together forever and a day.

Anna and Michael made love whenever they could. She constantly occupied Michael's mind and he hers. They both relived each and every moment of their sexual escapades. And, as a result of the stirrings in their respective loins, these constant thoughts of making love with each other, urged them to plan their next tryst at the earliest possible opportunity.

To Anna, Michael's unequivocal surrender to her advances became just as much an addictive aphrodisiac as her open and lecherous lust was to him. And she exploited their mutual need for each other at every opportunity. Anna hungered for him constantly. His desire was equally insatiable. And she flaunted herself wantonly on every available occasion when in his company.

The sight of small beads of perspiration bursting out on his upper lip, and of a faint soft blush rising up from his neck… in reaction to a mere downward glance at his crotch… or a provocative roll of her shoulder that exposed her breast… excited her and intensified her ever-present sexual cravings. At times, the intensity of her obsession caused her body to tremble uncontrollably as the heat rose up in her loins. She felt no shame. The basic carnal instincts which coursed so richly through Anna's veins when she thought of Michael Campbell, eliminated any and all thoughts of her moral obligations to Daniel. Yet she still loved Daniel… dearly. She never questioned that.

Nevertheless, her love for Michael was overpowering and she soon knew he felt the same way about her. Recognising this, Anna shamelessly manipulated her power over Michael. She got from him whatever it was she wanted. He was like putty in her hands. And the strategies and the techniques she used became ever more bold and licentious.

Anna had spread out the kaross and both the blanket-rugs, one on top of the other, on one of the palliasses. At the sound of Michael's scrabbling footsteps along the rocky ledge, Anna was overcome by a rush of physical desire. Her breathing quickened, her nipples hardened and her inner muscles twitched involuntarily as her most primal instincts came to life.

When Michael was but a few feet from the entrance to the cave, he stopped for a moment. He paused to calm his rapid breathing… which was not the result of his swift climb up the hill. He was a fit young man but, at that moment, the anticipation of what lay ahead overwhelmed him with huge waves of erotic vertigo. The sensation was all consuming. It invaded every corner of his being. In an effort to slow his racing heartbeat and to douse the rising flames in his loins, he took several deep breaths before finally entering the cave.

Michael found Anna sprawled seductively on top of the comfortable couch. She looked directly up into his eyes and she was smiling. She was propped up on one elbow and had contrived the pose for she had unbuttoned

her blouse to subtly expose one pale brown breast.

Michael stood still for a long moment looking down at her. In that instant of time he thought she was the most beautiful creature in the whole wide world. Silently he returned her beguiling smile and he soaked up the inviting, provocative picture she presented. The vision of her salacious loveliness made his heart beat a fast tattoo. His breathing fluttered as he felt the heat rising in his belly. He was always astounded at the speed with which these erotic feelings overpowered his senses when he was alone like this with Anna.

All hesitation was then abruptly swept away by the sexually charged volts of electricity that arced between them. Anna abandoned her pose, succumbing to her physical cravings as she swung her legs off the couch. In doing so she openly revealed her unclad womanhood to her man. She rushed towards Michael, smothering his gasp with hungry lips. Her tongue flicked across his mouth and urgently probed its inner depths. She thrust her voluptuous breasts hard against his ribs as he brushed the loose blouse off her shoulders.

Anna, all subterfuge now abandoned, shamelessly and frantically attacked the buttons of Michael's short khaki trousers. Her desire was at fever pitch.

With his hands on her shoulders Michael wrested his lips from Anna's, and he leant back saying *"Wait… wait Anna."*

For a moment he looked down at her heaving naked breasts. They were exquisite. Anna knew Michael loved her breasts and since their secret affair had begun in earnest she had subtly and provocatively pressed them up against his body at every opportunity.

"Quickly Michael. We're wasting time." Anna said as she undid the last button and slid his trousers down over his hips.

"We've got all afternoon," he said, feigning a nonchalance that was not there. He swiftly unbuttoned his shirt and wrenched it over his shoulders. *"We mustn't rush it. You were the one who taught me that. Remember?"* He felt no embarrassment standing now in front of her in a state of absolute nakedness. Anna had long ago expunged all the inhibitions Michael had once harboured!

Michael subconsciously absorbed Anna's air of urgency. He was also keenly aware of the powerful forces which ranged through his own body sending demanding messages to his now excited manhood. With her own sexual interests in mind Anna had, over many months in the past year,

painstakingly and patiently taught Michael the art of restraint and he had quickly recognized the advantages. It was not long, therefore, before she had moulded her once hasty and impetuous lover into one with a disciplined authority over his onetime uncontrollable impulses.

It was Anna who now displayed hurried impatience.

Michael cupped Anna's beautiful breasts in his hands… almost with reverence. His finger tips gently squeezed the pliant, rubber-hard nipples, thrilling at the feel of their greater erection. He was about to lower his head to suck on them when Anna sank to her knees, wrenching them from Michael's grasp.

She passionately clasped his buttocks with her fingers and took the head of his penis into her mouth, rolling her tongue around it. Joyfully she embraced the ever deepening onslaught of lust which was now rampaging through her impatient and quivering body, setting every nerve afire.

Michael ran his fingers through her hair. She looked upwards and saw that his head was hanging backwards from his shoulders, his face directed at the rock above. There was a tightness about his jaw and she knew his eyes would be closed. These were the signs of his rapture.

A deep throated groan escaped from Michael's lips.

Born of her super-developed sexuality was Anna's desire and capacity to titillate. And the knowledge that she now had this beautiful young white man completely at her mercy empowered and delighted her. She had utterly bewitched him. Her teasing tactics, however, were also carefully calculated.

Michael's heart was pounding painfully against the walls of his chest. He shuddered a heavy sigh as he wrestled with his emotions. He was trembling as Anna rose from her knees and snaked her way up his body. Her sensational breasts never lost contact with him all the way up. They nudged hard against his penis, his stomach and finally came to rest on his chest.

She lifted her arms and wrapped them around Michael's neck. And Michael's hands slid down her back and onto her buttocks, pulling her pelvis towards him tightly. With one swift movement of his fingers he unfastened the button at the back of her skirt. Its two ends fell downwards and outwards on either side. Feeling the garment loose, Anna moved backwards and away from him… and with a provocative roll of her hips the skirt tumbled to the floor. And there it lay in a forgotten heap for what remained of the afternoon.

"Today our time is precious," Anna said to Michael quietly. "It will be our last day together, Michael, for a long, long time… Maybe forever." There

was a quaver in her voice.

"Not forever, Anna," Michael said assuredly, "It will never be the last time for us. Wherever you and I are we will find some way of getting together. We must. Our lives will be entangled forever."

Michael wrapped his arms around Anna more securely and he gently guided her down onto the couch. He knelt over her, quickly absorbing the significance of the spasmodic tremors which now racked her body. He was familiar with the cravings of her flesh now. He knew that when Anna was in high lust… as she was at that moment… wherever he touched her body, it would shiver as if seared by an electric flame.

Not a word passed between them. No words were necessary.

As Anna settled her back onto the blanket she took Michael's right hand and placed it between her open legs. He ran his fingers lightly, lasciviously around the doorway to her sex. Her hips jerked involuntarily, again and again, with each provocative touch.

Anna sought out Michael's rampant penis, gently wrapping her fingers around its thick and rigid shaft. And Michael took one of Anna's exquisite nipples into his mouth.

Michael's body began to shake. His breathing became swift and irregular. Against her belly Anna could feel his heart pounding beneath his ribs. There was nothing she enjoyed more than making forbidden love to Michael Campbell. And she wallowed in the ecstasy of the moment.

Anna smelled of fresh fragrant soap and of the scented oil in her hair. Her body was strong and powerful. And Michael revelled in the exuberance of her vital, craving lust.

The strength of the high voltage sexual impulses that charged their bodies, minds and souls was felt by both of them. It engulfed them in a frenzy of urgency as Michael maneuvered his body between Anna's thighs. When she felt him beginning to penetrate, she lifted her legs and pushed her pelvis violently at him, feeling instantly… with huge exaltation… his hardened muscle plunge precipitously to the fiery and fluid depths of her carnal soul.

"Hold still," she moaned compellingly. The words rose with great effort from the mire of her wanton pleasure. *'It feels soooo good…'* Anna said breathlessly. *'It feels soooo good, Michael!'*

Anna held him tight, her arms wrapped possessively round his broad and naked torso. Her ankles entwined over his buttocks. And they both held still,

coupled together in static ecstasy. For a short period the violent tremors in Anna's body persisted. Then they slowly subsided. She sighed softly and languorously with blissful rapture.

He remained still, propping his weight on his hands. His back arched rigidly to maximise his penetration… unmoving… very deep… the tension in him vibrant… juddering.

Michael's appetite for this beguiling girl was insatiable. He always marvelled at the magical phenomenon of this ancient mystery and miracle of life when they were linked like this together. And Anna revelled in the euphoric pleasure of their fluid coupling. She began to groan in the cycles that now came in regular waves of fevered ecstasy. They engulfed her completely. Her orgasm came in a rush with stupendous paroxysmal climaxes that swamped her body, her mind and her soul… again… and again… and again.

"Don't stop, Michael… For God's sake don't stop now…" Anna panted.

Michael's climax deep inside her was like an erupting volcano. Gigantic surges of molten energy gushed up from the centre of his being, each onslaught more powerful than the last, each one claiming more and more of his consciousness until finally, he was completely overwhelmed by its exquisite torture. When he erupted inside her, Michael pushed in hard and he held himself still… very still… and very deep.

"Ohhhh… Christ." He muttered softly to himself, gritting his teeth. The sensation was excruciatingly beautiful.

Anna was deeply conscious of the moment. She writhed and she squirmed and she moaned beneath him. She delighted in the rhythmic explosions of his climax. And as he pulsed… and pulsed… and pulsed… deep inside her… again… and again… and yet again… she thrust her hips at him, grinding the bone of her wiry pubis hard up against his own. And as the orgasm gradually subsided so she pushed and she pulled in measured thrusts that matched the beat of each of his ecstatic ejaculations.

But the magic moment could not last forever. Michael's body slowly relaxed on top of her and Anna stopped her wild gyrations. Gently she returned her feet to the blanket. Her thighs fell open. They were both utterly spent… exhausted. And they were bathed in their own and each other's sweat… both of them breathing wildly from their exertions.

All that now remained of their stupendous love-making was the gentle throbbing of their still-united organs. They held their bodies together,

coupled tightly for as long as they could, savouring every last tender moment. The complete fulfillment they had both experienced had been wonderful. And they were left with a beautiful, mutual and astonishing feeling of utter contentment that penetrated to the depths of their beings.

"I can't bear the thought of losing you, Michael. I can't even think about us not doing this together… forever." Anna whispered her worried thoughts into his glistening face, the lust of her craving body gratified for the time being, at last. Her voice was weak with the shallowness of her breathing. *"But you are white and I am black…"*

"Shhhh." He smiled down at her, his chest still heaving.

But even as Michael was placating her, he knew that Anna was right. He had known it all along. He and Anna Mashonganyika could never have a public life together. Not in Rhodesia. They both knew instinctively that if they tried to challenge the social conventions they would destroy both themselves and each the other.

Michael had put those kinds of thoughts out of his mind a long time ago. He had accepted the reality for what it was. Anna's was an impossible dream whereas he had conditioned his mind to be content with what they had together, and to enjoy it for as long as they could make it last. Nevertheless, on that day he also did not want it all to end. And he did not want to even *think* about it ending either. In that crucial moment in time, all that mattered to him was that they were joined together in a timeless, mindless, re-creative ritual, their emotions swamped by floods of glorious carnal sensations.

Silently he lowered his golden tanned body onto Anna's naked brown breasts, taking again the weight of his chest onto his forearms. He rested his forehead on the cushion next to her ear. And he delighted in the fragrance of her body, mingled with the odour of their sweat and the scent of *woman* that drenched his senses. He lay like that on top of her, for a long, long time. And they wallowed together in the continuing, cloying bliss, and in the gentle waning rapture of the ecstatic moment.

Then, simultaneously, as their consummate lust for each other subsided, and as it turned to a passive, languid, sensuous euphoria, a great sadness enveloped them both. Michael pulled himself away from Anna and he lay on his back next to her naked body, looking up at the giant slab of raw granite above their heads. Anna looked up at the rock, too – and in that moment they both understood, unequivocally, that the only time they had left to spend together was what remained of that single afternoon.

PART SIX

North Eastern Rhodesia
1972

Chapter 27

IN the days of the 1960s' ZIPRA war, each time there had been a terrorist incursion from Zambia… a *'crossing'* the Rhodesians had called them… the security forces (SF) set up a temporary JOC HQ *(Joint Operational Command Headquarters)*. It comprised the senior officer commanding the local army unit, a senior Rhodesian Air Force liaison officer, the local Member-in-Charge of the B.S.A. Police, and the District Commissioner… and whoever else might be seconded to the group for special strategic or tactical purposes. Each of its members had a specific and unique function to perform or expert advice to offer. The senior army officer was always appointed the JOC Commander. He was referred to as the JOC's *'Sunray'*.

The JOC was the nerve centre that planned, coordinated and authorized all the anti-terrorist operations conducted within the zone of its authority. In the 1960s JOC HQs were established on the Zambesi River or on the shores of Lake Kariba… always somewhere close to the terrorists' crossing point. Their purpose was to coordinate the anti-insurgency security force measures employed to deal with each invading group. In the early days, a JOC came into being when a crossing had been confirmed, and it disbanded when the terrorists involved had all been accounted for.

Each operation was awarded a code name… such as *'Nickle'* or *'Cauldron'* or *'Cosmic'*; and when the ZIPRA fighters had all been killed or captured a report on the operation was compiled. The files were then neatly bound with a profusion of red tape and committed to the secret military archives under the label of their respective code names.

Few operations lasted more than a week or two. And when they were over… until the next incursion… the war came to a stop. Not a single ZIPRA attempt to infiltrate the country ever succeeded in its mission. And none caused much damage to the morale or to the economy of the country.

After the attack on the MacDonald homestead a similar JOC was set up at the scene of the attack… on the MacDonald's farm. The operation was code-named *'Hurricane'*. Its objective was to catch or to kill the ZANLA killers who had perpetrated that specific attack. It was no different, therefore, to any of the JOC HQs that had been set up during the ZIPRA insurgencies.

Two nights after the first attack, Rex Mbudzi defiantly hit another white

farmhouse, audaciously just two miles from the MacDonald farm where the JOC HQ was still in operation.

By then Mike Campbell and his trackers were on their way home to the Gonarezhou. They were not involved in any of the follow ups.

In the second strike, the farmer was seriously wounded… but he survived. His wife, however, was killed. One of the couple's teenage sons died in hospital a week later from his wounds. The farmer had been a neighbour of the MacDonalds and he had provided them with a roof over their heads whilst Archie was getting their home back into a liveable condition. In this second attack Martha MacDonald suffered some shrapnel wounds. Archie again escaped unhurt.

The whites in the area hit the panic button. They demanded immediate military protection, and within days the entire Centenary district was crawling with soldiers. Martial law was imposed and a night-time curfew came into effect. Thereafter, anyone found walking about after dark on a white man's farm, even an innocent traveller, was shot out of hand by the soldiers, or by the policemen, who manned the ambushes. And dozens of ambushes were laid every night by the now hyped-up security forces.

There were no further arrests, but the investigation into the two attacks continued. In early January the JOC was moved, at Ian Allen's suggestion, to his more convenient and more centrally situated offices in the town of Centenary.

Three weeks after the MacDonald farm attack, despite the now huge military force at his disposal, the only success that Major Brian Stokes could chalk up was Mike Campbell's fortuitous arrest of the three terrorists on that very first day. But those three cadres were to provide SB with their first vital glimmer of understanding about ZANLA's Chimurenga War programme. They still did not know, however, just how extensive ZANLA’s preparations for war really were.

Starting thirty-six hours after they had been captured, and for a week thereafter, the resistance of the three captured ZANLA fighters slowly crumbled. Gradually, like novice dentists pulling teeth, their SB interrogators extracted more and more information. Lack of sleep and continuous subtle physical pressures… which the Rhodesians would have denied was brutal torture… were the factors which made the captives succumb.

When their resilience finally collapsed, the ZANLA men took their interrogators to all the hidden arms caches that they knew about. But on

every occasion, when SB arrived at the sites, they found them empty. Nevertheless, there was ample evidence to support the truth of the men's disclosures.

There was always an abundance of recent foot prints on the sandy floors of the hidden caves they visited. And there were the clear marks of AK-47 rifle butts, and the bipod marks from RPD machine-guns, too. There were the imprints of ammunition boxes and the distinctive concentric ring patterns left by Soviet bloc TM-46 land mines. Each search party found the same thing… ample evidence to support the truth of their captive's information. The sites the captives pointed out had definitely been arms caches… arms caches that had been stripped just days before their locations had been revealed.

It was not long before the interrogators knew they had milked their captives dry of information, and the trails they had been following petered out.

Rhodesia's Central Intelligence Organisation (C.I.O.), revitalized following the farm attacks, dispatched a new batch of native moles into the ZANLA organization at all levels. Over the next several months… when the intelligence these moles had gathered started to filter back… they found out that ZANLA's planned battle zones in the north-east, even in those early days of the war, were split into three sectors… Nehanda, Chaminuka and Takawira… and that Chaminuka and Takawira were then still in mothballs. Throughout the month of December, all the action centred on Rex Mbudzi's western Nehanda Sector. The C.I.O. also discovered that each sector was sub-divided into several detachments, and that each detachment comprised many smaller and highly mobile sections.

They also discovered that each low-ranking cadre had access to only very limited information. All they knew was that which related directly to themselves. This included the location of only minor arms caches. The SF, in the field, also secured some of ZANLA's standing orders which instructed all *'freedom fighters'*, should they be captured, not to divulge any information for at least twenty-four hours after they had been taken. Thereafter, to avoid further unnecessary physical abuse by their interrogators, they were at liberty to divulge whatever they wanted. But, of course, the longer they could hold out the better.

That twenty-four hour period of grace was just long enough for those of the unit who were still at large, to relocate their precious arms. And after the

weapons had been moved, and after the remaining members of the section had re-arranged themselves amongst the people, it mattered not at all what the captives told the bewildered white S.B. policemen. And the vakomana of ZANLA had no difficulty at all in finding another safe puddle-of-people amongst whom they could swim.

The security force activity that followed the MacDonald farm attack did not deter Mbudzi in the least. His well-organised Nehanda detachments continued to cause destruction, murder and mayhem whenever and wherever they could find attractive soft targets. They attacked unprotected farms like sharks in a feeding frenzy. They blew up farmers' vehicles with land mines. They ambushed the vehicles of white farmers returning home from business trips to Salisbury, or from shopping excursions to Centenary.

ZANLA cadres also brutally cut the hamstrings of their prize bulls when targeted farmers left their properties. And on those occasions, too, they raided the farm stores and set fire to the white men's houses. They did anything and everything to demoralise the white farming community.

They always operated in the late evenings, or during the early hours of the night, using the cover of darkness to bomb-shell and to melt away from the scenes of their crimes. Come the dawn they had been re-absorbed into the local African populace. Few were caught in the SF ambushes because, *somehow*, the vakomana of ZANLA seemed to know exactly where they were located.

During this initial phase of the war, some of the land mines were detonated by the vehicles of innocent black men. Too many tribal Shona were getting killed. The people complained to their chiefs. The chiefs, in turn, complained to the local ZANLA political commissar… who relayed the complaint to their sectorial commanders. Thus a system of communication became established.

So the drivers of the big buses that carried African passengers to and from their tribal reservations, and the frightened drivers of native-owned motorcars and lorries, were forewarned by ZANLA about the presence of their land mines. Their cadres left symbols along the road to tell the drivers where the mines were located: green leaves scattered over the road; a green branch broken and left hanging from a tree; a living, thick tuft of thatching grass tied in a knot next to the road; two rocks on the road, one standing on top of the other; or a sand-filled Coca Cola bottle standing in the storm water ditch. At

those places the drivers were told not to use the left or the right track of the road because that was where the land mine was buried. On occasions they were advised to take alternative routes whenever the big round *biscuit tins* were laid on a main dirt-road for a particularly important reason.

The communication system worked and, thereafter, Shona civilian casualties, due to land mine detonations, declined dramatically.

Christmas 1972 came and went. By the end of the year the security situation in the Centenary district was quite out of control. Rex Mbudzi and his freedom fighters ran rough-shod, and with seeming impunity, all over the countryside. They popped up everywhere out of the blue… wrought havoc… then disappeared into thin air.

The counter-insurgency measures mounted by the combined Rhodesian security forces met with only minimal success. And in the well-organised and well-prepared Nehanda Sector of the ZANLA war zone, Mbudzi's pugnacious and victorious drive continued unabated into the New Year.

On New Year's eve, in a televised and radio broadcast to the nation, the Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith, described the country as *"… a strong nation, sure of its purpose and confident of its future."* And after a long dissertation about the need for racial harmony, he concluded his address by saying:

> *"As you all know, we have had a few incidents recently on the north-eastern border. Fortunately our security forces were quickly on the scene and have meted out to the terrorists salutary retribution. As we have done in the past, once again this year you will all, I am sure, join me in saying a prayer of thanks for our security forces, whose constant vigil on our borders plays such an important part in helping to preserve Rhodesia."*

In mid-January, Comrade Sectorial Commander Muliloh opened up a second offensive in his Chaminuka Sector. The following week Comrade Jairos, now a Sectorial Commander, too, ambushed a vehicle and killed a white farmer, his wife and his two small children, near Mtoko. This action initiated liberation operations in the Takawira Sector, also.

Daniel's first coup was the blowing up of an army unimog carrying six white soldiers. In a well-planned second-phase attack his ZANLA fighters wiped out the befuddled survivors before they could recover from the

devastating shock of the unexpected land mine blast. They raked the soldiers, as they staggered about, with harrying RPD machine gun fire, and with a fusillade of automatic AK-47 assault-rifle bullets. All this Daniel directed himself from a concealed ambush position.

By the end of January the whole north-east border area was aflame… from the Dande right across to Mtoko.

It soon became apparent that ZANLA was fighting a very different kind of war to anything the Rhodesians had yet encountered. The local black populace had clearly been thoroughly subverted. They were supportive of ZANLA and uncooperative with the SF. The situation was chalk-and-cheese compared to the war the Rhodesians had fought and won against ZIPRA… and they were ill-prepared to handle it.

Caught hopping on the wrong foot, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Salisbury resurrected the quiescent Combined Operations Headquarters (Com Ops.) they had established during the war with ZIPRA. Its prime objective was to assess the military's capability to deal with the unexpected Mashona insurrection, and to devise a strategy to fight ZANLA.

The first thing Com Ops determined was that Operation Hurricane was going to be a long and drawn out campaign. The concept of a limited-life JOC was, therefore, scrapped. The entire north-east war zone became known as the *'Hurricane Operational Area'*. It encompassed all the white farming areas and all the Mashona Tribal Trust Lands from the Dande in the west to the Inyanga Mountains in the east. This included all three of ZANLA's designated war zones.

Hurricane was to retain its cognomen until the end of the war seven long years later.

To control this vast area, a permanent JOC was set up in the centre of the war zone, on the edge of a small farming town called Mount Darwin. It replaced the temporary army camp that had languished there, as a precautionary measure, since the days of the ZIPRA war. The old weathered tents were replaced with permanent brick offices, with solid barracks, and with other necessary facilities including a tarmac airstrip. This was all contained within the confines of a well protected military encampment.

Three months after the MacDonald homestead attack, Colonel Tom Hubbard was promoted to brigadier and he was appointed the overall military commander at Mount Darwin. His task was to coordinate the anti-terrorist

efforts of the army, the air force and the police in the entire Hurricane war zone. He was also empowered to control the security activities of the civil administration under the District Commissioners, in terms of the special circumstances of the formally declared emergency.

Tom Hubbard's appointment marked the beginning of a long, bitter and protracted struggle between the white minority and the black majority of Rhodesia. Hurricane also marked the beginning of the end for white political supremacy in south-central Africa. Hostilities finally came to an end only when the state of Rhodesia passed into history… when it was replaced by Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe in 1980. But there was an awful lot of murky water still to pass under the rickety bridge of life before that eventuality became an historical fact. And the war was still to take a terrible toll of the country's people, both black and white and those of mixed blood.

PART SEVEN

CHIPINDA POOLS,
GONAREZHOU NATIONAL PARK
SOUth Eastern LOWVELD, Rhodesia
EASTER 1973

Chapter 28

MIKE Campbell walked thoughtfully across the open space between his office and the old reconditioned hunter's lodge that was his home. The giant mtondo tree in the driveway was dripping with golden mango-like fruit. A squirrel chattered at him from a low branch above his head.

A woodland kingfisher suddenly racked the air with its strident call. Mike looked up at the bird. It was sitting on the extremity of a far flung branch, its wings erect and stiff above its head. He smiled to himself. The kingfisher was a family friend. Every November the bird and his mate came back to Chipinda Pools, headquarters of the Gonarezhou National Park, from wherever it was they had migrated to during the cool winter months. And each successive summer they raised a brood of chicks in one of the many nesting boxes that Mike had fixed to the tree's higher branches.

‘He should have been long gone on his migration,’ Mike thought. ‘He’s very late this year.’

The house and the office had been built on the high left bank of the wide Lundi River. As he walked along, Mike looked down over the waving, fluffy-cream plumes of the reed beds that all but choked the river channels at this point.

There was an eruption of satisfied hippo grunts from the big pool just below the house. It was a peaceful sound that normally filled Mike's heart with serene contentment, but today the animals' exuberance was at variance with his sombre mood. One of the letters in his hand gave him no cause to want to indulge in such tranquility.

“When did this arrive?” Nikki laid the letter down on the table. She looked worrisomely at her husband. She was a lovely woman with wavy auburn hair and a golden amber tan. The tan came with the territory when you were a game warden’s wife.

Witness, their cook boy, had laid the table. He had already cooked the breakfast and was hovering about waiting for Nikki to tell him to serve it up.

“Oh, for God sake! I'll call you in a minute, Witness,” she said irritably.

“We are not ready for breakfast just yet.”

The young Tonga, dressed smartly in a white servant's tunic, looked greatly affronted. He disappeared morosely through the door that led into the kitchen.

Nikki had put on some weight since their long years on the Chizarira… since the family had left Binga. That was the result of the second baby she had produced since those halcyon days. But, Michael thought, she was still as supremely beautiful as ever. And she was even more attractive when she was angry.

“Bill Conway brought the mail into the office this morning. He collected it last night when he passed through Chiredzi.” Bill Conway was Mike's senior game ranger at Chipinda Pools.

“So… What are you going to do?”

He shrugged. “They don't leave me much choice, do they?”

“It says here Michael, they are asking staff to ‘volunteer’. You've done your bit for the army… at Binga.

“More than enough… if you ask me! You don't have to volunteer to join this damn tracking unit. There are lots of young eager beavers who felt they lost out because they were not involved in the ZIPRA war. Let some of them put their unsuspecting heads into the bloody noose for a change.”

Michael took a deep breath. He let it out slowly, looking at Nikki wistfully. *“It’s not as simple as that.”*

“Why not? It seems to me that all you have to do is not volunteer.”

“Nikki! I am expected to volunteer.”

“To hell with them, Michael. It says here…” she tapped the paper vigorously. “It says in the letter they are asking for ‘volunteers’. You don't have to volunteer, dammit.”

“Are we going to have a fight about this?”

“You've made up your mind already… I can see it in your eyes… in your body language.”

“I've got no option, Nikki.” Mike was clearly adamant. “The terrorists are shooting up the white farmers in the north-east like it’s gone out of fashion. They're killing people, Nikki… innocent men, women and children are dying. It’s not a happy situation. Believe me…”

“I know, Michael,” Nikki cut him dead brusquely. “You met the MacDonalds after their house was attacked last December. And it affected

you. You want to do something to help. But Rhodesia has a big army now, and an air force, and a very good police force. It’s their job to deal with the terrorists.”

Mike shook his head slowly. “They can't cope, Nikki. They haven't even made a dent in the terrorist numbers in four months. It’s much worse than when we fought ZIPRA at Binga. The gooks up there are ZANLA… Chinese-trained Mashona. And as I told you before, they've used witch-craft very cleverly to establish themselves firmly amongst the local people. The locals are supporting them… and they are hiding them. Just like Mao Tse Tung taught them to do, the ZANLA terrorists are ‘swimming amongst the people’… and they've made a bloody good job of it. They've got to be stopped.”

“So let the army do the fighting, Michael.”

“No, Nikki. This time we're all going to have to pull our weight. Who was it that said; ‘All it takes for evil men to succeed is for good men to do nothing’?”

“Burke… I think. Edward Burke!” Having answered his question off-handedly, Nikki looked at her husband angrily. No one could have doubted that she was now very cross indeed. Few would have guessed, however, that she was far more frightened than she was piqued. For Nikki Campbell was under no illusions regarding what her husband's military tracking duties would entail. She’d been down this road before.

“Besides,” he continued, “if you read what was written on the second page there,” he pointed to the letter on the table, “you'll see they're starting to call up the army reserves. And the twenty-to-thirty year age group will soon be doing six week stints in the army. Six weeks in… six weeks back home performing their normal civvie-street jobs.”

“Well, that lets you off the hook.”

“It also says that if the situation is not brought under control quickly, they will extend the call-up of the reserves to the thirty-to-forty year age group. Then, I'll bet my bottom dollar, it will be the forty-to-fifty year group. Soon the whole bloody country will be in the army…”

“They said that would only happen ‘IF the situation is not brought under control!’”

“It took two… three… years to knock the stuffing out of ZIPRA, Nikki… and the Matabele were babes in arms compared to ZANLA. What ZANLA has achieved so far is incredible. ZANLA will not be brought under control

as easily as ZIPRA was. They've organised themselves thoroughly and properly. And I believe they've been bringing massive quantities of arms into the country for over a year. The granite hills up in the north-east are a maze of nooks and crannies. Every fourth little hole is stuffed full of AK-47s and ammunition, or land mines. And all that took place right under the noses of the authorities. Ian Allen admits he had
no idea what was going on. Furthermore, even now that we know the massive extent of the terrorist presence, the local people still won't talk."

Nikki sighed resignedly. She realised then that Michael had, indeed, made up his mind.

"All loyal Rhodesians will have to do what they can do best, Nikki. And the best thing I can do for the war effort is to track for the army. And as you can see by that letter, if we join the National Parks Volunteer Tracker Combat Unit we'll only be required to do three weeks in and we'll have nine weeks out. That's better than what the poor bloody infantry will be doing."

"That's only because someone in the army knows that what you'll be doing is bloody dangerous… Thank God for whoever that is."

"Tom Hubbard probably…" Michael responded with a bland smile.

"Yes… It probably is him… as you say. He knows that you guys will be in the front line all the time, Michael… at the point of each and every follow up. Just like you were at Binga." Nikki was becoming very agitated.

"You wouldn't admit it at the time, Mike, but your nerves were shot to pieces by the time we left Binga. They were sticking out of your thick hide like six inch nails. You only acknowledged that fact when it was all over… when we had been transferred here to the Gonarezhou. I know what you were like. Remember… I had to sleep next to you after every damn contact you had with ZIPRA."

Mike flicked his eyebrows up and down. It betrayed his agitation. *'She will never understand,'* he thought unhappily. He sighed again deeply.

"And look at what happened to Ben." Nikki was relentless. "He nearly lost an arm. He was lucky he didn't lose his life. Are you going to make your poor bloody Bushmen go to war with you?"

She was snatching at straws. Psychologically she was trying to use the power of emotional appeal in a last bid attempt to sway him from his decision. But Nikki already sensed that she was wasting her breath.

"I won't ask them to do anything that I am not prepared to do myself, Nikki. And I won't make them do anything they don't want to do." His voice

reflected the anger he felt at her inferences.

“But they'll go with you, all the same… even Ben. God help them… They're too bloody loyal to you for their own damn good.”

“It'll be different this time, Nikki. The National Parks trackers will be dressed in army camouflage kit. They will look like ordinary soldiers. And they'll be properly trained to use the military FN rifles. They'll have automatic weapons. We'll all have automatic weapons. So we won’t stick out like sore thumbs like we did in the Binga days. We'll look just like all the other soldiers.”

“And you'll die just the same way that other soldiers will die, Mike… Oh, Michael! Do you really have to do this?”

He took a deep breath and nodded. “Yes, Nikki… I really have to do this.”

“And who will you take with you? They say in the letter they want two Europeans and two African trackers to make up a four man team. There'll be you and Ben and Mbuyotsi. And who else?”

“They want four man sticks, Nikki. The Alouette helicopters can carry only four fully equipped soldiers at a time. I haven't made up my mind yet who I'll take with me. Young Richard, maybe.”

“Richard Poole?”

“Yes. They want one experienced white officer and one young one in each team, plus two African trackers.”

“Richard is only a kid, Michael. He's still a cadet ranger isn't he?”

“Richard's twenty years old. That's older than most of the lads in the Rhodesian Light Infantry regiment. Most of the soldiers in the RLI are straight out of school.”

“What about Bill… Bill Conway? Or Peter Goodrich?”

“They're both senior rangers, Nikki. They'll likely be heading their own tracker teams. And Bill couldn't come with me anyway. When I'm away he'll have to stay here and run the Gonarezhou. He's already told me he's going to volunteer, too. So he and I will have to stagger our military commitments.”

“I was only thinking of you having an experienced man with you… IF you really have to go, that is.”

“Richard's all right. He's a bit green and rough around the edges… but otherwise he's O.K. He'll soon get the hang of it.”

Nikki looked at her husband silently… poignantly. “So you've really made up your mind? You're really going to join this…” she picked up the letter and read the underlined subject heading. “…this National Parks Volunteer

Tracker Combat Unit?"

"Yes, Nikki. I'm going to join up."

She drew in a deep lungful of air. It came out with a shuddering sigh. *"I suppose I shouldn't have expected anything different."* She smiled at him resignedly… fearfully… completely surrendering now to what she had known all along was inevitable.

"I'll radio the Provincial Warden at Kyle after we've had breakfast. Maybe he can tell me a bit more about it. For example, when, and for how long we're likely to be called up for combat training. That sort of thing… And I'll register a claim on young Richard … IF he volunteers, too."

"Don't worry… He'll be there boots and all," Nikki asserted. "He'll do anything to get out of Lake McIlwaine. The last time he brought rhinos down here he told me he was bored stiff working in the reception office of a tourist park. And he'd give his eye teeth to work with you, Michael. He thinks the world of you. You know that."

Mike nodded silently. He hoped to God that he wouldn't be putting young Richard's head on a block.

"All the young ones will volunteer," Nikki continued. "They'll be champing at the bit to get into the war. The poor… stupid… suckers."

"Can we leave the subject alone now, Nikki? At least until after I've spoken to the P.W.? His secretary said he'd be in the office today from about ten o'clock onwards."

Nikki tightened her lips. She nodded. Her body was tingling all over. Fear for Michael gripped at her belly.

"So… What's for breakfast?"

"Steamed eggs on toast. It'll likely be a burnt offering by now." She turned her head and shouted towards the kitchen "WITNESS… BWISA LOH BREKFAZ." Bring the breakfast.

"I'll go get Karen," she said, rising from the table.

"Where's Mark?"

"The last I saw of him, he was outside in the front garden."

Nikki disappeared down the passage.

Witness brought the food in on a tray placing it very importantly on the side table opposite Nikki's chair.

"Ipi loh Marco?" Where's Mark? Mike asked the Tonga.

"In gadden, Nkosi. He look for sporoh for mvundhla."

"He's doing what?"

“He look for sporoh for mvundhla.”

‘He's looking for the tracks of a rabbit?’ Mike’s four year old son never failed to amaze him. ‘What the hell was the little tyke doing looking for the tracks of a rabbit?’

“Go find him… Tell him to come in for breakfast.” Mike commanded the young black man somewhat imperiously. His mind was still on the conversation he had just had with his wife.

“Yeboh, Nkosi.”

Nikki came back into the room carrying Karen. She put the gurgling little girl in the high-chair and pulled the wooden framework closer to the table.

“What's Mark doing looking for rabbit tracks?”

“Haagh!” she exclaimed in amazement, shaking her head and looking at her husband with a smirk. *“In case you've forgotten, Michael… Today is Easter Sunday.”*

“So?”

“The Easter Bunny brought him a chocolate Easter Egg this morning… Remember?”

“Yaah… So?”

“Don’t be so obtuse Michael… Your son put me through a torrid third degree interrogation after you went to the office this morning. He wanted to know where the Easter Bunny came from and where it was now. I told him that I didn't know where it was at that moment… ’cos it had to deliver Easter eggs to all the children who were living in the Chiredzi district this morning.”

Mike began to chuckle. There was an amused smile on Nikki's face now, too.

“He wanted to know how a little bunny rabbit could carry so many big chocolate eggs.”

“And?”

The sound of Witness shouting came to them through the open windows. He was bellowing to Mark… in broken Chi-Lapalapa… instructing the little boy to come in for his breakfast.

“…I told him that it was a very special rabbit. A very much bigger rabbit than the ones we see here at night in the headlights of the Land Rover. It was also a very fast rabbit. It had to be, you see,” Nikki was nearly laughing now, “because it had to visit so many different children in one day. And it carried the eggs in a big bag which it slung over its shoulder. I showed him a picture

of the Easter Bunny in one of his books."

"And he didn't buy it?"

"Your son…? Believe a story like that?"

"So he's gone to look for the Easter Bunny's tracks?" Michael got the message.

"What did you expect? Like father like son!"

There was the sound of scampering feet running through the kitchen. Then a scruffy little boy burst very importantly through the doorway into the dining room. He was dressed in a miniature game ranger's outfit exactly like the khaki uniform his father wore. The shirt even had two buttoned breast pockets. There were epaulets on the shoulders, too, adorned with regular green National Parks insignia tags. He was tanned a mahogany brown… right down to the toes of his bare feet. There was a shroud of whiteness over his tousled blonde hair where it had been heavily bleached by the sun. His bright blue eyes were flashing as usual… but very sceptical at that moment.

In that instant Mike's mind flashed back to his own boyhood days… to the time when he had been four and five years old himself. The family photographs showed that young Mark was the spitting image of his father at the same age. Mike had been just about his own son's age when he had first met his Shona friend Daniel Moyo. And now Mark was spending more and more time with Ben's little boy. Life, he realised with some nostalgia, had turned one full circle.

"There's no Easter bunny" Mark declared positively… almost truculently.

"Oh… Why's that?" his father asked in all earnestness.

"I've been up the road as far as the big baobab tree… and I've looked all round the garden fence. There's no big bunny spoor anywhere."

Michael glanced at Nikki, catching the amused twinkle in her eyes. Suddenly neither of them could contain themselves. Simultaneously their suppressed mirth burst into laughter. That was just what they both needed after the nerve-racking talk they had just had together.

Mark Campbell was, indeed, a chip off the old block.

PART EIGHT

North Eastern Rhodesia
1973 – 1975

Chapter 29

WHEN the Chaminuka sector opened as a ZANLA operational war zone, Rex Mbudzi promoted Anna to the post of Sectorial Political Commissar under her husband's command. In the pre-hostilities period she had worked very hard in Chaminuka as a political commissar at the detachment level. She had established a solid political infrastructure within her zone of influence, and she attained the specific political understanding amongst the local tribespeople that the ZANLA Military High Command required.

In her new role, with several political commissars working under her now at the detachment level, Anna very quickly had the tribespeople throughout Chaminuka converted.

One of Anna's greatest accomplishments was the setting up of a sound and secret network of *contact men* throughout Chaminuka. The people she chose were all leading and respected community personalities.

The guerrillas in the field were required to report to the local contact man whenever they took up temporary residence near his village, for the fighters were forever on the move. Anna was, therefore, able to keep tabs on the vakomana from the information she obtained from her contact men.

Each of the various ZANLA units was contained within a network of divided cells, and the information each man was given by his immediate superior was only on a *need to know* basis. Security was tight.

It was the political commissars who maintained security amongst the people in the villages. Periodic changes in the chimurenga names of the contact men helped to confuse the Rhodesian intelligence which, on the ground, was the responsibility of the B.S.A. Police Special Branch.

Anna made sure that the leaders of all new ZANLA units were properly introduced to the contact men when they were first deployed. The contact men were thus assured of the guerillas' identities, they became familiar with their faces, and they memorised their chimurenga names.

The Rhodesians began, very early in the war, to use pseudo-terrorist groups. These comprised loyal Rhodesian blacks who were mixed with white soldiers with blackened faces. They always wore old, dirty and dishevelled civilian clothing. The black soldiers made the direct close-up contacts with the tribal people. It was they who did all the talking. The white men kept their distance in the background.

During the night they masqueraded as itinerant ZANLA insurgents. Their purpose was to make contact with *real* groups of terrorists and then to wipe them out.

These pseudo groups were called *sku'zapo* by the guerrillas. This, in idiomatic Chi-Shona, translated into: *'Excuse me – here…'* This was how one African confidence trickster would address a chosen victim, distracting his attention, whilst his accomplice picked the man's pockets from behind. The name alluded, of course, to the silent and underhand manner of the pseudo terrorists' operations.

The Rhodesians eventually called these specialist soldiers the *Selous Scouts*. The unit was named after the historical great white elephant hunter, Frederik Courtney Selous. He was the man who led the Rhodesian Pioneer Column from South Africa to what became Salisbury in Mashonaland, in 1890.

The scouts methods of operation varied. Their successes depended upon convincing a contact man of their freedom fighter status. They would pose, for example, as a group of vakomana on the run from pursuing mabunu soldiers. And when the contact man led them to the local guerrilla detachment force, the *sku'zapo* men machine gunned the ZANLA fighters and captured those who surrendered. Those they captured were later cleverly forced to join the Selous Scout ranks. In SF jargon, they were *turned*.

It was a savage war. It was a serious game of chess in which the stakes were life and death. No quarter was given by either side. And the contact men were lynchpins whose existence, identities and functions *had* to be kept secret from the lowly villagers.

It was only the contact men, collectively, who could bring the scattered vakomana of Daniel's sectorial command safely together. They were crucial, therefore, to both ZANLA's security and its mobility. The field commanders relied entirely upon them for many different things. And it was the political commissars who oiled the different disjointed contact man components and thus enabled them to operate smoothly as a single entity. Anna's role within the ZANLA war machine in the Chaminuka Sector was, therefore, pivotal to everything.

Nevertheless, the ZANLA commandants, *and* the political commissars, were always cognizant of the fact that their contact men were potentially the weakest links in their chains of command… and in their security. In reality, the contact men were conduits through which information was passed both

ways, making it possible to bring one element of ZANLA into contact with another. In this regard they performed an important and crucial role. They were a security risk insofar as they were the reason why the Rhodesian SF often tricked their way into face-to-face confrontations with ZANLA forces. But the damage the Rhodesians could do was limited to that single security infringement. The system made it impossible for a chain reaction to occur when only one contact man had been compromised.

ZANLA's purposeful lack of radio communications made the contact-man-system imperative. It was preferable to radios because it was, despite, its deficiencies, more secure. It was, therefore, a *better* option than radios even though it was both slow and cumbersome. Whatever its faults it was a simple system and it worked.

The senior officers of ZANLA were under no illusions that the huge rewards the Rhodesian regime offered for information leading to the arrest and/or for the killing of a terrorist… and big rewards for surrendering arms of war… represented a significant temptation for their contact men to betray their cause.

The safety and the integrity of their contact men was, therefore, very important to the likes of Comrade Sectorial Commander Muliloh. He looked after the contact men well and he kept a close eye on them through his political commissar network because he understood they were key men in his politico-military structure. Yet he also, through Anna and her subordinates, disciplined them strictly and kept a tight rein on their security consciousness.

The contact man network facilitated the safe movement of ZANLA fighters right across the country. It allowed for guerrilla bands to move, and to be looked after, wherever they *wanted* to go. So the vakomana never left a continuous trail behind them. Their movements could only be traced one step at a time. And if they were directed by a political commissar to a contact man further afield, which often happened, they completely disappeared off the local radar.

Anna also conceived and established what amounted to a secret young women's league comprising fifteen and sixteen year old girls. They became her private intelligence system. They operated as spies and informants who secretly reported directly to Anna. They acted as her eyes and her ears in every village settlement. She recruited them one by one and they functioned as individuals.

One of the young women's specific tasks was to spy on the contact men. So the key men in the community were constantly observed and reported upon. As a consequence, Anna was informed about everything the contact men did and said. And she made a point of questioning each contact man minutely every time it was reported to her that he had been approached and spoken to by a Rhodesian soldier, or by a policeman, even if it was clearly innocuous. This was also a sure and subtle way of impressing upon these important men that they were not immune from being very closely watched.

She formed corps of other village children, too, principally nine and ten year old boys. These were the boys who herded the village cattle. They became Anna’s boy scouts! Over the years these young boys right across the Hurricane War Zone carried out a million-and-one simple but important tasks in support of the ZANLA war effort.

The young boys became well known as the *mujibas*. This was a name that the migrant black mine workers had brought back to Rhodesia from the South African goldfields. In South Africa the word was used to describe common street urchins… Oliver Twists… who had been forced by circumstance to become petty thieves and pick-pockets to survive.

Chapter 30

ON a bright winter's day in June 1974 Anna visited Rusambo Mission. She had an important instruction from Muliloh for the local ZANLA contact man.

Her assignment accomplished, Anna was in a hurry as she walked back through the mission station. A 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. curfew had been imposed by the Rhodesians throughout the Hurricane War Zone and she wanted to get back to a little village that lay some four miles east of Rusambo before dark. There she had a personal rendezvous to keep with Daniel and she did not want to miss him. In her haste she did not pay too much attention to the people about her as she wound her way through the scattered mission buildings.

Coming round the corner of the hospital block she almost collided with a big, thickset black man who was walking equally briskly in the opposite direction. He was dressed in a greasy pair of grey slacks, a dirty airtex vest, and he had rough manyatela sandals on his feet.

Their eyes met and they recognized each other instantly. Anna knew who he was but she struggled to remember his name. His face and his manner she would never forget. She would also not forget that he had been responsible for the police raid on Chief Matsiwo's village within days of her being attested into ZANLA.

He was the driver of the lorry that had taken Anna to Chief Matsiwo's village that fateful day two long years before. If she needed further confirmation of that fact, over his shoulder, she saw his old and battered green truck standing in front of the mission's administration building.

"Ha-haaaah! My mysterious passenger… Chief Matsiwo's strange visitor…" The man quickly confirmed his recognition. His smile was the same as it had been that day on the way to her reunion with Daniel. It was both unctuous and venomous at the same time.

Anna looked at the man seemingly perplexed. "I don't know what you mean," she replied innocently. "Chief Matsiwo lives a very long way from here… in the Dande I think… I have never met him."

"Don't give me that, lady. I gave you a lift from Centenary to the Dande to visit your so-called husband at Chief Matsiwo's village. When was that now… about eighteen months ago? Two years maybe? It was about the time that Mbuya Nehanda was abducted and taken into Mozambique by ZANLA."

“You are mistaken. I am the wife of Chief Rushinga. I am here to visit my sister who is the wife of Chief Rusambo.”

“I don't think so, woman. I have not forgotten you. Not one tiny part of you.” Rudely and boldly he lifted a hand to stroke her shoulder. With a brisk upward chop that shocked his wrist, Anna knocked away his arm with the sharp, hard edge of her open hand.

The unexpected blow knocked the man off balance forcing him to take a step backwards. He rubbed his wrist vigorously, looking at her in amazement.

“Leave me alone, you animal,” Anna hissed angrily. Her voice dripped with venom. “I don't know who you are or what you want. But you don't know me. You think I am someone else… but you are mistaken. I am Chief Rushinga's wife. If you don't believe me go ask Chief Rusambo. That's him over there,” she said, pointing towards the white-washed church. “That's him talking to the white priest. I am not who you think I am.”

Anna, in that one short vicious stroke, had all but broken the man's arm.

‘She sure as hell knows how to handle herself,’ Tondongwe thought in wonderment, ‘and she certainly did not learn that trick from the old fossil she claims is her husband.’

“I don't think so, lady,” he smiled at her maliciously, still rubbing his wrist. *“I don't think so.”*

“Think what you like,” she retorted angrily. *“Just leave me alone.”* She pushed passed him brusquely and continued on her way studiously ignoring his presence behind her.

But deep inside Anna was trembling. She knew the man had recognised her and there was a malevolent air about him. She felt suddenly and truly afraid for the very first time since the war had begun. This was one man over whom she had absolutely no control. A sixth sense told her she was in very grave danger.

The man wasted no time when Anna left him. He quickly crossed to the church steps and rudely interrupted the discussion between Chief Rusambo and the German missionary.

“Excuse me,” he said quickly, pointing to Anna before she disappeared from view. “Who is that woman walking along the path over there? The one with the blue dress and the white blouse…”

Both men looked at Anna's fleeing figure.

“That is Chief Rushinga's wife,” Rusambo said. “She has no doubt come to

visit her sister who is one of my wives."

"She is a real beauty… Do you know her, father?"

"Ja!" The priest's teutonic inflection was strong even in that one-word utterance. "I know her. It is just as Chief Rusambo says. She is Chief Rushinga's wife. She visits here quite often… Pretty girl… Lucky chief." His eyes sparkled.

"I see…"

"Is there anything wrong?" The missionary asked.

"No!" The man replied. "No… There is nothing wrong. I just wondered if she was available?"

"No…No…NO… She's definitely not available," the priest laughed at the idea.

'There was nothing wrong at all,' Tondongwe thought happily. If she was posing as Chief Rushinga's wife he now knew how and where to find her.

The man watched Anna's bouncing figure disappear behind a line of trees. He turned again to the priest. *"Father… Is your telephone in working order?"*

"Yes… At least, it was working this morning."

"How much will it cost me to phone Rushinga."

"Forty cents for three minutes. You can pay the girl at the office."

"Thank you, Father."

The man turned away from the church and headed for the mission office. Both the missionary and the chief looked at him studiously as he walked briskly away. They both wondered what was going through the man's mind. Chief Rusambo was worried. He knew exactly who Anna was. He was a part of the tribal subterfuge that kept her real identity hidden.

Following the re-start of hostilities in 1972 the Rhodesian authorities had brought in a new reward system for terrorist-related information. It was based on a sliding scale. The police were now paying five thousand dollars for information that led to the capture or to the killing of a Sectorial Commander… reducing to one thousand dollars for a junior cadre. And there were several other enhanced rewards out now, too… for the recovery of specified arms of war.

The driver of the green truck was in no doubt that Anna was the woman he had transported to Chireka village two years before. He had recognised her

immediately. And he was now quite sure that she was involved, somehow, with ZANLA. In his mind it could not be otherwise.

As he walked towards the mission's office he thought deeply about Anna. This time they were not lewd thoughts of her as an exciting bed partner. His eyes were turning over on his face like the dollar signs on a supermarket register.

"Comrade Bakasa… Who is the man who owns that big green lorry?" Bakasa was the Rusambo village headman. He was also Anna's local ZANLA contact man. She had just bid him farewell. Now she was back. She had returned to Bakasa as fast as she could after her confrontation with the driver of the lorry.

"Which lorry… Comrade Motoh?"

"The one standing in front of the mission office block." Displeasure instantly showed on Anna's face. There was only one lorry at the mission that afternoon!

Bakasa knew most of the people who came to or who passed through the scattered mission settlement. He looked over the ragged pole wall that surrounded his village ménage and he recognised the old green lorry immediately.

"That's Patrick Tondongwe's lorry."

'Tondongwe!' Anna remembered the name now. 'Patrick Tondongwe!'

"He's a dangerous man, Comrade Motoh. They say he's a police informer. But it's a strange thing… I'm also told that he tells ZANLA many things about Smith's soldiers, too."

"So… He works on both sides of the fence, does he…? But he is still a sell-out?"

The sabooku nodded. "So it is said. He lives in Centenary. But he sometimes contracts with the white fathers here to bring in supplies to the mission."

"Is Detachment Commander Cephas still nearby?" Cephas was the commander of Anna's small private detachment. He was under particular instruction from Muliloh to look after Comrade Motoh. Cephas came at Anna's every beck-and-call and he attended to problems that she deemed to be of significant importance.

The headman nodded. "He is not far from here. I can get a mujiba to him inside one hour."

Anna thought for a moment. “When will that lorry leave, comrade?”

“It has just arrived, Comrade Motoh. As you can see they have just started to unload the supplies it has brought. Then the fathers have a load of maize for Tondongwe to take back to Mount Darwin. And there is the curfew… The lorry cannot leave now until tomorrow morning.”

“Good. Get a message to Comrade Cephas. Tell him I have a job for him. A very urgent job. Get him to report to me here… here at your village. He must get here as soon as he can after it is dark.”

Chapter 31

"S*PARROWS TO THE OPS ROOM,"* the loudspeaker blared out the message shrilly. *"SPARROWS TO THE OPS ROOM."* The speaker was placed just inside the door of the barrack room.

Sparrows, in Rhodesian military jargon, meant the National Parks Volunteer Tracker Combat Unit (The NP-VTCU). Some unknown pommie wag, upon seeing that the game rangers always tracked in short pants (unlike most SF soldiers who patrolled in camouflaged denim slacks) said they had legs *'loik sparra's knee-caps'*. Thus the National Park trackers were awarded their official code name… The Sparrows.

Mike had been awake for some time. He had been quietly savouring the slow coming of the dawn. At that moment he was wallowing in the tranquillity of the quiet hour, listening contentedly to the gentle increase in bird song outside, as the pastel grey light of the new day gathered strength.

Richard was still snoring quietly in the camp stretcher alongside him. He stirred with the rude interruption.

"FUCK YOU… YOU FUCKING FUCKERS!" A Rhodesian Light Infantry soldier exploded with exasperation. That vulgar expletive, Mike had come to learn, was one of many strange turns of phrase used regularly by the young RLI troopies. He recognised the soldier's voice. The corporal's four man stick had arrived back in camp at midnight after five long days on patrol. He deserved a lie-in this morning.

Mike leaned over and shook Richard awake.

"Huh" the young game ranger exclaimed in surprise. He was still half asleep.

"That's us, Richard. Get dressed. And make sure the trackers are ready. I'll go over to the operations room and see what's cooking."

As Mike was tying the laces on his light-weight black canvas hunting boots, the speaker-box clamoured again: *"SPARROWS TO THE OPS ROOM… SPARROWS TO THE OPS ROOM… ON THE DOUBLE."*

"SHIT!" Another irate young voice came from one of the jumble of stretchers that Mike could just make out in the lightening gloom. Someone else was not happy with the disturbance. The game warden smiled to himself as he lifted his camouflage-painted FN rifle off the wall.

The long day had begun.

"There's been a murder at Rusambo Mission," the duty officer told the game warden when he entered the sandbagged operations room. He tapped the position on the wall map with a long wooden pointer.

"You know the area?"

Mike nodded. He had passed through Rusambo many times during the rhino capture operations.

The slow whining sound of a helicopter's jet engine… building up revs… came to them from outside.

"The chopper's warming up. It'll be ready for lift off in two minutes. Here's a set of the maps you'll need." The captain handed Mike a wad of folded charts.

"When was it?"

"I'm not sure. About midnight I think."

"What back up do we have?"

"One stick RLI. We pulled them off an O.P.[xx] near the mission during the night. They're already there… waiting."

"Comms?"

"The RLI have an A-60 radio."

"What else can you tell me?"

"There's a police detail already at Rusambo. They'll fill you in when you get there."

It was very cold in the helicopter. The icy air of the pre-dawn whipped at them through the open door. They were hardly airborne when the goose-pimples were standing out on Mike's naked arms like coarse granulated sandpaper.

The white air force technician hung over the high mount of his twin Browning machine-guns. He seemed unaffected by the freezing chill but then he wore a thick quilted coat over his bullet-proof flack-jacket. He could afford to snub his nose at Jack Frost.

A coat was a luxury the trackers could not afford. They wore in the cold dawn air… that blasted in at them through the wide open door panel in the side of the helicopter… only what they were prepared to carry for the rest of the day. So all unnecessary encumbrances… like jerseys and thick warm jackets… they left behind in the barracks.

The technician remained immobile throughout the flight, hunched over his

weapons. He seemed to be asleep on his feet. It was impossible to tell if he was or was not, because the man's silver bone-dome helmet and perspex visor covered his head and his face.

He was not asleep. All the while, as they skimmed the treetops, he was scouring the ground for sign of human movement – a target – in the last hour of the curfew.

It was a twenty minute flight from Mount Darwin to Rusambo. They arrived just before the sun broke over the eastern skyline. By then the trackers' bodies were quaking with the cold. Their teeth were chattering. Their eyes were streaming and their ears were singing sweetly from the constant, shrieking whine of the aircraft's jet engine.

Ben was the last off the chopper. When his feet touched the ground the machine lifted off. The technician waved a casual sweeping salute. Once in the air the aircraft turned, gaining height all the while as it headed back towards the JOC at Mount Darwin. Helicopters were in constant demand and there was no need for the aircraft to dawdle at Rusambo.

The four trackers were spread out across the perimeter of the LZ[xxi]. They crouched down, their eyes shut tight, until the choking dust and the swirling grass, stirred up by the chopper's rotors, had settled. When the machine was up and away, Mike led his team over to the mission buildings where a Special Branch police officer was waiting for him.

In contrast to the blowing and freezing conditions in the helicopter, the still air on the ground felt hot. Yet the icy pimples on the trackers' limbs persisted. They transferred their weapons to different hands, alternately, as they tried to rub the frosty rashes from their bare forearms.

"You the trackers?"

"Yes," Mike nodded.

"Inspector Tony Jacques… from Rushinga."

Two black constables and a black police warrant officer, all carrying FN rifles in their hands, and four full spare magazines in their chest webbing, stood behind the police inspector. They made no attempt to introduce themselves and the white officer ignored their presence.

"Mike Campbell…" Mike introduced himself. "This is Richard Poole."

The three white men shook hands.

Ben and Mbuyotsi stood to one side, resting their hands on the muzzles of their FN rifles. They looked on in silence. Four young white soldiers, dressed in ragged camouflage, sat on the wall of the mission verandah. The RLI were

the only other army unit… other than the sparrows… that regularly operated in short trousers. Their faces, arms and legs had been blackened with *black-is-beautiful* camo-cream. Their thin camouflaged tee-shirts and their short black PT shorts were crumpled and unwashed.

They had spent the last five days on an observation post, without any let up, quietly and patiently lying in their confined and concealed O.P. positions on the top of a nearby hill. Observation Post duty was a soul-destroying task for young and vibrant soldiers. It confined them to watching and to waiting, and to relaying by radio to the distant JOC, everything that they saw unfold before them. They were immensely pleased to have been relieved of their boring duty.

"Corporal Barney O'Reilly." The NCO rose from the verandah wall to introduce himself.

He was thickset and tough-looking. A fringe of ginger locks stuck out from under his grimy and tattered fatigue cap. Carrot-red bristles adorned his chin. The circle of bright hair on his blackened face looked like a ring of flame burning around the dark ashes of a dying fire. Clear, sparkling, and intelligent blue eyes shone out from the dusky depths of his dark visage.

Mike shook the corporal's hand. He was pleased to see the heavy MAG machine gun standing on its bi-pod near one of the soldier's feet. Two long belts of shining brass cartridges criss-crossed the gunner's chest. The game warden had an immense respect for the fire-power of those formidable weapons.

"You guys our protection stick?"

"Yes, Sir." The young soldier recognised the natural leadership qualities in Mike Campbell's bearing. He afforded the game warden just recognition.

"I'll meet the rest of you guys just now," Mike said affably to the other soldiers. "…Just as soon as I've been briefed by S.B."

"O.K., Tony," Mike said turning back to the police inspector. *"What have you got for us?"*

"A dead police informer, Mike," the man replied. "I didn't know him personally, but the JOC says he was an important man. Someone very smart must have twigged on to him. He had a reputation for being very careful."

"What happened?"'

"I received a telephone call from him yesterday… in the afternoon. He identified himself by a code name and said he had something very important to tell me. Whatever it was I never found out. He was not prepared to say a

thing over the phone. He asked me to set up a road block between here and Mount Darwin this morning… and to search all civilian transport that passed through. He said he'd pass on his information to me

when I searched his lorry. The road block and the search, of course, were just fronts… to keep him above suspicion."

Mike nodded. 'Cautious bastard!'

"I told him if his code name checked out I'd meet him as arranged."

"And it checked out?"

"Yes… It checked out all right. But then I had a call from Father Augustine, who is the senior missionary here at Rusambo. The call came through at two o'clock this morning. He told me the driver of a transport truck had been murdered on the mission station. I knew immediately who it was. So I organised a protection stick and drove over here before it was even light."

"And it's your man?"

"I presume so. As I said, I never actually met him. But I do know that the informer was a one-man transport operator. And there's only one lorry here at the moment. It belonged to the victim."

"So it happened at two o'clock?" Mike looked at his watch. "Five-twenty… The spoor is just over three hours old," he did the math quickly.

"No! The father says it happened about one o'clock."

'Four hours. Four-and-a-half…' Mike adjusted his mental time schedule accordingly.

"And where's the body?"

"Come…"

The policeman led Mike round behind the office block to a line of rooms at the back. This was where the mission fathers accommodated their itinerant guests. The body was lying on the ground… in the open… in front of the rooms. It had been covered with a narrow black plastic sleeve. Soon the cadaver would be inside the sleeve, and the tube would be tied at either end before being placed into an aluminium body box. The dull silver coffin was already lying next to the body.

"You came prepared."

"When you're told there's been a murder there's normally a body."

Mike chuckled ghoulishly.

"I told my guys not to move the body until you arrived. You want to have a look?"

"Not particularly… Tell me what happened?"

"Apparently a group of terrs arrived sometime before midnight. We don't

know how many. They began to make enquiries about the man… Patrick Tondongwe was his name. He was not sleeping in the room he had been allocated, but with a mahouri in another room along the passage. When the terrs finally located him they dragged him out into the open here… and they bayoneted him to death. It was his screams that woke the mission fathers."

"Not a happy experience."

"His body looks like a colander… And the final insult… they cut off his penis and stuffed it into his mouth."

Mike looked the SB man in the eye. He raised his eyebrows showing greater interest. "Sounds to me that somebody was leaving a message… You might like to have a look into that," Mike offered his opinion. "The Shona are not people who do something like that without a reason."

"That thought crossed my mind, too." The policemen replied.

At that moment the first shaft of clear sunlight hit Mike's face. It felt warm and fresh and clean.

All at once the atmosphere brightened. Mike looked around at the sandy ground near his feet. There were tracks everywhere, all around the body. There were shoe prints left by the terrorists, those left by the mission fathers, and boot prints belonging to the policemen.

"Once we had worked out what happened," the policeman said in explanation, "and after we had examined the body… to make sure the man was really dead… we just left everything as it was. Didn't want to smudge more tracks than we had to."

"That was thoughtful of you… Thanks."

Mike looked round and saw his two Bushmen standing at the corner of the building behind him. They had been watching the proceedings very carefully. He summonsed them with a wave of his hand. There was just enough light for them to see what they were doing.

Mbuyotsi flipped the black plastic open. He wanted to see the body… to assess the caliber of the magadanga they would be following during the day. He saw the multiple bayonet punctures and he saw the man's penis sticking out from between his teeth. So did the game warden.

Mike said nothing. He watched and understood what Mbuyotsi was doing.

"Hah!" the tracker said succinctly. He had seen what he needed to see. Flipping the black plastic back over the body he rearranged it into its former position. He looked at Mike then and shook his head. They now both knew they were going to be tracking a bunch of veteran and very ruthless

vakomana today.

“Ben… Mbuyotsi…” Mike turned now to the task in hand. “You can start unravelling these tracks now…”

Chapter 32

IT had been impossible for Anna to keep her appointment with Daniel. She had arranged a new meeting with Detachment Commander Cephas at Rusambo after dark. And there was the curfew.

Before dark the Rusambo contact man sent a mujiba on a bicycle to his counterpart in the village where Daniel was waiting. The message he carried informed the ZANLA commander that Anna couldn't make it. She spent the night at Rusambo.

Cephas and his guerrillas arrived just before nine. Anna instructed him carefully. She wanted *this* killing to leave a very strong message to other *sell-outs* like Patrick Tondongwe and she knew that Cephas would carry out her orders to the letter. Only when she understood that the guerrilla soldier knew *exactly* what she wanted done, did she retire to bed. And there she had waited, listening patiently, for the furore that she knew must come.

Not knowing that the randy old driver had decided to spend the night with a local whore, and that the ZANLA men were having trouble locating their victim, she had been surprised that the assassination she had ordered did not take place until one o'clock in the morning. She had not slept a wink during the entire night. This killing, when it was done, would leave her soul in peace.

When the helicopter arrived Anna arose from her sleeping mat and quietly dragged open the plank door of her hut. The doorway faced directly onto the main mission buildings so she was able to see everything that went on outside from inside the hut. She wrapped a blanket around her shoulders and sat stock-still on the floor in the dark interior… watching. She saw the helicopter land and depart. In the distance she saw the white leader of the tracking unit conversing with the policeman. And she watched, with a scathing lack of interest, as the two Bushmen slowly sorted out the confused mêlée of the spoor.

The deed was done and Anna was content. Nothing else really mattered now. Patrick Tondongwe was no more. She just hoped that he had not been able to pass on any critical information that might have drawn SB’s attention to her as the beautiful wife of Chief Rushinga. She still had to determine whether Tondongwe’s killing had eliminated that possibility. She decided to keep away from her Rushinga village for the next

few days.

Cephas' tracks led right past the little group of huts where Anna had spent the night. She watched, with only a small degree of concern, as the tracking team began to wend its way towards the village enclosure. The soldiers' bodies were all stooped forward to compensate for the weight of the heavy packs on their backs.

Ben and Mike were at the point. Richard and Mbuyotsi followed a few yards behind. And behind the trackers the RLI corporal expertly arranged his troopers with silent hand signals. He positioned two men on either side of himself in a narrow line-abreast formation. The remaining soldier took up a position as the patrol's rear guard. Even then, the *tail-end-Charlie* was constantly looking back to examine his back trail. The Rhodesian Light Infantry soldiers had been extremely well trained.

As they drew alongside the village fence, Anna gasped. There was something about the leading white man's face that she recognized. *'It's Michael Campbell'* she thought, her heart immediately started to hammer in her breast. *'There's no doubt about it. It can't possibly be anyone else.'*

She had not seen Michael for nearly twenty years but she recognised him the instant she laid eyes on him. There was no mistaking that handsome profile. She watched, fascinated, as he walked along applying camo-cream to blacken his face.

He had put on a lot of weight since she had last seen him but it was not fat. It was all solid muscle. His shoulders were broad and heavy now. His middle was thick and solid… like a strong tree trunk. His face had hardened. It was no longer the face of an innocent young schoolboy. It was the same face she had known and loved so deeply in her youth, but now it projected the ruggedness of robust manhood.

Anna experienced an impetuous urge to rush out and greet him… To say: *'Hello Michael'* and to hug him to her breast. But no sooner did that idea come to her than she put it quietly to one side. Too much water had gone under the bridges of their respective lives since those carefree days on the Marandellas farm. They were on opposite sides of the fence now. They were deadly enemies fighting fiercely against each other in a vicious war.

That they were enemies may have been true, but Anna was amazed to feel that once familiar hunger for this charismatic white man. The lust and the craving she had once possessed for Michael Campbell's young body… so many long years ago… was clearly still very much alive and vibrant. And the

unexpected sight of him now sent those well-remembered sparks of high voltage current humming along to the ends of her prickling nerves. Her strange passion for the mabunu hunter, she
suddenly realised, was just as great and just as strong as ever it had been. It had been good… very good… that last year, when they had been secret lovers in their youth. *'It would be so much better now,'* she thought… *'now that we are both adults and all grown up.'*

Then, as suddenly as Michael had come back into her life, he flew out of it again. A few moments after the game warden and his entourage had passed by, Anna emerged flushed and breathless from the hut. Her pulse was racing. And she watched with a new found but hopeless yearning as the big game warden guided his men down the rough track that led towards the hills.

Detachment Commander Cephas and his guerrillas, she well knew, were at that very moment hiding out amongst those distant hills. But she was not concerned for her people's safety. The strict security system she had constructed would protect them. Her Michael would soon discover that the tracks he was following would evaporate mysteriously into the thin and ephemeral air.

Suddenly, and strangely, Anna realised that it was about *Michael Campbell's* safety… and not the safety of her freedom fighters… that she was now *most* greatly concerned. If he succeeded in finding Cephas, the game warden would walk into a fusillade of bullets. Cephas and his men were experienced fighters. She knew they would lie in ambush all this day long… waiting… just in case the mabunu security forces *did* track them down. Anna felt now curiously afraid. And she was confused. The only thing she was quite clear about was that she did *not* want Michael Campbell to die.

It was a moment of sublime truth for Anna. The nobility and the grandeur of the impulsive emotions that she felt for the white man were overwhelming. Despite all those long years of separation, it seemed she had never yearned more strongly for him than she did at that very moment. Her passion for the man was irresistibly powerful. It was then that she realised it had not been just an animal lust for his body that had once powered her emotions. It was not just the need for forbidden sex with a magical white man that had fuelled the fires of her long ago desires. It suddenly dawned on her that, all along, she had been truly, hopelessly, and madly in love with Michael Campbell.

Chapter 33

“SHIT… Fucking mujibas again,” Mike exploded.

There were cattle all over the path ahead of them. At least sixty head. And they were being driven urgently towards the soldiers in a phalanx that was fifteen… twenty… yards wide. Behind the cattle half a dozen near-naked piccanins were urging the animals on with shrill whistles and wildly wielded sticks.

“Bastards.” The corporal was fuming, too. He held up his hand, palm facing forwards. His two flanking soldiers took up defensive positions on either side of the path. The rearguard turned to face back the way they had come.

Seeing the soldiers come to a halt the Bushmen stopped, too. They turned and silently, helplessly, looked at their Nkosi. It was obvious the cattle were trampling into oblivion the already faint sign that the trackers had been following. And the cattle had probably been driven, like this, along the road for the last half an hour.

‘What to do now?’

“This is getting too much…” Mike was furious. He turned to the corporal: “You know… every fucking time we get onto a fresh set of tracks this damn well happens. It’s just too much of a coincidence.”

“They're doing it on purpose,” Richard said resignedly.

“Of course they are. It’s a ZANLA tactic,” Mike agreed. “Ask one of these pics where they're taking the cattle and they'll tell you the animals are full of ticks; that their father has instructed them to take the cattle to the local dip tank.”

Ben squatted down in the path, disregarding totally, the broad front of oncoming cattle.

“Ghaaaw!” Mbuyotsi exclaimed gutturally, slowly shaking his head. He, too, shared the game warden's frustration. He stood next to Ben and leant his weight on the muzzle of his FN rifle.

The cattle came on, lowing softly. They passed by on one side of the tracking party. The picannins, none much older than about ten, focused their wild and fearful eyes on the blackened faces of the fearsome white men. They kept a safe distance. Nevertheless, in a brief and sudden rush, Barney managed to catch one of them by the arm.

The little boy screamed in his fear, peeing his pants. And he struggled and he gyrated in a vain attempt to free himself from the corporal's iron grip. He bit the soldier's hand and was cuffed smartly behind the ear for his troubles. The soldiers all laughed at the boy's frantic antics.

“He won't tell you a thing,” Mike asserted.

“He will after I beat the shit out of him,” which is exactly what Barney O’Reilly had in mind.

“No, Barney… I know these little buggers see and hear everything that goes on about them. And I know that if we could beat the shit out of them they'd be a mine of general information. But this one will know nothing specific about the gooks we are following.”

“Little bastard,” the soldier exclaimed. He twisted the boy's arm behind his back and held him tight. *“The little sod bit me.”*

“When did the terrorists pass by here?” Mike asked Ben quickly in Chi-Lapalapa.

“About the time the roosters crowed! They were here at about half-past-four… five o’clock… this morning.”

Mike flicked his hand toward the piccanin. “This little mite won't tell you a thing more than we already know, Barney. He probably does know that the purpose of the cattle trek is to hide the gooks' spoor. But that's all. And we already know that.”

“I'd like to beat the shit out of the little fucker, anyway,” the corporal said vehemently. “Just for mozzelbeach…”

“Let him go Barney.”

Reluctantly the red-haired corporal released his hold on the little boy. Free at last the piccanin raced towards his brothers who were now standing some distance away fearfully and angrily watching what the soldiers were doing. It was an event they would not forget in a hurry. It was an event that would help cement their already indoctrinated hatred for the white man. Barney O’Reilly had walked right into one of the traps the ZANLA high command had carefully prepared for him. The corporal's irresponsible action was not the way for white men to behave if they wished to win the hearts-and-minds of the local people.

“He has changed his shoes…” Mbuyotsi advised Mike quietly in their Chi-Lapapa-cum-Bushman *lingua franca*. It was a mixed language that the tracking team had evolved over years and years of big game hunting together.

The trackers had discovered a set of human footprints high up in the hills. It was two miles from the place where they had encountered the cattle. After the cattle had passed them by, the trackers had set off in a wide arc up the mountainside on one side of the rough bush road they had been following in the valley below. The Bushmen had not gone off on their own, as they would have done had they been looking for rhino or elephant spoor. The whole patrol had followed closely in their wake. A hot war zone was not the kind of place you allowed your trackers to wander off without protective cover.

Finding one set of human tracks was their reward for an hour-and-a-half's determined searching. Now the man they had been following had changed his shoes. The shoe pattern they had been following was different. This was a terrorist ploy the trackers had long ago learnt to recognise… the changing of their shoes during their flight. That tactic fooled many army trackers. Ben and Mbuyotsi, however, were not normal trackers. They were exceptional and they took these kinds of attempted deceptions in their stride.

"He's changed his shoes," Mike translated for the corporal.

"How do you know we're onto a gook?" Barney asked skeptically. He was obviously unimpressed. "We could be following one of the locals searching for a stray cow."

"This man passed by here just about dawn this morning. His spoor is on top of the dew."

"Could still be a local, couldn't it?"

"With a curfew in force? What would a local villager be doing looking for cattle this far from his village at that time of day?" Mike responded with assurance.

The corporal shrugged. He had no answer to that observation.

"No, Barney… The gooks bomb-shelled at a pre-designated place down there on the valley floor… and the mujibas were told to run the cattle over that spot as soon as it was light. Then the terrs changed shoes to confuse the issue further. But the age of this spoor fits with the tracks we were following before. I'll bet my bottom dollar this is one of the guys we followed from the mission. You watch… He'll join up with his mates in a mile or two."

By eleven o'clock they had left the village lines far behind them. They were moving through the high hill country that bordered the Mazoe river. And they were following the multiple sign left by five men who were walking in a military line-abreast formation through the scrubby tree line.



The sun was beating down fiercely from directly overhead when Mbuyotsi, who was then at the point, suddenly went to ground. Mike and Ben instantly followed suit.

"Down Richard," Mike urged. The young ranger hit the deck smartly.

The soldiers were crouching low amongst the grass, scouring the bush ahead with alert eyes, their rifles at the ready.

"Barney… For Christ's sake get down."

One by one the soldiers melted into the grass. The corporal crawled over to where Mike was lying.

"What's up?"

"I dunno yet. But the trackers have heard or seen something. Best to be careful."

The game warden turned his attention then to Mbuyotsi. The Bushman was lying directly in front of him, his heels within touching distance. *"Kanjani Mbuyotsi?"*

"Aaieee… Meena ezwileh loh tsindi yena kala."

"Kala kah pezulu? Kumbi panzi?"

"Panzi."

Richard began to crawl towards Mike, too. The game warden stopped him immediately.

"Stay away Richard. Don't bunch up."

"What's going on?" The excitement that had been in Richard's eyes earlier in the day had disappeared. All Mike could see in his face now was fear. Gone was all his erstwhile bravado. What the young ranger was experiencing now was the real thing and he was clearly nervous of the possible consequences.

"Mbuyotsi heard a squirrel calling… He says it was its ground alarm call."

"SHIT!" the corporal exploded derisively.

"It may be nothing," Mike looked at the soldier sternly. "Or it may mean we've just walked into a ZANLA ambush." He was very serious.

"Squirrels have two alarm calls, Barney," Mike explained. "One is for hawks in the sky and one is for danger on the ground. This one was a ground alarm. Let's just give the trackers time to assess the situation."

"Fucking hell… I don't believe it." The corporal turned his face away from the game warden in disgust.

"It's just a fucking squirrel," Barney shouted back to his men

contemptibly.

"Richard?"

"Yes, Mr. Campbell."

"Keep your head down. Move out from the centre and find a rock or a hollow for cover… and just lie still."

The young ranger crawled away seeking a bulwark behind which he could hide.

They had been traversing a shallow grassed drainage line when Mbuyotsi's warning had stopped them. Looking around now, Mike realised there was precious little cover. The dry, two foot tall, yellow grass was sparse and there were just a few scraggy bushes scattered about… and some boulders. It was a God awful position to be caught in if it was an ambush.

"Nghapi, Mbuyotsi?" Where are they?

"In the bushes on the left," Mbuyotsi said quietly, peering at Mike over his shoulder. He was cool, calm and collected. His whole demeanour was very matter-of-fact.

Mike lifted his head briefly above the grass sward and quickly pulled it back under cover. He had exposed himself just long enough to confirm the lie of the land. But he had exposed himself! He knew that if there were any terrorists out there they would have accurately pin-pointed his position.

"Chainja." Mike instructed his trackers. Then, in a slightly louder voice, he spoke to the others. *"Everybody… Change your positions. Spread out… Quickly,"*

There was the sound of people shuffling about on their bellies. The grass sward swayed wildly all about them.

"Barney?"

"Yes?" The corporal's voice sounded tired. Its tone was disrespectful. He clearly had no inclination to add 'sir' to his communications. The correctness he had displayed towards the game warden earlier in the day was now gone.

"There's a little ravine coming off the hill to our left… about a hundred yards away. There are rocks and thick bushes all about it…"

"Is that where your squirrel is lying in ambush?"

"Don't be a stupid fucking idiot all your life, O'Reilly." Mike was suddenly and fiercely annoyed at the corporal's supercilious attitude. "These trackers know what they're doing."

The soldier did not respond.

"That's where the gooks will be… if they are there at all." Mike asserted.

“So what do you suggest we do now?”

“Now corporal? We just lie still. And we wait.”

“For fuck's sake!” The corporal’s whole attitude suddenly became belligerent.

“We wait, Barney… We wait.” Mike's voice was urgent… adamant. “We wait!”

“You fucking Sparrows have got shit for guts…” O’Reilly said derisively. Blurting out, at last, what he had wanted to say for the last several minutes.

Looking at the young corporal through the screen of yellow grass stems, Mike Campbell could see ice in the young soldier’s bright blue eyes. The game warden shook his head slowly and sadly.

“When we get back to the JOC, I will have you court-martialled for that remark, young man,” Mike advised the soldier in a soft and gentle, but forceful manner. There was a promise in Mike’s voice, and its biting tone shocked the young corporal into silence. *“Watch your tongue…”*

The sun was scorching. It beat down relentlessly and mercilessly onto their exposed skin. The black colouring on their faces and arms absorbed the heat terribly. And the tops of Mike's forearms, and the tender flesh at the back of his knees began to burn.

“NANSO!” There it is again. Ben and Mbuyotsi, in unison, alerted Mike to the renewed call of the squirrel. This time Mike heard it, too. It was, indeed, a squirrel's ground alarm call. It continued for some time. If there were gooks out there they were moving about now… perhaps shifting their ambush positions. But, Mike realised, the little animal could equally well have been disturbed by a prowling lynx or serval cat. The corporal in the end, Mike realized, may yet be proved right… But he trusted the trackers’ instincts more than he did the corporal’s angry impatience.

The squirrel chatter went on… and on… and on.

“Hear that, Barney?”

“Hear what?”

“Do you hear that chattering call of the squirrel?”

“If that’s what it is. Yaah… I can hear it.”

“That's the mopani squirrel's ground alarm call.”

The soldier did not respond. His silence spoke volumes.

‘Fool!’ Mike thought. ‘These young RLI soldiers think they know it all. O’Reilly still has a lot to learn in this big wide world.’

At that moment there came a deep, throaty bark from higher up the ravine. It was repeated several times.

'That does it,' Mike thought. 'There are definitely gooks in that brushline… for sure. Thank God for Mbuyotsi's alertness.'

"Your squirrel has been shouting at a baboon," the corporal said with contempt.

"That was the bark of a bushbuck," Mike said sibilantly. *"It was not a baboon."* He could still see the corporal through the grass. He had a derisive sneer across his face. It made Mike simmer with anger. *"It, too, was barking at something, Barney… or someone… in that ravine."*

"It could be a leopard."

"Could be… You want to stand up and test the wind?"

Silence!

Mike's chagrin slowly melted. He suddenly felt sorry for the young man. It was never a pleasant experience to be put in your place in front of your subordinates. Nevertheless, Barney had asked for everything that he had got.

"Barney… The gooks we have been following have gone to ground up here somewhere. They've been wandering about like spare farts in the wind for the last two miles. The trackers and I picked that up some time ago. They have been looking for somewhere to hide out for the day."

"And you think they are in that gully?"

"Yes! Yes, I do. And I think you should radio JOC and ask for a chopper."

"Without a sighting… without confirmation?"

"You want to risk a contact without air support… with us in this position? If they open up on us now we're fucked."

"All the same…"

"Barney… Call in a chopper."

Silence. The corporal was thinking…

"Richard?"

"Yes, Mr. Campbell."

"Keep your arse down."

"Yes, Sir."

There was no need for Mike to tell the Bushmen what to do. They'd been through it all before.

"Ben… You O.K.?" Mike was always especially solicitous of his lead tracker's feelings. It was in a situation just like this that he had had his arm

nearly blown off by a ZIPRA terrorist's bullet just six short years ago.

"Yebo Nkosi." Mike noted the positive timbre in the Bushman's voice. He was solid!

Silence!

Even the squirrel had stopped its monotonous chatter. There were no more barking notes from the bushbuck. It must have run away. Mike's nerve ends began to tingle.

The tension was electric. Mike's sixth sense was screaming at him… telling him that the gooks were there… waiting… waiting for them to grow impatient. Waiting for them to stand up and continue their tracking patrol. He was beginning to *feel* that they were well settled in that gulley over to their left… waiting for the final act of confrontation to unfold in front of them. The deck was, at that moment, stacked heavily against the SF tracking team.

"Corporal O'Reilly!"

"Yes?"

"You are aware that I am in command of this tracking unit right up until battle commences. And that only when we have a positive sighting, or when a shot is fired, do you take charge."

Silence.

"Do you hear me Corporal O'Reilly?"

"Yes."

"Call up a chopper, corporal. That's an order!"

Silence.

"Corporal…"

"Mack…" The soldier reacted at last. Mack was the troopie who carried the A-60 radio.

"Yaah?"

"Get JOC on the air. Tell the boss-man we need a cyclone… on Sunray Sparrow's instructions." Barney O'Reilly's voice grated with anger and chagrin.

"O.K. Give me a map reference."

The corporal lifted a hand over his shoulder and pulled a sheaf of charts from the side pocket of his pack. There was the hollow sound of stiff paper being unfolded.

"V.S… Victor Sierra," the corporal said immediately. Identifying the greater grid square on the map was an easy task. Locating their exact position was more difficult. The corporal looked at the hilltops that surrounded them,

picking the features out, one by one, on the map. He located the drainage line in which they were lying. Finally, he chose a point on the grubby chart which he determined was as near as dammit to their exact location on the ground.

"Figures… two-eight-five…" he read off the calculated grid-square coordinates along the bottom edge of the map.

You go into the house on the ground floor before you go up the stairs. You read the bottom reference numbers first…!

More slowly, the corporal read the three figures off the side… *"Five-one-three… Put it in shackle before you send."*

The six figure map reference would pin point their location on the military charts to within fifty metres of their actual position on the ground… provided the corporal had read his map correctly.

Shackle was the military term for the daily radio code. Every day the shackle code was changed. Every single unit in the field was given a military code number – a call-sign – and all call signs were given at least one week's supply of shackle codes when they went out on a patrol. Each day the previous day's shackle code was destroyed.

The muffled sounds of distant radio chatter came to Mike through the grass as the troopie carrying the A-60 turned up the volume. He selected the appropriate channel and broke into a conversation demanding immediate air space. He got through to the JOC at Darwin right away, passed his message, and was told to stand by.

The silence in the grassland was eerie. The sun continued to beat down on them mercilessly. Two minutes later the troopie was in discussion with an officer.

"This had better be good," the corporal warned Mike. "JOC doesn't like sending its choppers on wild goose chases."

"Are they sending a cyclone[xxii]*?"* Mike shouted across to the radio operator… ignoring O'Reilly's remark.

"There's a G-Car at Rushinga. It's refuelling and will be overhead inside fifteen minutes," Mack said.

"Good." All of a sudden Mike felt better. A G-Car helicopter, armed with twin .303 browning machine-guns, would be perfect for their purpose.

The troopies and the trackers waited. Half an hour came and went. The silence was oppressive. The heat and the burning intensified. Still the

helicopter did not come.

"Find out what's keeping the chopper," Mike commanded. The radio operator raised the JOC again.

"It was diverted," Mack said laconically.

"Fuck."

"A land mine took out a civvy truck. Our cyclone at this time is casevacking two of the injured to St Mary's Mission hospital."

"How long the delay?"

"Half hour."

Mike took a deep and angry breath. He let it out forcibly.

"You planning to carry on tracking now?"

"Are you crazy, Barney? Those gooks haven't just disappeared into thin air. They are just waiting for us to stand up."

"We haven't heard a sound from your squirrel for forty minutes."

"That's why I know they haven't gone. If they'd left, our squirrel friend would have told us… And the bushbuck."

"Unless your two animal friends have buggered off, too." The corporal retorted derisively.

This time Mike remained silent. The soldier might just be right… But he was not going to be the joker in the pack. He was not going to be the first idiot on his feet to check the climate.

"I'm getting up to have a look."

"Barney… For fuck's sake stay down."

"We can't stay here all bloody day."

"I can… to stay alive."

"Well…" The corporal lifted himself onto his knees.

"Hang on Barney… please," Mike pleaded. "Let me ask my trackers what they think."

The soldier crouched in the grass. He waited.

"Ben… Mbuyotsi… Kanjani? Loh magandanga yena kona?" What's happening… Are the terrorists still there or have they gone?

"Yena kona," Mbuyotsi said without hesitation. They are still there.

"Ben?"

"Yena kona!"

"Both trackers say the terrs are still there."

"Well I'm going to find out," the corporal said rising to his feet.

Michael held his tongue. He had warned the man. There was nothing more

that he could do.

The soldier stood up in the open vlei, the tallest of the grass stems reaching to his crotch. He held his FN at the ready and he examined the tree line at the mouth of the ravine. For a long time he said nothing.

“There's fuck all there,” he said crossly. “As I said,” the corporal repeated defiantly, “You sparrows have got shit for guts.”

Those were the last words Barney O’Reilly ever uttered.

Schluck-schluck-schluck-schluck-schluck-schluck…

The liquid impact of the RPD machine gun bullets hitting the corporal's chest were the first sounds that Mike Campbell heard. The rattle of the machine gun firing came a split second later.

“CONTACT… CONTACT… CONTACT.” The radio operator screamed into the radio. And suddenly the air all around them was swamped with the cacophony of gunfire and the hiss of flying bullets.

Mike hugged the ground, pulling his head down with both his hands, as a murderous fusillade of steel projectiles raked through the grass inches above him. He felt the tugging, and heard the impact, of bullets tearing into the pack on his back. They were buzzing all around him like a swarm of angry bees, cutting swathes through the open grassland.

Severed grass stems cascaded over his quaking body like broken stiff spaghetti. Dust and muck hung in the air. There was the sound of whistling… of shrieking… of distorted metal slugs ricocheting off the rocks and hard ground. And there was the acrid stench of hot steel, too, and of burning aluminium powder from the communist tracers.

The SF soldiers were sitting ducks.

Seconds after it all began the furious deluge died away. The terrorists were conserving their ammunition. They had no targets to shoot at.

Mike belly-crawled to where the corporal had fallen. The soldier’s body was convulsing like the carcass of a newly slaughtered cow in an abattoir. His own body was twitching violently with heavy nervous twinges. Mike knew that, at that moment, everybody else in the patrol was trembling, too. Nobody is immune from fear when under fire.

Barney was sprawled on his back in an awkward heap, lying on top of his back pack. His cap had fallen from his head exposing a mop of sweat-dampened carrot-red hair. His steel blue eyes were staring vacantly at the cloudless sky from his camouflage-blackened face, the eyelids opening and

closing… slowly… mechanically. Mike watched, with morbid fascination, the young man's mobile jaw. It was chewing slowly as if he was having trouble masticating the thick column of pink, frothy blood that gushed into his mouth from his throat. The gore spilled out from between his lips in a continuous viscous river. It ran down his grimy cheeks and down his neck onto the ground.

Mike had seen death many times. He did not need to feel for a pulse to confirm that Barney O'Reilly was dead.

"The corporal's dead," he shouted. He crawled in behind the man's body, using it as a shield between himself and the terrorists.

"How's everybody else?" One of the other soldiers immediately took command. The terrorist fire had dwindled to an odd potshot here and there.

"Mack?"

"O.K."

"Hal?"

"I'm O.K. But… Looks like one of the sparrows has himself an oil leak."

'An oil leak?' Mike was confused. 'One of the trackers was… bleeding. One of the trackers had been wounded! These bloody RLI troopies and their stupid fucking jargon…'

"Ben? Mbuyotsi? Wena all right?" Mike spoke anxiously into the grass.

"Yebo, Nkosi."

"Yebo, Nkosi."

"Richard?"

No response.

'It's Richard… Richard's been hit!'

"He's over here…" The troopie's voice gave Mike direction.

Mike crawled furiously in the direction of the soldier's voice, pulling his rifle through the grass by its muzzle alongside him. The shifting grass marked the course of his passage. It drew a short burst of machine gun fire from the ambush position.

Fluk… fluk-fluk… fluk-fluk-fluk…

Mike flinched as the bullets whistled past his ears. The gunner was firing high.

Richard was lying flat on his belly facing the enemy. The troopie called Hal was stretched out alongside him. He was sawing away at the ranger's webbing with a Swiss army knife. As Mike reached them the soldier severed the last of the restraining straps and he rolled the heavy pack from the young

ranger's back.

Richard was lying very still. His eyes were screwed tightly shut. His face was grey beneath the black camo-cream and he was sweating profusely. To the touch he was icy cold. His rifle was still in his hands pointing towards the terrorists. He was gripping the weapon so fiercely the knuckles shone starkly white through the black smearing that covered them.

The enemy's fire remained desultory. So far there had been no return fire from the Rhodesians. They could see nothing… only the yellow grass stems that grew mere inches from their noses. Like the ZANLA men they, too, had no target to fire at. They were pinned down in the open… impotent… feeling naked. And they dared not make a move for fear of attracting attention.

Mike could hear the radio operator speaking frantically into his handset. And the troopie who had taken command was shouting instructions to him. But the game warden was not listening. At that moment his wounded ranger was his sole concern.

Richard groaned as the heavy pack rolled free. *"Fucking hell,"* he hissed painfully.

"Where are you hit?" Mike asked him.

"In the back," The soldier, Hal, answered the question. He was busy slitting the ranger's shirt open with the blade of his knife.

"Ooohh… Shit," Richard groaned.

"You're gonna be O.K., Richard," Mike reassured him. *"Just lie still."* But Michael Campbell was really not very sure about anything.

There was a raw ripping wound high up on the young man's back… high above the left shoulder blade. A trickle of thick red blood ran down from the wound. It spilled onto the ground near Richard's face.

'Thank God it's not frothy pink lung blood,' Mike thought. A bullet through the lungs was normally, sooner or later, fatal.

Nevertheless, the prognosis was not good. The bullet… coming directly from the front… had missed Richard's head by a fraction of an inch. In that fact he had been very lucky. But it had penetrated the top muscles of his shoulder and slipped by under his pack, raking down inside through the length of his body, boring deep into his vitals. When he perceived this Mike knew the wound was serious. Very serious! And a melancholy premonition swamped his soul.

The troopie looked at the game warden silently. He shook his head. He, too, understood the remoteness of Richard's chances.

“Where'd it come out?”

Together Mike and Hal searched Richard's body. There was no exit wound. The bullet was still lodged somewhere deep inside his body.

The soldier shrugged off his own pack and extracted a compact medical kit from a side pocket. From this he removed a small grey tube and screwed off its polythene cap to expose a short hypodermic needle.

“Omnopon,” the soldier said. He pressed the needle to the hilt into the muscles of Richard's upper arm, and squeezed the tube until it was flat.
“Morphine…”

“I know what it is,” Mike said hoarsely.

The soldier bent the needle over with his thumb and tossed the spent phial into the grass.

Mike noticed that the soldier’s hands were trembling.

“How you feeling, Rich?”

“Like shit, Mr. Campbell… Christ but it's sore.” He coughed painfully… dryly.

“Just hang in there, boy…” the soldier addressed Richard. “We've given you a shot of morphine. You'll begin to feel a bit groggy in a few minutes and the pain will ease. We'll have you casevacked out of here in no time.”

The troopie ripped the plastic wrapping off a sterile dressing-pack and he set about fastening the gauze padding to the wound. Mike held the thick wadding in place and the soldier strapped it down firmly with long strips of elastoplast.

Suddenly Hal stopped what he was doing. He looked up sharply… listening. Mike listened, too. In the distance there was the distinct sound of an approaching helicopter… the whine of a jet engine… the gentle beat of rotors.

The game warden looked at the soldier. Jubilant smiles broke out across both their faces.

‘Where the hell had that cyclone come from?’ Mike wondered. ‘It must have been on a task somewhere nearby and the pilot must have intercepted the radio contact message.’ But it didn't really matter. The chopper was here. That's all that counted.

“See,” Mike said encouragingly to the stricken game ranger. “Listen…

There's a chopper coming. It won't be long now."

Detachment Commander Cephas heard the helicopter, too. *"STOP YOUR FIRING,"* he shouted. He listened carefully. For Cephas and his band of guerrilla fighters a helicopter meant big trouble. It was a helicopter. And it was approaching fast.

"LET'S GO!"

The terrorists broke from their ambush positions and… scattering… they began running up the gully behind them.

"Right… Right two o'clock…" The RLI radio operator urged the pilot. "We're to your right front. In the middle of a grassland… on the hillside above you."

The machine's nose moved from left to right across the side of the hill behind and below them. The instruction brought the aircraft round to face in their direction. It began progressing up the hill.

"A little to the right… That's it. Watch out for my orange smoke. We're in the open grassland. The terrs are in the thick bush… in the gully… at the side of the kopje behind us."

"Roger, Two-Six Charlie." The pilot's voice rang clear and loud from the troopie's radio.

The new patrol leader pulled the pin from a small metal grenade-like canister and lobbed it as far as he was able in the direction of the terrorists' ambush position. Immediately it hit the ground a pall of heavy orange smoke spewed out from the tiny container.

"Got your smoke, Two-Six Charlie." The pilot was nonchalant. The helicopter was coming up very fast now. Mike could see it. His heart lifted. The screaming of its jet engine was distinct above the heavy beat of its rotors.

"I have you visual." The pilot did not sound at all like a man who was about to enter a deadly battle.

Then the machine was overhead. The down-draught of its rotors was whipping at the grass all around them. Then it was sweeping away towards the ravine. The orange smoke was flattened into the grass sward.

Mike looked up and saw the technician's silver bone dome above and behind his machine-guns. The menacing side-by-side twin barrels of the weapons, sleeved in their perforated black anti-heat tubes, were raked

forward and downward. The tech was craning his neck towards the ambush position… searching the bush eagerly for a target.

The radio operator remained in contact with the pilot who, in turn, told the soldiers on the ground what was going on.

"The gooks have broken cover. They're running up the gully," the soldier shouted.

"LETS GO!" came the order from another voice. Mike shrugged off his pack. He was on his feet and running with the soldiers. The dead and the dying were left behind. All he carried now was his FN rifle and his chest webbing which contained four full spare magazines. Each was loaded with twenty live rounds.

Automatically the soldiers fanned out. They dodged evasively from side to side as they ran through the open grassland towards the ravine. Their rifles barked in their hands… intermittently… sending single bullets raking into the thick bush ahead. Sometimes double-tapping… two bullets at a time. It was the attack tactic they had all been taught. Only a very brave man would remain in a blown ambush position in the face of such an aggressive advance.

Half-way up the ravine, the helicopter's guns erupted. The sound of short, repetitive, bursts of intense machine-gun fire was like music to Mike's ears. A man began screaming far away up the hillside.

The game warden was suddenly alive again. He was running just as hard and just as fast as the young soldiers at his side. In his hands he carried his FN and he fired it like a veteran.

They passed through the fringe of thick bush at the edge of the vlei and they entered the gully proper. They ran on up the ravine… running round trees and dodging behind boulders. And as they advanced they continued to punch bullets into every conceivable hiding place… into every nook and cranny that materialised before them.

Cephas took refuge behind a tree trunk high up on the eastern slope of the hill. For a long time he did not move. He *could* not move… because he would have been spotted by the crew of the nearby helicopter. And he was forced to watch… helplessly… as the weird and frightening flying machine sought out and destroyed his comrades one by one.

Then he heard the shots that were being fired by the soldiers below. Looking down the ravine he saw, with a growing fear, the scrambling,

weaving forms of the SF soldiers skirmishing up the gully. It would not be long before they were upon him.

Cephas felt a compelling urge to run. But still he dared not move. There was the helicopter… If it did not go away soon he would have no option but to stay and fight it out with the soldiers.

Resolutely, he made up his mind. He would try to shoot the aircraft down. If he succeeded he would then arrange an expensive reception for the oncoming soldiers. They would not take him cheaply.

Suddenly the aircraft swung away. Its machine-guns had just cut to pieces a comrade who had taken refuge beneath a fallen log. It began searching for a new target on the far slope of the ravine.

When the helicopter's tail rotor was directly facing him, Cephas abandoned his heavy pack and broke cover. He ran for the crest of the hill. If he could just get over that hump without being seen there was a chance he might escape the holocaust that was roller-coasting his comrades in the gully below him. He was no longer concerned about their fate. He was only interested now in his own survival.

Like the SF soldiers behind him, all Cephas carried now was his light-weight AK-47 assault rifle and his Chinese chest-webbing. In the webbing pouches there were four banana-shaped magazines each loaded with twenty-eight rounds. And he ran… and he ran… and he ran… as fast as his legs would carry him.

Mike's bush-trained eyes picked up Cephas the minute he moved. Sliding to a halt the game warden lifted his weapon to his shoulder. It was a long shot. Three hundred yards if it was one! And the elevation, too, was great. Whatever the degree of difficulty, it was still a running shot that was well within his capability.

Taking a deep lungful of air, Mike held his breath. His right eye focused automatically through the centre of the rear aperture ring-sight. Carefully, he placed the tip of the foresight in the middle of the fleeing man's back. He lifted it a fraction to compensate for the distance. The man's head was bobbing about on the tip of the foresight post.

Mike's chest was heaving from the running. His body was shaking with fatigue. The foresight wavered on and off the target. And the moving figure moved first into his point of aim, then out of it. Finally, anticipating all the variables, he squeezed the trigger.

The game warden always used tracer ammunition. He begged, borrowed or stole the red-tipped bullets whenever and wherever he could. He had learned in the ZIPRA war that the vision of fiery tracers flying into their faces demoralised the enemy greatly. It was an added advantage and he was all for using any kind of advantage.

He was using South African tracer now… and he watched the red fire-ball rise slow and high above its target. It looked as though it was going to pass well over the man's head. *'Had he over-compensated?'* He need not have worried. As the bullet approached closer it descended like a guided missile to extinguish itself in the lumber region of the man's back.

Cephas went down as if pole-axed.

"Tshayileh!" Good shot!

Mike turned to see Mbuyotsi's grinning face just behind him.

High up on the hill Cephas began to wail. But he was going nowhere. The ZANLA detachment commander would never see the crest of that hill. Soon he would see nothing at all… ever more. He was finished.

"Where's Ben?"

"Behind us."

Mike looked back and saw the weary old Bushman laboriously toiling up the hill. He was walking. Ben was not fit, by comparison with Mike and Mbuyotsi, and for years now he had been flagging more and more whenever a hunt was in full flight. But it mattered little. His advancing years had not impaired his tracking abilities… and he still walked from dawn to dusk without complaint.

Fifteen minutes later the battle was over. Five ZANLA terrorists lay dead.

It was after midnight but Mike was still awake. He lay quietly on his stretcher in the barrack room. He was very conscious of the empty stretcher at his side. He was oblivious to the snoring and to the sonorous breathing of the young soldiers all around him. His body, smelling of fresh soap from a late cold shower, ached from the day's strenuous man hunt. But his mind was not conscious of his fatigue. It was going over and over the events of the afternoon's contact.

They had been bloody lucky. If it wasn't for Mbuyotsi's quick-wittedness… and his tremendous bushcraft… they'd all have walked right into the terrorists' killing ground. If they had progressed just a few more yards none of them would have heard the bark of the rifles that fired the bullets that

would have killed them.

‘Dammit! But they had been lucky!’

Barney O’Reilly was dead. Sad as that fact was, he had had it coming. The corporal had been an arrogant fool. Sooner or later the Barney O’Reilly's of this world all got themselves killed. And then there was Richard. There was no doubt in Mike's mind that Richard would die, too.

After the contact the helicopter had whisked Richard off to Bindura hospital. Bindura was further than Mount Darwin but it was the nearest medical centre to the battle site that had the facilities to treat the kind of wound the game ranger had suffered.

Richard had still been conscious when Mike helped lift him onto the helicopter's stretcher. By then his stomach was swollen… taut like a drum… from the internal bleeding.

Nevertheless, they got Richard to Bindura alive and he had miraculously survived the emergency operation. So there was a chance. There was reason for hope. *‘One must never lose hope. One must never say die.’* Now all that Mike Campbell could do was to wait… and to hope… and to pray to a God that he no longer believed in.

It was two o'clock in the morning when the duty officer quietly opened the door of the barrack room. Mike had told the captain the whereabouts of his stretcher… just in case the ops room received any news about Richard during the night. The officer walked quietly towards him.

Mike raised himself onto one elbow.

“Mr. Campbell?” The captain whispered hoarsely.

“Yes, Sir.”

“I'm sorry. Young Richard didn't make it. He died just a short while ago.”

“FUCK IT!” Mike flopped back onto his bed. He was stunned. He had been expecting this news but still it came as a shock.

“Is there anything I can do for you? Some coffee, perhaps?”

“No… Thank you, captain.”

“I've got a bottle of brandy in the ops room…”

“No… No thank you.”

“Give me a shout if you change your mind.”

“Thanks.” Mike felt suddenly very cold.

“I'm very sorry.”

Mike was choking. He could not reply.

The captain left the room just as quietly as he had entered it. He closed the door without a sound. And Mike was left to his sorrow, alone, in the darkness.

But he was not really alone. A subtle change had come over the barrack room. The hum of slumbering men had ceased. Some of them had been awakened by the captain's entry and they had heard him convey his sombre news. Others, it seemed, had somehow unconsciously absorbed the fact in their sleep. They all lay unmoving and silent in their beds now, their hearts going out to the grieving game warden.

Then Mike’s tears began to run. They flowed in a great torrent from his burning eyes. They came in a deluge no matter how tightly shut he tried to squeeze his eyelids. They ran wetly down the sides of his face, soaking into the soft fabric of the pillow beneath his head.

Finally he began to sob. And the sobbing became great racks… guffaws of painful anguish… that pulled at his chest and gnawed in his aching throat. He was unashamed of his open display of grief and torment. And he was unconcerned by the fact that there were grown men all about him who were listening to the pain of his terrible distress. They were silent men who knew they were quietly witnessing the melancholy breaking of the big man's heart.

Quite suddenly Mike's stomach began to heave. In his panic to rise he fell sideways off his stretcher. The metal frame of the camp bed tipped over sideways, making a great clattering noise on the cement floor. The metallic din wakened all those who had still been asleep.

He raced for the door.

His gorge was full by the time he stepped off the verandah. The vomit spewed from his mouth, spraying the darkness with his foul-smelling puke. He staggered about in the gloom… oblivious to the cold night air on his naked body… retching… retching… retching. Soon there was nothing left that he could fetch up but still the heaving tugged at his bowels. And he gagged on the bitterness of the bile.

Gradually his emotions settled. Slowly he became more aware of his surroundings. He found himself standing, bent over double, amongst a forest of *desert lilies*… stiff pvc urinal pipes that protruded *cock-high* above the ground from primitive French drains in the earth beneath. The metal funnels that were wired to the tops of the pipes shone dully in the starlight. Only then did he become aware of the dank stench of stale urine that rose up at him

through the metal funnels of the *flowers*.

He spat the last of the bile from his mouth and straightened his body. His stomach hurt. His throat ached. And his eyes were burning from the tears. Suddenly he felt very cold. His body was shaking.

Deep within his psyche Mike's spirit plummeted to the very depths. He felt remorse… and sorrow… and guilt… and his heart grieved hopelessly at the loss of Richard Poole. The young game ranger had had so much promise.

‘What a waste of a wonderful young life!’

Mike then moved towards the ablutions. What he needed now was another cold shower.

Chapter 34

DANIEL and three young ZANLA cadres arrived at the village in the dead of night. They had been walking from Chifombo since early Thursday morning, now five full days march behind them. As usual, they all had carried heavy back-packs filled with ammunition. No one ever came into Zimbabwe from Chifombo empty handed. They were dead beat.

The first day-and-a-half march from Chifombo south to the Zambesi River, had been a cinch. That part of Mozambique was now firmly in the hands of ZANLA's staunch ally… and bitter enemy of the Portuguese… FRELIMO.

Although there had been a *coup d'etat* in Portugal in March that year, [xxiii] and the new military regime, under the presidency of General Antonio de Spinola, seemed conducive to granting independence to Portugal's African colonies, in June the situation was still far from clear. There seemed to be a hidden political force behind Spinola which had another agenda for Portugal's colonial policy. The political future of Mozambique was, therefore, balanced on a knife edge. The undercurrents could be felt but not seen, and fighting in the Tete Province of Mozambique remained fierce.

Once Daniel's small force had crossed the great river, therefore, they had to proceed with immense caution. They had travelled only at night. But the danger lay not only in the fact that the Portuguese had stepped up their war effort. There was another problem… a problem of far greater significance to ZANLA.

Rhodesia's dreaded Selous Scouts were now operating permanently inside Mozambique with the approval of, and in collaboration with, the Portuguese army. And the sku'zapo were very cunning, devious, and deadly. Furthermore, the Rhodesian Special Air Service… the elite SAS… were working in tandem with the scouts. Those two units, when they worked together, were a formidable force.

Both ZANLA and FRELIMO camps in Mozambique were being hit regularly by these Rhodesian special force units now and the transit routes the guerrillas used were constantly being ambushed or booby trapped. Claymore mines… capable of shearing ten men in half with a single blast of shrapnel… detonated by cleverly concealed trigger devices on the bush paths… were favourite sku'zapo weapons. Just the thought of walking into

one of these walls-of-death in the middle of the night was enough to give the vakomana continuous nightmares.

And because ZANLA had not politicised the masses in Mozambique, and because an effective contact-man-network was not operative there, the sku'zapo found the Mozambican Mashona much easier to dupe than their Rhodesian counterparts.

The old ploy of the scouts posing as ZANLA fighters returning from unfortunate battles in Rhodesia… carrying what appeared to be seriously wounded comrades who required *urgent* medical attention… worked time and time again. When the pseudo-guerrillas approached the Mozambican Shona for help, the willing and unsuspecting villagers quickly led them to the nearest ZANLA base camp.

The scouts also kept watching briefs on all those camp sites known to be used by the ZANLA high command, striking only when they knew that a high ranking officer was in the bag.

The ZANLA freedom fighters, even in Mozambique, therefore, were now not safe from the Rhodesian SF. Consequently, Comrade Commander Muliloh and his men, when they passed through Mozambique south of the Zambesi, had to be continuously on the alert to avoid the countless pitfalls that were being put in place all the time to bring about their demise.

Anna was expecting Daniel. She had, in fact, been expecting him for several days. It was not unusual that he should be delayed but this time she had become more fearful than normal for his safety. A strange ambience pervaded the Rhodesian native villages and, intuitively, Anna sensed that there was going to be a shift in ZANLA's fortunes. She had a strange feeling that the tide of the war was about to turn in favour of the mabunu.

When the ZANLA men arrived, therefore, Anna was greatly relieved. She directed Daniel’s subordinates quickly to the various huts that she had arranged for their accommodation. Urging the fighters hastily into the dwellings, she silently shut the doors behind them. Then she awakened the women who had been press-ganged into providing the guerrillas with food. She cautioned them, too, to be as quiet as was humanly possible.

The sku'zapo were everywhere these days. Hidden in the hills… roaming the bush disguised as local tribespeople. They lurked round every corner, like hyenas at a water hole waiting to surprise unsuspecting prey. The Rhodesians watched the people come and go. There were so many prying eyes now… so

many O.P.s… even in the night… it was not wise to draw attention to a village by advertising any kind of nocturnal activity.

Anna fussed over Daniel more than usual that night. He had problems of his own that worried him, but her attentions, although welcome, both amused and intrigued him. Something was troubling her. He could sense it.

She had commandeered the headman's kitchen hut for the night and had arranged a thick pallet of blankets in one corner of the room for their bed. She had not been with Daniel now for over a month and she had designs for their bed that night which included activities other than sleeping. But Daniel's biggest and immediate concern was his immense fatigue.

The meal arrived quickly and when Daniel had at last satisfied his hunger, Anna asked him the question that she had been biting back since the moment he had arrived.

"Is there any truth in the rumour that the Mbuya Nehanda is dead?"

Daniel pulled the heavy clay pot down from his lips very slowly. He wiped the mahewu froth from his mouth with the back of his hand. The steady yellow glow from the hut's paraffin storm lantern and the flickering flames from the fire, were both reflected in his steady, staring eyes. The look he gave Anna was one of absolute astonishment.

"How'd you know that?"

"The povo… the village people… have been talking about nothing else for the last week."

"Here? Here in Chaminuka?"

"Of course… I haven't been anywhere else."

There was a look of consternation… of bewilderment… in Daniel's eyes.

"Is it true?"

"Yes…" Daniel responded slowly, eyeing Anna speculatively. *"But how did the people here know that?"*

Anna, for the moment, was dumb-struck. Then, hesitantly, she volunteered the vital information: *"They say their midzimu spirits told them."*

"The village spirits? That can't be…"

"That's what they say."

Daniel looked at her… puzzled. For a long moment he thought about what she had just told him. Finally he shook his head in disbelief.

"You say they've been talking about it for a week?"

Anna nodded. Her face was a mask of shocked austerity.

"When did you first hear she was dead, Anna? Exactly… Think

carefully."

Silently Anna recalled, one by one, her activities over the past several days. She thought deeply. Abruptly she said: *"Nine days ago… today. Nine days ago exactly."*

"But the military command at Chifombo only discovered that she was dead the day before I left base." Daniel was now almost in a state of panic. His voice had risen half an octave. He was now clearly quite incredulous. "That was five… no… six days ago."

Anna's eyes opened a little wider. An eerie feeling made her shudder. "What are you saying? That the people here knew beforehand? That they had, perhaps, known she was going to die?"

"No, Anna… When the Mbuya's attendants reported her death she had been dead then for three full days. She'd gone into her hut to fast… and to be alone…"

"Six and three makes nine, Daniel," Anna cut her husband dead. "That means she died nine days ago… the exact same day the rumours started here."

They looked at each other blankly. 'It couldn't be. It just couldn't be.'

"It was not unusual for the svikiro to go into long seclusions." The astonishment in Daniel's voice and in his facial expression was clearly manifest. "So no one thought anything of it when she did not appear for several days. But when she had not eaten for three days… when she did not respond to them knocking on her door… her attendants became worried. The ZANLA medic said she must have died shortly after she entered her hut."

Anna felt the nerve ends tingling along her spine. Waves of cold goose pimples ran up and down her arms.

Daniel was just as much disturbed. His eyes wore a wild and unbelieving expression. His innards began to squirm.

"Nine days ago…" Daniel could not believe what he was hearing. It was impossible. But the facts were undeniable. He did not doubt Anna's word. *"Nine days… They were talking about the mbuya's death… here… nine days ago?"*

Anna nodded. Her mind, too, was racing.

"Then… as you say… they must have known about it the very day it happened." Daniel spoke slowly… half-skeptically. "…the very day she died!" He could not mask the amazement in his voice. "That means the people here knew about it even before the mbuya's own attendants knew

about it. Before the ZANLA military command at Chifombo knew about it. But that is not possible, Anna. Unless…?"

"…unless the midzimu spirits are real." Anna's voice was dry and squeaky.

"You can't believe that? …I can't believe that!"

"But it's what the people say, Daniel." Despite a nagging and reluctant acceptance of the facts, Anna could still not quite bring herself to believe in the reality of their discussion. *'But what other possible explanation could there be?'*

"It must be true," Anna said resigning herself, at last, to the inevitable conclusion. "The midzimu spirits must be real, Daniel… I tell you… Nine days ago the people here began talking about Mbuya Nehanda's death. I asked them how they knew. They told me the midzimu spirits had told them."

Daniel continued to look long and silently at Anna… and with continuing incredulity. He was utterly confounded.

"How…?"

"All the sabookus said the same thing, Daniel. All the headmen in every village throughout the Chaminuka Sector. They all told me the same thing… that the midzimu spirits had told them that Mbuya Nehanda was dead."

The two of them sat in complete silence then, for a long, long time. And they looked at each other with wide and unbelieving eyes. Their minds were in complete turmoil.

"What happens now?" Anna asked Daniel at last…fearfully. "What will ZANLA do now that the Svikiro Nehanda is dead?"

The same thought was racing through both their minds. Indeed, what *would* ZANLA do now? The old woman had worked wonders with the local Mashona povo. The very fact of her alliance *with* ZANLA had been enough to keep everybody *on-sides*. The war had been progressing so well… so *very* well. Despite recent sku'zapo successes in Mozambique, inside Rhodesia… for eighteen months… ZANLA had moved from strength to strength.

New operational areas had been opened up and the boundaries of old ones had been extended southward. Many European-owned farms had been hit, and hit hard, and on a regular basis. Road ambushes of white-owned vehicles in all the rural areas of the north east had occurred, always at dusk, with impunity. Land mines had blown up SF vehicles, buses and civilian motor cars indiscriminately. There had been many, many mabunu casualties, both

dead and severely injured. The predicted exodus of white Rhodesians seeking safe havens in other countries had begun.

ZANLA's war operations had stretched the Rhodesian economy to the limit and the Rhodesian security forces had made no significant gains at all. And once the vakomana of ZANLA had returned to their tribal strongholds, from their attacks on white-owned lands and properties, they simply disappeared amongst the people of the villages.

Everything that Daniel and Rex Mbudzi had said about the prosecution of the war that night at Matsiwo's kraal… that night that now seemed so very long ago… had actually come to pass. But now the old crone was dead. What would happen now?

"Has the news made any difference to the people? Do they still support us?"

"It seems so…" Anna responded… but there was a twinge of uncertainty in her voice. She had noted a strange innuendo permeating the people's attitude over the last week. It worried her. She tried to shrug off her doubts… and in her consternation she unnecessarily pushed a burning log further into the fire. It was a subconscious and useless gesture… an innate animal displacement reaction enacted without thought in the midst of her mental agitation.

The smoke hung silently in the amber lamp-light above their heads looking like a misty shroud. It slowly filtered, with the warm air, through the soot-tarred thatch into the cold night sky outside.

"They haven't given any indication that they have withdrawn their support for ZANLA if that's what you mean?" Anna told Daniel what he wanted to know.

Daniel nodded… urgently, silently, egging her on. Her demeanour told him that she had still more to say. She still had on her mind the crux of the matter that was nagging her.

"But the villagers… They have suddenly become very reserved, Daniel."

"Reserved? How so?"

"Yes… Reserved. The bounce they once had in their spirits seems to have gone."

"They are in mourning? … For the Mbuya Nehanda?"

Anna took a deep breath before replying. "I hope that is all it is, Daniel. For all our sake's… I hope that that is all it is."

Chapter 35

THE old black man squatted morosely on his haunches in front of Inspector Hugh Ritchie's desk. His tattered clothes were dirty from day-after-day wear-and-tear. His feet were bare… cracked at the heels and at the toes. He rested his elbows on his knees and he clasped his downcast head forlornly between his hands. There was a resigned, dejected, look on his weather-beaten face.

The policeman was dressed in civilian khaki shorts and a pale blue, checkered, open neck shirt. The Special Branch was a plain-clothes unit! He leaned forward on his elbows and looked down sympathetically at the old sabooku.

'It is the old people who are the real victims of this war,' Hugh Ritchie thought sadly.

He had a hard and sometimes ruthless job to perform but he was still human. Even when they refused to give him vital information, Hugh Ritchie often found himself empathising with the old Mashona… like this grand old man before him now.

"What is his name, Joseph?" Joseph was a well-trained SB interpreter. He spoke to the old man gently in the Makorekore dialect of the Chi-Shona language. His questions followed a well-oiled procedure. The inspector had no need to prompt him.

"He says his name is Charles, Sir. Charles Chimoko." The officer wrote down the man's name on the lined pad in front of him.

"Situpa number?" Joseph read the old man's identity number from his crumpled old employment record sheet. It showed that, throughout his life, he had been unemployed. He was totally committed to his village and to his small family land holding in the Rusambo Tribal Trust Lands.

"And where does he live? What's the name of his kraal?"

Joseph spoke to the old man again.

"Chimoko… Chimoko is the name of his kraal, Sir. He is the sabooku of the kraal line. I know where it is. It's about ten miles west of Marymount Mission."

Hugh Ritchie recorded these particulars meticulously. He was about to get the surprise of his life. He was about to record certain strange and mysterious details that he would never be able to fully comprehend. To the uninitiated,

what the old sabooku was about to tell him would sound like some bizarre fantasy taken from an improbable science fiction story.

Joseph, a black Shona like the old man he was interrogating, sat at ease in a high-backed chair at the side of the policeman's desk. He leant forward now, smiling at the old man, his elbows resting on his knees. His body language projected sympathy, understanding and friendliness. And he spoke gently, encouragingly, in the man's own language. The sabooku understood every word that he said.

"He says the people are tired of the war, Sir. They want the fighting to stop."

The white policeman gazed down at the elderly Shona man compassionately. He was such a sad caricature of primitive humanity… with his gristly grey beard and his fuzzy white peppercorn hair. Hugh Ritchie found himself feeling sad and melancholy just looking at him.

'Mashona oldsters, like this old man, were caught between a big rock and a very hard place in this war,' Hugh Ritchie thought again sadly. 'All they really wanted in their old age was some peace and quiet… some tranquility… but there was nowhere they could go to find it. The war was everywhere. It was all around them. They could not avoid being a part of it.'

"Tell him we are all tired of the war, Joseph. Tell him it is time we all settled down to a life of peace together."

"Ghaaaw… Tina zhonke dinehwileh hondo," the old man readily agreed. Yes, indeed, *everyone* was tired of the war.

The old sabooku turned away from the police inspector at that point and he listened to the traffic passing along the road outside the police camp. To him the little town of Mount Darwin was a great metropolis. It was on the outer-most edge of his very limited world.

Chimoko then spoke to himself… softly and obliquely… as he stared vacantly at the open window.

"What was that?" the policeman asked of his interpreter. "What did he say, Joseph?"

"He was talking to himself, Sir," Joseph responded. "He said that since the Mbuya Nehanda had died everything has been going wrong."

"What has been going wrong, Joseph? Ask him what has been going wrong?"

Every permanent senior member of the security forces in the Hurricane Operational Area had now been told that ZANLA had abducted the

powerful Svikiro Nehanda. They knew now, too, that the old crone had died in Mozambique. Few of them, however, understood, yet, the real significance of her life and/or her death on ZANLA's prosecution of the war.

"He says, Sir… that the people no longer support ZANLA but they are afraid to make a move against the vakomana."

A broad smile cut across the policeman's face. This was something the Rhodesians had been waiting to hear for a long, long time… *'that the people did not really want to support ZANLA.'* Suddenly, the SB officer realised that he might just be recording history in the making.

"What are the people afraid of, Joseph? And ask him why they supported ZANLA in the first place."

"He says that the Svikiro Nehanda told the people to support ZANLA, Sir. She told them that anyone who did not support ZANLA would be working against the wishes of the great spirit.

"She also told the people that the vakomana of ZANLA were the spears of Nehanda and that anyone who failed to support the vakomana would feel the sharpness of those spears. That is what the people are afraid of now."

Hugh Ritchie wrote down everything… question and answer… verbatim… as the story unfolded. He had learned that scrupulous accuracy in his interview records was what revealed the truth in the long run. He left nothing out of his voluminous notes.

"It was a threat…?" he questioned Joseph. "…that if the people did not support ZANLA the wrath of Nehanda would descend upon them?"

"Yes, Sir… Clearly. In effect, the old woman told them that the spirit called Nehanda would use the vakomana to kill them if they disobeyed her wishes."

"I see… And you say she told them it was the spirit Nehanda's wish that the people should support ZANLA?"

"Yes, Sir… And the Midzimo Spirits… the village spirits… supported her."

"And now that she is dead… ?"

"Now, Sir… Now that the mbuya is dead… the people are beginning to question the things that the vakomana tell them to do. They think that… maybe… Nehanda has withdrawn her support from ZANLA. They believe that if the great mhondoro spirit really did support ZANLA she would not have let her svikiro die."

‘The tide was indeed about to turn!’

“Keep the old man talking, Joseph. Don't let him wind down. Ask him if there is anything else that the people don't like about ZANLA?”

“He says, Sir, that the people now distrust ZANLA. He says that Comrade Mbudzi tried to cheat them.”

“Mbudzi…? That would be Sectorial Commander Rex Mbudzi?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“How so, Joseph? How did Mbudzi try to cheat the Makorekore people.”

“When the mbuya died, Sir, Comrade Commander Mbudzi told the people that the mhondoro spirit…”

“Nehanda?”

“Nehanda… Sir. Yes. Comrade Mbudzi told the people that the great spirit Nehanda had appointed a new svikiro to represent her. The new medium ZANLA seems to have appointed is a comparatively young woman from the Bindura district who, for years, has been claiming to be the ‘Legs of Nehanda’.”

“The ‘Legs of Nehanda’, Joseph? I don't understand.”

The interpreter then spoke at some length with the old man.

“Sir, the mdala here… the old man… he says that for some years now there have been two svikiros claiming to represent the mhondoro spirit of Nehanda. The old Mbuya Nehanda was called the ‘Head of Nehanda’ and the young woman from Bindura was called the ‘Legs of Nehanda’.”

‘This is crazy!’ Hugh Ritchie thought… nevertheless, he wrote everything down religiously. Even what he didn’t entirely understand he recorded… word for word. There were learned people in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and at the university in Salisbury, who would be able to provide him with clarity.

“So when the old woman died, Joseph… when the ‘Head of Nehanda’ died… Mbudzi immediately appointed the ‘Legs of Nehanda’ to replace her?”

“Yes, Sir… That is the gist of it.”

‘It takes all kinds to make the world go round!’

“But…? There must be a ‘but’ to all this, Joseph.”

“Yes, Sir… there is a ‘but’… The ‘legs of Nehanda’ did not pass the test.”

“What test, Joseph?”

“Svikiros are not just appointed, Sir,” Joseph explained patiently. “And

ZANLA certainly does not have the spiritual authority to appoint a personage as important as the Svikiro Nehanda. The spirit mediums who claim ascendancy apparently have to show certain manifestations of the fact that they are possessed by a spirit… by THE spirit… by the spirit of Nehanda. Then, Sir… Then the spirit has to be tested."

"The spirit has to be tested, Joseph?"

"Yes, Sir… It is complicated. The svikiro may be genuine. That is, she, or he, may be truly possessed of a spirit… but the spirit that possesses the medium can be false."

"You mean some bad spirit can possess a svikiro and claim to be someone else… some other spirit?" The inspector was getting a bit tongue-tied. "The spirit that is… not the svikiro… claims the identity of a spirit that it really does not represent?"

"That is right, Sir. As I said… It can get very complicated."

"So how do they test the spirit, Joseph?"

Joseph and the old man went into another long and detailed conversation.

"The old man says he does not know… exactly," Joseph continued. "He says that the Svikiro Mutota is normally called upon to test any spirit claiming to be Nehanda. Mutota and Nehanda are the two most important mhondoroh spirits in the Mashona spirit world."

"Mutota?"

"Mwene Mutota, Sir. You white people call him Monomatapa."

"Monomatapa? You mean like the Monomatapa Hotel in Salisbury?"

"The hotel is named after Mwene Mutota, Sir. He was the first king of the Mashona people."

"So what has Mono… Mwene Matapa… Mutota… got to do with the spirit of Nehanda?"

Joseph already knew the answer to that question but he was obliged to follow procedure. It was not correct that he should assume that the man he was questioning entertained the same ideas about such matters as he did himself. It was correct police procedure that he should pose the question and then report the man's answer verbatim.

A gentle smile creased the old man's face when Joseph relayed the question to him. He looked up at the bright and enquiring eyes of the young marungu policemen sitting behind the big desk. Slowly he shook his head. *'These young white men know so little about Mashona history… about Mashona culture.'* Patiently he explained the facts in his Makorekore

dialect… via the black interpreter, Joseph.

"They were brother and sister, Sir," Joseph interpreted. "…hundreds of years ago. So, Sir, the Svikiro Mutota can call upon the mhondoro spirit that possesses him… that is, the spirit of King Mutota… to test the spirit that claims to be that of his sister, Nyamhita-Ne-Handa."

"Let me get this right… As I understand it, what you are saying Joseph is that both svikiros go into a trance…?" The policeman clearly knew something about the spirit mediums.

"That is correct, Sir."

"And they each then… respectively… call up the mhondoro spirits… the lion spirits… the most important Mashona spirits… that possess them?"

"Correct." The interpreter smiled almost mischievously now. He nodded affirmatively.

"And then the king's spirit questions the spirit which claims to be his sister?"

"That is what the old man says, Sir." The interpreter smiled beneficently. "You see, Sir, the spirit of Mutota knows many things about his sister… about, for example, some of the things the two of them did together when they were children. These are things that no false spirit can possibly know."

"So the king's spirit can question, and it can prove or it can disprove, the validity of any spirit that claims to be Nehanda."

"Correct, Sir. Exactly correct." the interpreter beamed. He was obviously enjoying himself for he nodded his head enthusiastically. Hugh Ritchie's bland eyes, however, continued to betray his skepticism.

"And this test was carried out?"

"Yes, Sir… The vakomana of ZANLA took the new svikiro… the young woman from Bindura… to a ZANLA camp far away in Mozambique. To a place far to the north of the Zambesi River."

"To Chifombo?"

The existence and importance of Chifombo to ZANLA was now well known to the Rhodesians. One day they would destroy the base completely… but the exact location of Chifombo was not known until the war was nearly over. When it was located the Rhodesians ripped the camp apart with everything they had. It was carpet-bombed by Canberra bombers. It was strafed and rocketed by Hawker Hunter jet fighter-bombers. It was attacked by hundreds of paratroopers supported

by helicopter gunships. And it was razed to the ground. Hundreds of ZANLA guerrillas were killed and/or maimed in the attack. There was nothing left when the Rhodesians had finished with it.

"Yes… The old man says that was the name of the place to which they took her… to Chifombo."

"And then what happened?"

"Then, Sir, Comrade Commander Mbudzi told the people that there was a new Svikiro Nehanda. Mbudzi told the people that she, like the old mbuya, supported ZANLA. And the people were told, through the new svikiro, that they should continue to support the vakomana of ZANLA as they had done in the past."

"And were the people happy about that?"

"No, Sir… The people were not happy. The village spirits… the midzimus… insisted that the spirit of the new svikiro be put to the test. And the village headmen demanded that ZANLA carry out the test in the traditional manner."

"And?"

"Comrade Commander Mbudzi knew nothing of these things, Sir. So he approached Chief Chiwashe to find out what he must do."

"Chiwashe? Are you sure it was Chiwashe?"

Joseph conferred with the old sabooku.

"Yes, Sir… Mbudzi asked for the advice of Chief Chiwashe."

"And then…?"

"Then, Sir, ZANLA took the Svikiro Mutota to Chifombo, too. And there he tested the spirit that possessed the young woman who claimed to be the new Svikiro Nehanda."

"And the spirit was proved to be an imposter?" The policeman prompted his interpreter. "The Svikiro Mutota came back and told the people that the spirit that possessed the new medium was not the mhondoro spirit of his long dead sister?"

"No, sir… The spirit was found to be an imposter… yes. But even before the Svikiro Mutota had returned to Rhodesia the people already knew. Each village headman was told the truth by his family's midzimu spirit."

"I'll be damned… Are you sure about all this, Joseph. Have you interpreted exactly what the old man has told you?"

"Yes, Sir… The old man says that their midzimu spirits told everybody."

The SB officer shook his head in amazement. He wasn't quite sure if

everything he was hearing and recording was valid… or whether it had any real bearing on the war effort. But he wrote it all down just the same… word for word. What he had to tell the JOC Commander that evening was going to make Brigadier Tom Hubbard's hair stand on end.

"So what you're saying Joseph, is that the people got a message back from the spirit world… through their village midzimu spirits… and the message they received was to the effect that the new svikiro was an imposter."

"No, Sir…" Joseph corrected his superior again… patiently. "The svikiro was all right. It was the spirit that was the imposter."

"Shit…! All right." 'That was an important detail, I must get it right.' Hugh Ritchie scratched out what he had written and inserted the correct version. 'It was not the spirit medium that was the imposter… it was the spirit itself!'

"You believe in all this crap, Joseph?"

Joseph hesitated. He shrugged his shoulders eloquently. Then, smiling sheepishly, he replied: *"No, Sir."*

The SB man looked at his interpreter speculatively.

'Like hell you don't,' Hugh Ritchie thought wryly. 'You monkeys are all the same. We whitey's have been taking black men like you out of the trees for years, but we've never been able to take the trees out of any one of you.'

"What now, Joseph? Don't, for God's sake, stop. Keep asking him questions. Keep the ball rolling…"

"He says, Sir, the vakomana buried the dead mbuya just outside their base camp at Chifombo… at the side of the path that leads southward from their camp to Rhodesia. But they didn't bury her completely. They left her sitting up with her head and her shoulders exposed, and now the young fighters have to pass the stinking corpse when they travel south. They are told that just one look at the famous mbuya-svikiro will bring them good luck."

"And what do the people think about that, Joseph?"

"Chimoko says, Sir, that the people feel that what ZANLA have done to the mbuya's body is a sacrifice…"

"I think you mean sacrilege, Joseph. The people feel that what ZANLA have done to the old svikiro's body is a sacrilege."

"Yes, Sir," Joseph had the good grace to laugh. "That's exactly what I meant."

Hugh Ritchie smiled.

“Go on Joseph… And…?”

“He says, Sir… that the people are fed up with ZANLA. They are fed up with the war. They want to now stop helping ZANLA. They want to start helping the security forces.”

“They want to do what…? He says the people are now prepared to a start cooperating with the security forces! Just confirm that, Joseph.”

“Yes, Sir… He confirms that many people want to start cooperating with us. They believe this is the only way to stop the war now.”

The SB man smiled. His eyes sparkled. What the old man was telling him now was dynamite.

“They are tired of being harassed by the army,” Joseph continued. “They are tired of being harassed by the vakomana. It has been nearly two years now since the war began and all it has brought the people is trouble. They want it all to stop.”

A swell of hope rose up in the policeman's breast.

‘It was all coming right… at last. IF what the sabooku Chimoko was telling him was true, the tide of the war was truly about to swing in favour of the Rhodesians.’

“He says, Sir, that ZANLA commandeer all the people’s food for their vakomana and they sleep with their women at will. On the other hand, the marungu's army pushes the people into their villages at night, like animals, and they shoot them if they break the curfew. And the white soldiers shoot the people's cattle if the mujibas use them to hide the tracks of the magandangas.”

“And when the vakomana are seen in their villages… and the soldiers come to fight them… innocent people are killed by both sides in the cross-fire. And ZANLA kill anyone they suspect might be a sell-out… even if he really isn't a sell-out at all. Innocent people are also being killed by ZANLA's land mines. And innocent people… who are forced to feed and hide the terrorists… are taken away from their families by the white man's police. They are accused of feeding and hiding the country’s enemies. And the people are told those who have been arrested will never come out of prison.

“The old man says the people are tired of all this nonsense. He says they are caught in the middle of a war that they don't want. It is a war between ZANLA and the white man's government. It is not their war. And they want the fighting to stop. They want to return to the lives they had before the war began. Lives of peace! He says that everyone was happy then.”

“Tell him, Joseph, that the people can help to stop the war… And they can do that by telling us where the magandangas are hiding… so that we can arrest them.”

“He says, Sir, that there are many, many people who want to help the security forces like that. They are willing to pass on information. But they are afraid of what the vakomana will do to them if they find out.”

“Tell the old man about our secret ground coverage network, Joseph. Tell him how it operates… and how the people can get information to the security forces without anyone knowing about it.”

Joseph had recited this story many times. He began to tell it again to the old sabooku now… slowly and carefully.

“And don't forget to tell him about the reward money, too, Joseph,” the SB man added quickly.

Chapter 36

"G*ENTLEMAN…"* Brigadier Tom Hubbard addressed the assembled Mount Darwin JOC meeting soberly, bringing everyone to order. It was six o'clock in the evening following two days of hectic military activity in ZANLA's Chaminuka sector.

Sporting a heavy dark moustache the JOC commander looked a bit like the actor Tom Selleck… a *very fit* Tom Selleck. Deep lines ran down his tanned cheeks and penetrating dark blue eyes looked out from under shaggy eyebrows. His smart and immaculate uniform, with red flashes on the collars and with his rank insignia on the epaulets, enhanced his stature in the gathering.

On the wall behind him a huge map of the Hurricane Operational Area dominated the room. Everyone's eyes were focused on the coloured wax crayon marks that were drawn on the transparent plastic overlay. All the marks converged on a small hill just east of Chief Masoso's village.

"You will be pleased to hear," the brigadier opened the meeting without preamble, "that the contact which began yesterday afternoon has come to an end. And I am sure you will be even more pleased to hear that the final tally is fifty-one."

"Hah-haah…" There was a sudden outburst of satisfied noises… a few whistles… from the nine white men gathered around the long, bare trestle table. Most of them were the senior staff members of the security force units based at Mount Darwin.

They were all dressed in their respective uniforms… army… air force… and police… Hugh Ritchie, as always, was in casual civvies. There was a uniformed captain from the Selous Scouts, and the civil administration was represented by the local District Commissioner who was dressed in slacks and an open neck shirt.

"Forty-three terrs killed…" The JOC Commander explained further. "Eight wounded and/or captured."

It had been a massacre.

"And our casualties?" someone asked.

"Two RLI troopies dead I'm afraid. One RAR soldier killed. One air force tech killed. And three RLI troopies wounded… but not seriously. One cyclone was shot up a bit."

Losing men was a sad and serious business. A damaged helicopter was also bad news. But when the SF casualties were compared with the number of enemy accounted for, the results were fantastic. Clearly everyone was immensely pleased.

"Was Muliloh in that total?" The question came from the officer commanding the Police Reserve… *'Dad's Army'*. Everyone by then knew the Chimurenga names of the principal guerrilla commanders in the Hurricane War Zone… *and* they knew, too, the boundaries of their operational areas.

"'Fraid not, George."

"Slippery bastard…" The police inspector who had asked the question clamped his smouldering pipe back between his teeth.

"Confirm this contact was the result of information received from a local?" Mount Darwin's District Commissioner had just returned from Salisbury. He had not been at the previous three evenings' JOC meetings. So he had only received a second hand account of Hugh Ritchie's very important but highly truncated JOC report.

"Yes Jim. It was."

The D.C. raised his eyebrows and he pursed his lips appraisingly. He nodded his approval.

"Seems the tide has turned," the Brigadier said with a smile.

"So someone is walking around jingling a lot of pennies in his pocket."

Tom Hubbard smiled… and nodded. "Nearly a hundred thousand dollars."

"Waaa-oh… He'll stick out like a sore thumb, Tom… Don't you think? He'll become a prime ZANLA target."

The JOC Commander shook his head. "You're supposing only one person got the reward money, Jim… Just for everybody's information… Hugh has arranged for the reward money to be deposited into a bank trust fund. The person… or people… concerned understand they'd only expose themselves if they flaunted their new-found wealth before the war is over."

Hugh Ritchie and the JOC Commander looked at each other. Silent signals passed between them. Neither made any further comment. The details of Charles Chimoko's defection from ZANLA… and the secret change of attitude exhibited by many other headmen… was something they intended to keep to themselves. Only those who had a *need to know* had been informed. Very few people, therefore, knew what was *really* going on.

“I know… You've got to keep mum… I understand. But I've got another question,” the D.C. continued resolutely. “Can you confirm that the Nehanda spirit medium is definitely dead?”

Tom Hubbard looked to Hugh Ritchie for comment.

“Yes,” the SB man confirmed. “At least, the latest int[xxiv] we've got suggests very strongly that it is true. The Svikiro Nehanda… known as Mbuya Nehanda… apparently died at Chifombo about six weeks ago.”

“That could have something to do with it,” the D.C. persisted. “…About the locals reporting the gooks for a change, I mean. I think we all know now,” he continued confidently, looking around the table at his colleagues, “that that old bag was the sole reason why the local people supported ZANLA in the first place?”

Everyone digested the D.C.'s words. What he had said about the Svikiro Nehanda they all now knew to be true. What he was now implying… about there being a link between the death of the old woman and the changing fortunes of the war… could equally well be true. So they contemplated the idea and nodded their heads sagely.

“They're very hot on their religion hereabouts, you know. Ancestor worshippers they are.” The D.C. nodded his head emphatically. “The fact that the locals are reporting the terrs now could easily have something to do with the death of that old female witch-doctor. There definitely could be some connection.”

Tom Hubbard smiled slyly to himself. The District Commissioner had not detected ZANLA's initial subversion of the local people for some very good reasons. Among other things, the D.C.’s office had been far too complacent. Now, it seemed, they were at last getting the message.

Chapter 37

"W*E must now apply Mao's Plan-B,"* Mbudzi said forcibly. Dappled sunlight filtered through the leaves of the tree over his head. It formed strange patterns on his camouflaged smock. *"Those people who have turned against ZANLA must be made to feel the spear of Nehanda. That was what the old mbuya warned them to expect. Wasn't it?"*
No one responded.

"WASN'T IT COMRADES?"

"YES… yes… yes… YES." There was no one present, senior officers though they may be, who wasn't just a little bit afraid of Rex Mbudzi.

He glared at the seated comrades before him. And, abruptly, he laughed at the memory of the old hag. Mbuya Nehanda for Rex Mbudzi, in retrospect, had been a joke. And her replacement had been even worse. They had both been a means to an end! But no one mistook his laughter for hilarity. No one doubted his anger or his seriousness. His eyes bulged with the intensity of his spleen. And all the while a malevolent grin twitched at the corners of his mouth.

"The sell-outs must be eliminated," Mbudzi almost screamed out his anger. "We must make an example of them… a very good example of them. The people must be made to understand what will happen to them if they cooperate with the mabunu."

Mbudzi was now the Field Operations Commander of what ZANLA called its Tete Province. This made him Chief of Operations in the whole north east war zone inside Rhodesia. The promotion demanded that he remove himself from the operational zone and that he base himself in the rear at Chifombo. He had consequently handed over his command of the Nehanda Sector to another.

For this special change-of-strategy meeting Mbudzi had recalled to his Chifombo headquarters, all his sectorial and detachment commanders, and all their respective political commissars and logistics officers. The war throughout the entire north-eastern front, in all three sectors, had been put on hold.

The guerrilla commanders were seated on an assortment of chairs and benches and small Batonka stools. They were arranged in the open under the canopy of the big ZANLA indaba tree, three rows deep, in front of their

supremo. Anna, together with two other women, sat apart from the men. And they all watched the growing fury of Mbudzi's outrage with great apprehension.

Daniel had never seen Rex Mbudzi quite so angry. *"Inside one month…"* Mbudzi's passion forced his voice higher. He paced the ground in front of them waving an emphatic index finger in the air. His whole demeanour exuded an almost obsessive aggression. *"Inside just one month, the marungus have found our freedom fighters… and they have engaged them… nearly twice as many times as they did over the whole of last year."*

No one questioned these statistics. Nobody volunteered further information either. Mbudzi's statement was met with complete silence.

"That must mean many of the local people in the war zone have become sell-outs. They are reporting the presence of our freedom fighters to the mabunu soldiers."

He continued to pace the ground before them using the frenetic activity to sublimate his simmering fury.

"Our casualty rate last month was too high, comrades. It was far too high. We cannot sustain the number of losses we suffered in July." He was fuming… bubbling… with suppressed outrage. His chagrin seethed in every nuance.

"Such losses affect everything, comrades. They affect our ability to fight the mabunu. They encourage the people who are wavering to side with the mabunus… to report the presence of our vakomana. And they have definitely slowed down the number of voluntary recruits that have come forward for training."

Mbudzi paused in his harangue. But he continued to pace the ground. *"It's got to stop. You hear me? It's got to stop."*

He was almost apoplectic now with the intensity of his wrath. And all the time he paced up and down… up and down… winding up his twisted emotions ever more tightly.

"And not only has it got to stop, the situation has got to be reversed**.** We haven't come this far, comrades, just to yield to a bunch of lily-livered old women… for that's what the Mashona men in the villages have become."

"What do you suggest we do, comrade commander?"

Daniel was the most senior, the most experienced and the most respected field commander present. He, therefore, had some considerable standing in

the ranks of ZANLA's officer corps. He had the further advantage of a long standing friendship with Rex Mbudzi. Daniel was, therefore, the only man present who was in any position to confidently question the new Chief of Operations … and he was the only one who had the brazen temerity to do so.

"Do… Comrade Muliloh? Do…?" Despite their long standing association Mbudzi did not give Daniel any preferential treatment. "Why… you must do what you have been trained to do, comrade commander. You tell me… What does Comrade Mao Tse Tung's Plan-B say we should do under these circumstances?"

"It says we must discipline the people, comrade. It says we must do whatever is necessary to bring the people back into line. For without the support of the people no guerrilla army can survive."

"Precisely comrade. And that is what you are all going to have to do." Mbudzi looked pointedly about the faces in front of him. "You are going to go back to your operational areas, comrades, and you are going to do just that. You are going to discipline the people. Make the sell-outs feel the sword of Nehanda, my vakomana. Make an example of the sell-outs… every one. Re-educate the people… every one."

"We shall risk alienating those who still support us voluntarily, comrade commander."

"And that was understood by our friend Comrade Mao, too," Mbudzi replied slowly and deliberately. The smile on his face was fixed… wicked. "You and I went through the Nanking Military Academy together, Comrade Muliloh. You know there can be no half measures under these circumstances. People tire of war when it drags on… and when the pressures are heavy upon them they begin to wish that the war was over. Some of them change sides thinking that by doing so they can bring the war to an end. There is only one way to stop that kind of rot, comrade. You know that as well as I do."

"So we abandon the new Svikiro Nehanda, comrade commander?"

"Have you a better suggestion, comrade? Using the spirit mediums to get the people on sides worked the first time round, but it failed to work the second time." The glare Mbudzi gave Daniel now lacked any acknowledgement of their special friendship.

"Of course we abandon the stupid witch. Now that we will be putting Plan-B into operation, ZANLA has no further need of Nehanda."

Chapter 38

ANNA sat alone in the shade of the large and spreading mahogany tree, and she stared silently into the clear waters of the Zambesi River as it flowed sibilantly… hissing… past the high bank on which she was perched. She was thinking long and deeply about Rex Mbudzi's new war strategy.

At this point the river was nearly two miles wide. It was composed of many deep water channels separated by open, golden sandbars. Despite its wide expanse she could clearly see the fringe of green trees on the faraway south bank.

Daniel had called a halt to their march at the Zambesi. They could not cross the exposed river during the hours of daylight for fear of being spotted by the Portuguese air force… or by a Portuguese army patrol on the other side… or by the sku'zapo. There were just too many prying eyes watching the big river during the hours of daylight.

The ZANLA boats were well hidden in heavy jesse high up on the river bank. They would only be dragged down to the water's edge after dark. From now on they'd be marching *only* at night and Anna was not looking forward to the dangerous journey.

A fish eagle called melodiously over the water. Its mate replied from further downstream. It was tranquil on the river but the peace did not penetrate Anna's much troubled thoughts.

"A penny for your thoughts, Anna." Daniel had come up quietly and unnoticed behind her. His sudden remark startled her.

"You gave me a fright."

"Sorry," he said, settling himself down beside her. "I didn't mean to frighten you… What's the matter? You look to be in another world."

"I'm concerned about ZANLA's Plan-B."

"It's appropriate."

"That doesn't make it any easier to swallow."

"We've got to do something about what's happening, Anna. Rex is right, you know. The people have been supplying the mabunus with information. They must have. And we've got to stop the rot before it gets any worse."

"You approve?"

Daniel shrugged. "It doesn't matter whether I approve or not. We've got to

carry out our orders."

"That doesn't stop you having an opinion."

Daniel was silent for a while as he turned over Anna's question in his mind.

"Well Daniel? Do you have your own opinion or not?"

"I approve."

"You approve of murdering our own people?"

"Murdering our own people?" Daniel looked at Anna askance. "Anna we will be executing people who are our enemies… the sell-outs who have changed sides. They will be Mashona people who are on the side of the mabunu now. Those people are no longer 'our people', Anna. They have been responsible for over a hundred vakomana deaths in the last month alone…. They will have to die so that our own comrades can live. They will have to die so that we can win the war."

Anna did not react. She continued to stare silently into the moving water. It had a mesmeric effect on her mind. The vision tended to numb her brain and she was quite happy about that. She did not really want to think too much about ZANLA's Plan-B.

"Anna… think about it. You didn't think twice about ordering Tondongwe's execution. And you did that without compunction… even without an order from me… and without any prompting."

"That was different… He recognised me, Daniel. He was going to expose me. It was a defensive action… Survival. It was either him or me…"

"Whoa there… I'm not criticising you, Anna. I'm merely making a point. You quite happily ordered the death of a Shona man… a sell-out… who was about to denounce Chaminuka's Sectorial Political Commissar. Am I right?"

Anna looked at him blankly.

"What's the difference? ZANLA's Plan-B will merely be doing the same thing in protection of our whole army."

"No… It will be different, Daniel. It won't just be protective killing… it will be punitive. ZANLA will be punishing and coercing the whole of the Makorekore people. The killings must be carried out in horrific proportions to bring the Mashona people to ZANLA's heel. The mabunu will then be fully justified in calling us 'terrorists'. We will no longer be freedom fighters… soldiers fighting to liberate our country and our people from an oppressive white regime."

Daniel laughed. "And that worries you, Anna? What does it matter what

the mabunu call us? Guerrilla soldiers are always called either ‘freedom fighters’ or ‘terrorists’. It depends on your personal perspectives. It depends on whether you are fighting with them or against them.” He did not in any way try to further rationalize ZANLA’s Plan B. Daniel was clearly and unequivocally committed to ZANLA’s cause, and he was prepared to do anything to help ZANLA win the war.

“If we don’t win this war, Anna, our children… yours and mine… will have no better options in life than those you and I had when we left school. They will remain ‘hewers of wood and carriers of water…’ They will forever be ‘the children of Ham’. We started in this war, Anna, to change all that. We entered into this war, Anna, with the objective of bringing some dignity into the lives of the Mashona people…”

Daniel stopped his harangue at that point, and he looked into the same moving water that Anna was so studiously watching.

“Anyway…” he continued. “We have no option now other than to implement ZANLA’s Plan-B. The people themselves have forced this situation upon us. The sell-outs have brought ZANLA's… Nehanda’s… retribution upon themselves.”

Anna looked at her husband briefly… marvelling at the way he had so glibly brought Nehanda’s name back into the equation… wondering how and why the war had taken this terrible turn. She had not joined ZANLA to cruelly slaughter her own people.

The idea bewildered Anna. And she wondered about Daniel. How Daniel had changed over the last four years. How Daniel had changed ever since he had been involved with ZANLA! He had not always been this callous. Slowly she turned her attention back to the gently flowing surface of the river. She was silent for some time.

Daniel did not further interrupt Anna’s thoughts. He wanted to give her time to digest what he had just said to her.

“You know I was quite happy to join ZANLA when we were fighting the oppressors of our people,” Anna said at last. “When we were hitting at the Rhodesian security forces… at the government… even at the white farmers… I understood and I accepted that unless the Mashona people fight the whites and win the war, us black people will be forever treated as inferiors in the land of our birth. And our people understood that… or they seemed to understand it. And they gave us their voluntary and enthusiastic support. It all seemed to make sense. We were fighting with the people, for the people, and

for the greater good of an independent majority-ruled Zimbabwe."

That was a long speech for Anna and it came directly from her heart. She had carefully thought about how to couch those words and she had memorized every nuance. It had been simmering inside her all day long. All she had been waiting for was the right moment to release it to Daniel. Now was that time.

"So…? Nothing has changed. We are still fighting for the people and for a new majority-ruled Zimbabwe." Daniel was not going to change his stance.

"No, Daniel. We are going back home now to oppress our own people. They will no longer be supporting us voluntarily. We are going to have to bully them into supporting us… to beat them into submission in the most cruel and barbaric ways possible. That is not the same thing. A lot has changed. The people are tired of the war. They want a return to the peace they used to know. To get them to support us now we will have to become greater oppressors… of our own people… than ever the mabunu were before us."

"Only temporarily, Anna… Only temporarily! The people do not understand what is at stake. They are simple povo… ignorant peasants. In the long run it will all be for their own good. To release them from their bondage to the white man ZANLA must win this war. We cannot afford… for the people's own sake… to lose it."

Anna continued to look down at the softly flowing surface water and she shook her head sadly.

"Do you remember when I left school Anna?" Daniel didn't have to remind her. It had all started then. "When I tried to find a decent job…? The best I could do was to become a school teacher. Remember?"

Without looking up Anna nodded. She remembered all those conversations: between her and Daniel; between Daniel and Michael; and between Michael and herself. They were all indelibly imprinted in her mind.

"And remember the options that Michael had? A white boy! He had the whole world at his feet."

Unconsciously Anna smiled at the remembrance. *"Yes. I remember. I remember it all very well."*

"That was… what… twenty years ago? And in all that time nothing has changed. Exactly the same work restrictions are still applied to the black man in Rhodesia. There are still no black officers in the air force… or the army… or the police. And there are still no officer posts available for blacks in the

civil service. Black people in Rhodesia are oppressed, Anna… The whites may not treat us exactly like slaves but they, nonetheless, oppress us… in many, many ways."

Daniel was convincing. Anna had to agree with him in all these things. The Mashona people *were* oppressed by the white minority.

"And Michael, Anna, has always been one of them. You say you have seen him. You told me yourself that he is fighting with his mabunu friends against ZANLA. He is fighting to maintain the country's white supremacy. He is one of them… and always has been, Anna. He is one of the enemy.

"But I don't have to tell you all this, Anna. You were instructed in Mwenge-One at Mgagao. Remember… All the grievances the Mashona had against the mabunu were outlined in Mwenge-One."

"I agree with all you say, Daniel… I just don't like the idea of being forced into oppressing my own people."

"Well I suppose, we've got two choices. ZANLA can either implement Plan-B or it can stop waging war. We have to do the one thing or the other because if we don't get the support of the people, one way or the other, we will lose the war."

Anna stared into the water blankly. She understood exactly what her husband was telling her. As a consequence of Mbuya Nehanda's death, and of Mbudzi's bungling of the appointment of a new Svikiro, ZANLA now found itself between a rock and a very hard place.

"In reality, Anna, you and I don't have a choice."

"What do you mean? Of course we have a choice!"

"The truth of the matter is that the ZANLA Military High Command has already made the decision for us."

"Plan-B?"

"That's right. Our political and military leaders are determined that we should win this war, Anna. Plan-B, therefore, is now the only option we have left. Plan-B is now a military instruction. If we refuse to obey it, we will ourselves be considered sell-outs."

"They'd kill us if we do not obey?" Anna was incredulous. She had not considered that possibility at all.

"Of course… " Daniel was now very matter-of-fact. He had Anna on the run… "Rex can't afford to have the likes of you and me not carry out his orders."

"Rex Mbudzi would kill us?"

“He would order our execution. Yes… He'd have no option. It is far more important that he maintain discipline in the ranks of ZANLA than that he let the likes of you and me blatantly disobey his orders. He has tasked us to re-establish and to maintain discipline amongst the people of Chaminuka, Anna, and to ensure that they once again support ZANLA.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I'm going to carry out Plan-B to the best of my ability, Anna. And when the war is over we will all get our just rewards. You'll see…”

Anna looked searchingly at Daniel then. There had been something in the way he said those last few words…

“What has Rex told you, Daniel? Has he said anything about a post for you in the new Zimbabwe government after the war?”

Daniel smiled mischievously. “How would you like being married to the Minister of Education?”

“He's offered you that*?”* Anna's voice exuded as much excitement as it did incredulity.

“Rex recommended it… Herbert Chitepo approves.”

“Daniel…” Anna was smiling… excited now.

“So,” he chortled. “Now there is another good reason why we must win this war.”

Chapter 39

THE helicopter deposited Mike, his two Bushmen trackers, and the black soldier that had been assigned to make up his four-man stick that day, on the open land next to the village. The aircraft lifted off immediately the tracker-team was on the ground.

After Richard Poole's death, Mike had refused to accept another inexperienced game ranger in his tracking stick. In fact, he had refused to accept *any* young game ranger at all. He had reasoned that Ben and Mbuyotsi were, undoubtedly, the best trackers in the country. That meant they would succeed in finding their elusive human quarry more frequently than did any other tracking unit. That, in turn, meant more than the usual number of contacts with terrorists. It also meant more ambushes to survive and more bullets to dodge.

Mike had made it very plain to his National Park's director that *if* the SF wanted his services as a tracker, and *if* they wanted the services of his two Bushmen, the army would have to provide him with a fourth man for his tracker combat stick. And that, that man would have to be a trained fighting soldier to whom the game warden did not have any emotional attachment. He was not prepared to risk losing another close friend and colleague in another terrorist ambush.

It was not normal for security chiefs to succumb to the demands of a non-ranking civilian soldier, but the game warden had been adamant. His director had assured the army that there were many young game rangers available, eager in fact, to become the fourth man in Mike Campbell's unit. But Mike had resolutely refused them all. In the end, at Tom Hubbard's insistence, the army had acquiesced to the game warden's demands.

The fact that Mike Campbell had been able to thus twist the SF around his little finger proved the high regard in which the military held him. During the two long years since the ZANLA war had begun, Mike and his two Bushmen had become living legends within the Rhodesian SF. And JOC commanders everywhere felt privileged to have them on their roll calls.

Mike was now no longer afraid for himself. He had totally blocked off that part of his sub-conscience which concerned his own safety. He had become inured, mentally numb, to the bullets that threatened his life every time they made contact with ZANLA. Indeed, he and his trackers seemed to have been

blessed with invulnerability. They came out completely unscathed, time and time again, from vicious engagements that should have seen them all dead. Like his two Bushmen, the game warden had become a hardened fatalist.

Most people never understood why the Campbell tracking unit enjoyed such great success. Everyone knew that all three of the men were superb trackers and that that fact accounted for the large number of their successful contacts. But how they *survived* those fights was a continuing mystery.

The truth of the matter was, they owed their seemingly charmed lives to their combined and superb woodsmanship.

In this regard, Mike's and the Bushmen's ability to find and to follow the signs left behind by the fleeing enemy was but one accomplishment. Another, and perhaps more important one, was the fact that the bush all around ‘spoke to them’. It conveyed continual messages to all three of them, individually and collectively, all the time. They detected sounds and sights, or lack of sounds and sights, and smells… signals that others neither noticed nor recognized. And it was their accurate interpretation of these faintest of natural messages that kept the trackers safe. These messages told the seasoned hunters that the coast ahead was clear… or that danger lurked in the nearby bushes. They absorbed all these strange and momentary communications subconsciously… instinctively… analysing their meanings… registering only those that were important… and reacting instantly, when needs be, in the most appropriate manner.

And as the team's experience and reputation grew, so Mike encountered fewer and fewer Barney O’Reillys… fewer and fewer arrogant, pompous, young soldiers who knew better than the best… for word of that unfortunate incident had quickly spread.

“Fucking hell,” Mike exclaimed as he came up to the SB Inspector. The helicopter that had just dropped off Mike and his tracking team was, at that moment, already disappearing over the low hills to the west of their position.

“Hello Mike… You back on the job?”

Hugh Ritchie was sitting soberly on the bonnet of his grey police Land Rover. He was watching his two plain clothes detectives gingerly trying to pull apart the still burning poles of an incinerated hut.

A second hut nearby had also been gutted. All that remained of the buildings now were two smouldering piles of still burning poles under fluffy

heaps of delicate black ash that had once been thatch.

There was the stench of roasting flesh in the air, and Mike could see the blackened shapes of what were obviously charred corpses lying amongst the debris.

Six, he counted. No, there were at least seven bodies that he could see.

"What the hell is this all about, Hugh?" Mike had come to know the SB man quite well. Over the last two years, they had met in some of the most unlikely places… starting with the MacDonald farm attack way back in '72.

"Bastards!" Hugh Ritchie said vehemently. His face was bland… a mask of pure hatred.

"What happened here?" Mike inquired. "All I got from the ops room was that some gooks had burned down a village and that they had killed a number of people."

The SB man shook his head sadly, his eyes red with the tears that he had long ago shed for the victims. "Twenty-seven dead. Every soul… every man, woman and child… that once lived in this village… or so the people in the next village tell me."

The policeman indicated the large number of people standing amongst the huts in the background. *"They all come from the next village…"* Hugh said, indicating the crowd of people behind his right shoulder. *"We won't know for sure what the tally will be until we have pulled apart that heap of melted-together humanity."* He made a gesture towards the pile of corpses in the middle of the still burning conflagration.

"Twenty-seven… Christ!" Mike looked around the village compound, his eyes searching for more bodies.

Hugh noticed Mike's searching eyes. *"They're all in there. In what's left of that one hut."* Hugh said, pointing to the smouldering heap of corpses.

"They put them into one hut and burned them alive?"

"Yes… The whole family," the policeman nodded. "The old man… his three wives… and two of his sons and their wives. The rest were children… from teenagers down to a new born baby I believe."

"My God… I thought I'd seen everything." Mike said horrified. "But this has got to be the worst…"

"Apparently ten gooks, led by our friend Muliloh, came to the village late last night. First they called together the people from the nearby villages for a pungwe… that's what they call a midnight political indoctrination meeting

with ZANLA. It's the latest ploy. And in front of everybody, they accused the old man of being a sell-out."

"Was he?"

"Did Charles Chimoko provide us with information? Yes he did. It was his int. that was responsible for the big kill we had last month."

"The fifty-one?"

The policeman nodded.

"And the terrs found out about it?"

Again Hugh nodded sadly. "God knows how they found out… unless the old man himself opened his big mouth. But we'll never know that now." Hugh Ritchie looked down, unhappily, into the ashes.

"IT'S STILL TOO HOT," he shouted to his detectives. "YOU HAD BETTER GET THE PEOPLE FROM THE NEXT VILLAGE TO BRING US SOME BUCKETS OF WATER."

The policeman sighed.

"They put them through a kangaroo court?" Mike surmised.

"Uh-huh. But they had their facts right. The old man was all that they accused him of. He was reporting anything and everything that he heard and saw… religiously… to our ground coverage man in the area."

"So the terrs found him guilty?"

"That's right… Then they collected his whole family… every single person in the village… and they pushed them at bayonet point into the old man's big family hut… there. That's what's left of it." Hugh pointed to the pile of still burning poles. "They tied the door shut with eight gauge fencing wire…"

"Then they torched the thatch?"

The policeman nodded solemnly. "After pouring paraffin onto the grass all the way round."

The SB man sighed again, his huge remorse manifest. Hugh Ritchie had been responsible for turning Charles Chimoko onto the side of the SF. He now felt accountable for the carnage. He was not in a mood for unnecessary talk. But it was his duty to tell Mike Campbell all that he knew. The game warden had the right to know the measure of the people he would be tracking today.

"They forced the people from the other villages to watch… to witness the court… and to listen to the victims' screams as the family was roasted alive."

"Fucking hell. Twenty-seven people… What kind of a man is this Muliloh?" Mike almost whispered the question.

“He's a butcher, Mike. He's a butcher. If he's capable of doing this sort of thing to his own people, he's capable of doing anything.”

They both gazed, silently, at the rigid black corpses lying in a pile, grotesquely twisted and moulded together, amongst the smouldering logs. And they listened to the still sizzling sounds of their burning fat.

“You know what worries me more than anything else about this incident, Mike?”

“What's that?”

“It’s what this will do to the people's morale. We've had so much cooperation from the locals since that old spirit medium died. Now I'm worried. If this sort of thing is repeated, it may push us right back to square one.”

“Which, of course, is exactly what the gooks want…”

A helicopter came overhead. Its shrieking engine and whapping rotors stopped their conversation dead. It dropped off four black soldiers… immediately lifted off again… and flew away on another mission.

“That's my protection stick,” Mike said. “Seems we've got the good old Rhodesian African Rifles again.”

“They're good soldiers.”

“Amongst the best… And there's no bullshit with them either. There are no prima donnas in the RAR like you get in some of the European units I've worked with.”

The four tough-looking black soldiers spread out and infiltrated the village. Their action was professional, their weapons at the ready. There was a no-nonsense quality in the way they conducted themselves. It made Mike feel good.

The corporal in charge of the RAR stick came over and saluted the two white men smartly. He introduced himself and politely asked what had happened. When he had been apprised of the facts, and after he had looked down at the charred bodies in the remains of the holocaust, a look of disgust and outrage swept across his black face.

“We must catch the animals who did this Mr. Campbell,” the soldier said passionately. “They must not be allowed to crow when the new dawn comes.”

A sudden, painful ache developed in Mike's throat. This was the kind of soldier… this was the kind of man… that he really appreciated. He fought back his tears and he smiled at the soldier… and he clapped him warmly on

the shoulder. He choked for words to express the feelings he felt.

"We shall try, corporal…" Mike's voice came out as a dry, froggy croak. He cleared his throat and repeated softly: *"We shall try."*

The game warden turned then and offered his hand to the SB man. *"I'd better be on my way, Hugh."*

"Good luck, Mike… And keep your arse down." They shook hands.

"Thanks. See you back in Darwin. Come up to the sergeant's mess for a noggin sometime."

"Will do… Just as soon as I get back."

Chapter 40

ANNA stood amongst the villagers at a distance and she watched everything the Rhodesian Security Forces did. She had been present in the background the night before, and she had witnessed both the trial and the execution. Now it was her task to see who amongst the villagers around her, would provide cooperative information to the mabunus.

When the first helicopter dropped off the trackers her heart missed a beat. For, when the dust from the aircraft's rotors had dispersed, she recognised the broad shouldered white man that emerged from the swirling muck. It had been three long months since Michael Campbell had tracked down Comrade Cephas and wiped out his unit.

That morning, Anna had been quite sure that Cephas would be safe from the trackers. He and his men had changed shoes and bomb-shelled at the designated spot, and the mujibas had driven the cattle over the tracks as she had commanded. But, even so, the game warden had found them. Michael and his Bushmen, therefore, had either been very lucky that day, or they were exceptionally good.

As she looked at Michael now those familiar, gnawing, feelings of physical longing returned with a rush. She still hankered after this extraordinary white man. *'Just one night with him…'* she thought. *'Just one last time.'* And she remembered poignantly what he had said to her on the last occasion they had made love. They had then been just seventeen years old.

"Wherever you and I are, Anna, we will find some way of getting together. We must. Our lives will be entangled forever."

Anna remembered clearly that last afternoon when she and Michael had made such wondrous love together in the old Bushman's cave. She remembered those words, too, as clearly as if Michael had just uttered them… but they could never now come true. Every passing day made the chance of such a reunion ever more remote. And she understood that the successful implementation of ZANLA's Plan-B would put him quite out of her reach forever.

'After the war is over… maybe?' She thought hopefully. 'If we both survive it.'

Anna was not a natural killer. Daniel was the hunter in the family and, paradoxically, he had learnt that trade from Michael. She doubted that Daniel

would ever have taken up the cause of ZANLA had he not had his hunting instincts kindled so long ago by Michael Campbell. Certainly, Daniel's present senior position in the ZANLA hierarchy was mainly due to his natural flare with a rifle. At least, that was how Rex Mbudzi had come to notice him, and he had learnt *that* skill from Michael.

It was doubly ironical, she thought, that Michael had first learnt how to track and how to hunt, even if it had been just cane rats they had started with, from Daniel.

Now ZANLA's Plan-B had turned Anna into a killer, too. A killer by collusion if nothing else. Daniel had been patient with her, carefully weaning her from her early misgivings. He had made her see that ZANLA's Plan-B was pragmatic. He had impressed upon her that their options boiled down to one issue… *survival.* If she and Daniel were to survive, let alone if ZANLA was to win the war, they simply *had* to have the support of the people. Without the local people's support she and Daniel, and ZANLA, were finished. Plan-B was designed to *force* the people to provide that support. It was one of the many *thoughts* of Mao Tse Tung.

There was also the fact that she was now part of a very large military machine, and she was just one small cog in it. She was one of the many soldiers that comprised ZANU's guerrilla army and, as such, she was required to obey, without question, the legitimate orders of the ZANLA Military High Command. If she failed to do so, she herself would have to be *disciplined* according to the articles of Plan-B. In this context, ZANLA’s discipline would mean she would be made an example of; she would be murdered, horribly, by her own soldiers. She now had no illusions.

Mbudzi had said: “There can be no half-measures.”

Anna had salved her conscience by telling herself, over and over again, that the victims of Plan-B all deserved to suffer and to die. They were traitors. Sell-outs! They were a disgrace to the African people. Shonas who betrayed their own kind to the mabunu were beyond the pale. And, when she rationalised the new strategy holistically, she had come to realise that the people who supported ZANLA had nothing whatsoever to fear from Plan-B.

This, after all, was a people's war. ZANLA was fighting to lift the white man's yoke from the necks of the Mashona people. ZANLA had a right, therefore, to expect… to demand… the people's loyalty.

The sell-outs had to be punished. ZANLA had no option now but to make *exceptional* examples of them all. Their deaths or their mutilations had to be

horrific. They had to be so terrifying that the people who witnessed the disciplining procedures, or who saw or heard about the results, would be far too fearful to ever even *think* about abandoning ZANLA, or to ever contemplate cooperating with the mabunus.

Anna had conditioned herself now to evaluate ZANLA's options in this manner. But she had no stomach at all for the physical application of the atrocities that Plan-B demanded. She *could* not, and she promised herself she *would* not, participate in any such activity. Fortunately her special political position required that she maintain a low profile amongst the people, and to achieve that state of affairs she had to divorce herself from overt military actions.

She was no fool. In time, Anna had come to understand and to accept, that the changed circumstances following the Mbuya Nehanda's death, had made Plan-B the *only* option that was now left open to ZANLA. It was the *only* way for them to proceed if the Mashona people were to oust the white man from his seat of political power. The second-thoughts she had expressed to Daniel that day on the Zambesi, therefore, had now been laid permanently to rest. And Daniel was happy about that.

The Mashona people would be idiots, she believed, if they succumbed now. They would be sentencing themselves to a life of misery and of slavery under the white man's rule, perhaps forever, if they lost direction at this critical stage. ZANLA had made so many spectacular advances. The whole country was in a virtual state of siege. International sanctions were biting hard at the Rhodesian economy. The entire white populace, and all the government's resources were now totally committed to the prosecution of the war. Prime Minister Ian Smith, and his white government, could not sustain that sort of economic and emotional pressure forever. Sooner, rather than later, the white Rhodesians would *have* to succumb.

It was only a matter of time now, also, before the Portuguese colonial regime in Mozambique collapsed. Then, with FRELIMO in control of Mozambique, the whole eastern border… Rhodesia's soft under-belly right down to the Limpopo River in the south… would be exposed to penetration by ZANLA.

Anna had accepted, therefore, that ZANLA's Plan-B, horrific though it might be in the short term, was a necessary means of achieving the political objectives that ZANU had long ago prescribed for its military wing.

Chapter 41

MIKE and his trackers had some difficulty in locating the escaping guerrillas' spoor. The vakomana had scattered… bomb-shelled out of the village. They had vacated the area one man at a time in different directions. And the villagers had been forced to walk along with them to mask the vakomana's tracks still further. To make matters worse, at first light, the mujibas, following Anna's instructions, had driven the victim's large herd of cattle over the whole mêlée of human spoor.

The Bushmen were forced, therefore, to carry out massive three-sixty degree searches amongst the surrounding hills. It took them an hour to find a set of tracks that *smelled-of-terrorist,* and they set off in hot pursuit.

This time, watching the trackers' masterful skill, even from a distance, Anna experienced a strong feeling of unease for the safety of the freedom fighters. She realised now why Michael had caught up with Comrade Cephas and his men so quickly and so easily, that day three long months before. The native trackers were superb. And so also, she knew, was Michael. She made a mental note to speak to Daniel about improving ZANLA's anti-tracking tactics.

As the trackers and the soldiers disappeared into the hills, Anna was pleased that Daniel had not chosen to travel with his men last night. He and Anna had, instead, gone off together to a nearby village and there they had spent what remained of the night making passionate love … a love that was emotionally spiked by their participation in the horrific experiences of the pungwe. Daniel had only left her bed after the first rooster of the day warned him of the coming dawn.

It was no longer safe for ZANLA guerrillas to move about during the hours of daylight. The Rhodesian security forces were now fully on the alert. They were everywhere. Every high kopje in the area was used, from time to time, as a military observation post. And onto those high O.P.s soldiers of the Rhodesian SF were periodically and secretly
deployed, with ample supplies of food and water. And they remained there, in hiding, for days on end, sometimes for weeks… waiting… and watching… with powerful binoculars. Never moving! And they reported to the Mount Darwin JOC by radio, every suspicious activity that they observed.

The rugged granite hills of the region were now, therefore, no longer an asset to ZANLA. They had become a huge liability… at least during the hours of daylight. Night was the only time the vakomana could operate with reasonable safety… but then they had the curfew to contend with, and unexpected SF ambushes. And since the death of the Svikiro Nehanda those ambushes had become a serious matter even in previously safe areas of the war zone.

ZANLA was under no illusions. They knew that the adverse change in their fortunes was due to the increased cooperation the Rhodesian SF were receiving from the villagers.

The Mashona people, all over the country, were now desperately tired of the war. Even the mujibas no longer told the vakomana everything they observed when they reported seeing mabunu soldiers or their tracks. The people, in fact, had become *numb* to the armed struggle. Ostensibly they saw nothing and they heard nothing. And they spoke of nothing anymore. In short, they acted like sullen, intractable children towards the vakomana, doing what was demanded of them and nothing more. They no longer offered information to ZANLA voluntarily.

Day and night the villages were no longer a safe haven for the vakomana. And during the day, when the freedom fighters lay low, the wild thick bush was their only real sanctuary.

The ZANLA hierarchy knew, therefore, that if they wished to win the Chimurenga war, the sell-outs would have to be winkled out and dealt with… quickly and summarily.

The nine ZANLA men, who had executed Charles Chimoko and his family, knew they had only until the dawn to hide their tracks and to find a suitable place to go to ground. To have continued beyond the dawn would have meant them risking a sudden helicopter attack directed by some hidden SF O.P. Hence, until the villages were once again made into safe havens for the freedom fighters to mingle amongst the people… which would only come about when ZANLA's Plan-B took proper effect… they had no option but to rely upon the anti-tracking devices they employed when dispersing from an act of war.

The ZANLA fighters came together from their separate perambulations early the next morning at a pre-arranged rendezvous some ten miles from Chimoko's village. They then walked in a group, close together, for about a

mile before looping back. And in the grey light of the dawn they

went into a superb and preselected ambush position that looked directly over their in-coming tracks.

At four o'clock that afternoon, Anna heard the battle raging in the hills. It was far away… but the firing of machine-guns, the thudding detonations of a K-Car's cannon shells, and the ripple explosions of matra rockets fired from a twin-boomed air force Lynx aircraft, echoed clearly back through the valleys that separated the mountain ranges.

The sounds secretly boosted the flagging spirits of the demoralised and silent villagers. They had just the opposite effect on Anna.

The battle continued, intermittently, rising and falling in intensity, for over an hour. It subsided gradually as the ZANLA resistance was slowly whittled down.

Just before sunset, two helicopters with bulging nylon nets suspended beneath their bellies, brought the shattered and bullet-riddled bodies of the ZANLA guerrillas back to the scene of their crime.

One of the aircraft hovered over the nearby villages and, using its sky-shout equipment, addressed the people below. A Shona police sergeant was on board. He instructed the people, in their own language, to come to Chimoko's now deserted and all-but burnt out village. It was to be the people’s final and gruesome task to identify the bodies of the ZANLA murderers.

Anna was amongst those who slowly shuffled their way along one of the many narrow foot paths that led to Chimoko's village. She was dressed in a clean but nondescript dress. She was barefoot and wore a bright floral scarf about her head. A heavy bright red poncho was draped over her shoulders. There was nothing to distinguish her from any of the other women in the group to which she had attached herself.

Seven bodies had been laid out in one long line in the middle of the village. And, as the people gathered… fifty strong at least… they hung back in a mob, fearful of the macabre tableau the dead bodies represented.

Anna quickly counted the corpses.

‘Seven! Seven out of ten! Seven out of nine if you excluded Daniel. That meant two comrades had escaped… or they had been captured.’

The Special Branch detectives were still at the village when the helicopters arrived.

The SB policemen that day had first of all documented and then photographed the frightful details of the slaughter. Then they had had to wait for a special international press contingent to arrive by bus from Salisbury. The scene of the ZANLA crime was left unchanged for their inspection, except for the now clear exposure of the tangled and fused-together bodies. Throughout the press interviews, the victims had remained in full view… a mass of scorched, heat-melted and shrunken bodies in the middle of the still smouldering hut poles. The aroma of the charred bodies permeated the atmosphere all around. It was reminiscent of an over-cooked roast-pork luncheon.

In addition to the main media contingent, a Rhodesian national television crew and a very select group of international journalists were flown in from Salisbury by commercial helicopter. It was their job to visually and to verbally record the facts of the horrifying spectacle. Hugh Ritchie had spent the greater part of the middle-day giving interviews and generally cooperating with the hungry members of the media.

The massacre was hot material for the avid international news hounds. They had been fed, for far too long, only dry skeletal stories by official SF spokesmen. Tales about how the terrorists had used witch-craft, and fear, to subvert the populace in the Hurricane war zone! And there was normally nothing concrete to back up their statements.

Ever since hostilities had first begun, SF spokesmen had made countless claims that ZANLA was using terror tactics to keep the rural Shona people in line. But nothing to that effect had ever been substantiated… until now. As a consequence, those members of the press who tried to keep an open mind about the war had become very skeptical, cynical and disillusioned about the veracity of official bulletins.

Now, at last, they had an indisputable ZANLA crime to report. The murder of the Chimoko family was a truly appalling and barbarous act of brutality perpetrated by ZANLA's so-called *freedom fighters* against their own people! The press was now being provided with some real meat to put on the bones of the official propaganda. None of them were to know that this was the first incident of this magnitude since the war had begun. To many of them, however, that fact would not have mattered anyway. What *did* matter was the

proof… the undeniable evidence of the twenty-seven charred bodies that were now laid bare before them.

The reporters had been allowed to interview the people in the nearby villages, too – anybody they had wanted to interview – without restriction. And the witnesses of the massacre confirmed, unequivocally, the identity of the killers as the vakomana of ZANLA.

It was during these *ad hoc* interviews that the people of the media were introduced to a name they were to make synonymous with brutality and terrorism in the Rhodesian Bush War… *'Muliloh'*. But, for the moment, on that day, it was the visual evidence of the brutal, sickening murders that had most fixedly gripped their imaginations. The media's fabrication of the infamous Muliloh legend, however, was being hatched in their minds.

The images and the story of the shocking and brutal murder of the entire Chimoko family would be shown on national and international television screens for days and weeks to come. Pictures of the holocaust, and stories explaining the blood-curdling details, would appear on the front pages of every major newspaper across the globe.

During his interviews Hugh Ritchie described Muliloh as *'a butcher'* and the avid press snatched a hold on the descriptive epithet.

Thus it was that Comrade Sectorial Commander Muliloh of ZANLA was branded, nationally and internationally, as *'The Butcher of Chaminuka'*. And he became Public Enemy Number One in the eyes of the white Rhodesian nation.

Rhodesia's politicians and the military propagandists employed by PSYAC… the Psychological War Branch of the Army Intelligence Corps… were determined to exploit ZANLA's first real act of savagery down to the very last ghastly detail. So they were very happy to go along with the extravagant claims made by the press. And they were delighted with the image of barbarism with which the media tarred-and-feathered ZANLA.

In the flood of press exposure that was to follow, government stoked the fire by offering a ten thousand dollar reward for *'The Butcher of Chaminuka'*, dead or alive. It was twice the value they had placed on the head of any other terrorist leader of similar rank.

The media boys had all gone, however… gone to release their scoops… by the time the battle commenced. And when the helicopters arrived back at the

village with the bodies of the slain terrorists, Hugh Ritchie was busy watching the last shovelfuls of dirt being thrown onto the mass grave that he'd had dug for the murder victims. He had already arranged six neat piles of silver coins on the bonnet of his Land Rover, the payment he had offered the six local men he had contracted to dig the grave.

Chapter 42

THE local villagers assembled in the gathering dusk and they were asked to confirm the identities of the bodies. The two questions they were asked were: *"Were these the men who had killed Charles Chimoko and his family?"* And: *"Is the terrorist called Muliloh amongst the dead?"*

It was at times like this that Anna was pleased she never got to know the vakomana too well. Nevertheless, it took a great deal of courage… of raw guts… for her to join the queue of tribespeople who walked past the bodies. The people knew of her presence amongst them and they feared her terribly. They feared her so much that none of them were prepared to lift a finger to denounce her. And they feared her particularly because they all knew she had a special connection with Muliloh. Nevertheless, because the people knew who she was, Anna was also very vulnerable and she understood that without reservation. It was only Muliloh's fearsome reputation and his protective mantle that now protected her.

Anna had to steel herself when she looked down dispassionately on the pulverized, blasted and bullet-ridden bodies of her husband's fighting men. She had known every one of them as happy-go-lucky young soldiers. They had all believed they led charmed lives. Death was not on their agendas. They had been trained to kill but none of them had been taught how to die.

She was heart-broken by the experience. All those lovely young Shona boys shot to pieces by the marungus' machine-guns. In that moment of desolation, she felt nothing for Chimoko and his family. She saw them for what they were… traitors whom the vakomana had justly executed. In her eyes their brutal murder had been just retribution for the fifty-one comrades that had been slain and/or captured as a result of Chimoko's treachery.

But, strangely, there was still another concern she felt. It was for Michael Campbell. Paradoxically, she was anxious for his safety, too. By the sounds she had heard, the battle must have been terrible. Michael could easily have been killed or wounded. She simply *had* to find out. An irresistible force within her impelled her to try to discover what had become of him.

There was a Shona detective standing watching the people as they filed past the corpses. He was noting their expressions… their reactions… and he

questioned anyone who nodded his head or who pointed to a face… when he, or she, recognised one or another of the dead guerrillas. It was important for SB to confirm that the dead men were, indeed, the ones who had committed the Chimoko massacre, and to ascertain their Chimurenga names. It was important, also, to find out if Muliloh was amongst those who had been killed.

Anna sidled up to the detective in the evening gloom. She asked him directly about the battle.

"Aaieeeyah… your soldiers did well to kill this scum, Ndoda." She addressed the policeman quietly in the vernacular. "But there were ten ZANLA men here last night. What happened to the other three?"

The detective looked at Anna quizzically. Despite the gloom he could see she was an attractive woman and, he surmised, she was very bold to approach him with such a question. Rural Shona women were normally much more reserved. He wondered idly who she was.

"Two were captured during the battle, Amai" he said politely. "One of whom was wounded. We already know there were ten terrorists here last night. So that means one must have escaped."

'The tenth man had been Daniel… and Daniel hadn't been a part of the battle!'

"I see… Let us hope you get him, too," she concluded. "What they did to Charles Chimoko and his family last night was terrible. God will not forgive them…"

'So the mabunus… with Michael's help… had got them all. In one fell stroke they had wiped out what was left of the entire Marymount detachment.'

The policeman was not to know that Daniel had not left the village with his men last night, and Anna felt a great surge of relief about that fact. He could so easily have been amongst the cadavers on the ground right now. But he was not. She put that negative thought firmly behind her.

Now she pondered how best to approach the policeman about Michael Campbell.

"Do you know the magandanga they call Muliloh, Amai?" The detective threw the question at Anna unexpectedly. Her mind was still full of Michael Campbell.

"No… No," she stammered. "I saw the man they said was called Muliloh. He was here last night. But I only saw him from a distance. It was very

dark."

"Is he not amongst these seven?"

Anna looked down at the mangled bodies once again. "I don't know… Even if he was alive I don't know that I would recognise him."

"Have a good look. It would be very good if we had killed Muliloh."

Anna shuddered. 'Was that all these black lackeys of the white men thought of Daniel? All they wanted was to see her husband dead!' She felt greatly annoyed. But there was still the nagging question of Michael…

"Yes," she said weakly, swallowing hard on the thought. "That would be good news… But I don't think he is one of these. Anyway, you can't be too upset by the results of today's fighting?"

"No… we are not. Nine more terrorists out of the way… are nine more terrorists out of the way. But it would have been even better if Muliloh was amongst them."

"Tell me, Ndoda. You have killed seven magandanga, and you have captured two. Did not ZANLA kill any of your own soldiers?"

"One man," the detective frowned. "They killed one man… and they wounded one other."

'One man dead. Another wounded. Could either of them be Michael?'

"Was one of them perhaps the white man who did the tracking this morning?"

'There… it was out.' She had asked the question for which she craved the answer.

"I saw him leave here with his black trackers… and the black soldiers," she explained. "One white man all on his own… He looked so vulnerable."

"Katasoro?" The detective laughed.

'Katasoro! He who shoots his quarry in the head! So that is what they call him. It was an apt name for Michael Campbell,' Anna thought. 'But was it Michael who had been killed?'

"No… it was not Katasoro, Amai. He is indestructible that one."

The detective looked at Anna askance. 'What a peculiar question for a raw black tribal woman to ask,' he thought. 'Why would a common Shona woman from a rustic village be concerned for the safety of a white man like Katasoro?'

He continued to look at Anna… a lot more closely! He perceived qualities in her bearing that he had missed before. Despite her very ordinary dress she

stood out from the crowd.

‘So… she may not be,’ he realised, ‘such a common woman after all.’

There was definitely *something* about her… some special essence… a quality… that made her different from the other women who were examining the corpses. The man's police-trained brain began to click into gear.

So great was Anna's relief at the detective's report she did not at first notice the man’s inquiring scrutiny… the look that betrayed the policeman's sudden special interest. All she was conscious of at that moment was the unexpected… and strangely wild… palpitations of her heart. The man had confirmed Michael's safety!

Then, with a shock, Anna *did* see the searching… probing… suspicious look on the policeman's face. A twinge of fear snatched at her belly. But her training had been sound. And as a woman, she instinctively knew how to react.

Immediately, instantly devious, she coquettishly dropped her eyes from the black man's gaze. And with her feminine guile working overtime, she cleverly feigned an interpretation of his interest as a sexual overture. It did the trick, for when she flicked her eyes back to his face she saw that he was smiling… almost shyly.

Anna, however, understood that she had overstepped the mark of common prudence. She had been dangerously indiscreet. She *must* be more careful. It was very important that she did *not* attract such attention to herself.

“The man who was killed was one of the black soldiers who was with the marungu tracker this morning.” the detective continued… slowly now. He watched her reaction carefully.

Anna was now very conscious of the policeman's continuing examination. She realised that she was teetering on the brink of a precipice. She must be *very* careful how she handled this detective. She must now contrive some means to extricate herself from her very dangerous predicament. She must escape with a high degree of controlled expedition.

“He was a corporal in the RAR,” the detective continued. “The soldier who was wounded was also of the RAR.”

The detective's enquiring look never wavered. The question mark on his face was very obvious.

‘Could this woman have anything to do with the ZANLA terrorists?’ the policeman wondered. ‘Was she, perhaps, gathering intelligence for the

gooks? Or had Katasoro's reputation reached the ears of ZANLA? Perhaps he had become a special target? Perhaps this woman was gathering information about the famous white tracker?' Stranger things had happened.

Anna looked at the man silently and she smiled at him invitingly. Forgotten now was the gruesome spectacle of the seven corpses at her feet. Forgotten now… also… was her concern for Michael Campbell. Her sudden and sole interest at that moment in time was for her own precarious safety.

'She is, indeed, a good looking woman,' the detective mused. 'But…'

"What is your name, Amai?"

"My name is Susan," Anna said shyly.

"And where are you from Susan?"

"I am here visiting my sister," Anna explained. "I come from Rushinga. I am Chief Rushinga's fourth wife."

The detective nodded. 'So,' he thought, 'she is THAT old reprobate's wife.' He knew the old chief well. 'That explains why she stands out. She is used to wielding the authority that goes with being the wife of a senior chief.'

"I have met your husband."

"Oh, yes…? He is getting very old."

'Not too old to have a good-looking wife like you,' the policeman thought unashamedly. 'It is the old chiefs who have the money. Only they can afford the lobola for a wife such as this one.'

'So… she was Chief Rushinga's wife…'

Reluctantly the detective accepted that fact and he partly laid aside his vibrant suspicions. 'If she was a senior chief's wife the idea that she might be a member of ZANLA was preposterous… Or was it?'

The policeman had no idea that he was contemplating, at that moment, arresting and bringing in for questioning a senior ZANLA field officer. How was he to know that Anna was the Sectorial Political Commissar of Chaminuka? The infamous Comrade Motoh! She would have been a prize catch had he acted on his instincts.

The detective was to later bitterly regret not having picked her up… when he found out who Anna really was. And, although he did not tell this to his superior… when he thought about the matter objectively, he had to truthfully admit to himself that he had allowed his physical attraction for the mysterious woman to cloud his better judgment.

But all that soul-searching occurred much later.

'Chief Rushinga's wife?' The detective mused again. *'I wonder? She could be lying?'* He chewed over the possibility. And he continued to scrutinise Anna's face. His gut feelings bubbled.

'What was it about her? There was definitely something about her… Was it just her exceptional good looks? Those eyes…' It was a niggling feeling. He could not shrug it off.

She had expressed concern for the safety of the white game warden. That was the fact that *really* worried him. It intrigued him, too. *'Was she really concerned? Or was she prying for information?'*

His thoughts having returned to Mike Campbell, he now considered the white man's apparent invulnerability. And he softly told Anna… with an unconscious subtle derision… and almost to himself… *"Katasoro! Yes… he may seem to be indestructible but one day that marungu's luck will run out. Even a cat has only nine lives."*

At that moment an old woman in the queue kicked one of the bodies… viciously. And she ranted and she raved at the dead man before falling into a screaming and hysterical heap in the dirt. The detective's attention was diverted.

"Wait here, Susan," he said to Anna. *"I would like to talk to you some more."* The detective went over to the ruckus to find out what all the commotion was about.

Immediately the policeman turned away from her, Anna moved back into the mass of people behind her. She stripped from her head the brightly coloured scarf and she turned her red poncho inside out. It was a brown drab colour on the reverse side. She drew the garment over her head and shoulders, and she allowed herself to be absorbed into the amorphous mass of humanity.

The policeman went over and spoke to the overwrought old woman, and to those all around her. One of the victims had been the woman's sister and some of the children who had been killed had been her nieces and nephews. A young female relative came forward and led the weeping old hag away.

The detective then turned his attention back to Anna… but she was nowhere to be seen. He looked amongst the gathered people… mystified. He could not see her anywhere. He looked around what remained of the village environs… urgently. He looked amongst the ghostly huts and into the darkening gloom of the evening dusk. Anna was gone. She had mysteriously

disappeared into the imperfect twilight of the passing day.

Chapter 43

BRIGADIER Tom Hubbard was seated behind his desk in the JOC Commander's office. Every time Mike saw him he looked with affection and great pride at the big, affable, powerfully-built man who had become his friend. Leadership rested easily on Tom Hubbard’s shoulders. He exuded strength and a vitality that was an inspiration to everyone around him. He kept himself very fit with a morning jog and regular evening work-outs and he was ruggedly good looking. He was everything that a commanding army officer should be.

Mike and Tom had become friends at Binga. It had been Tom, in fact, who was then a major in the RAR, who had press-ganged Mike into tracking for the army… not that Mike had required much persuasion. Now Tom was delighted to have Mike on his team at Mount Darwin… even if it was only for three weeks out of twelve. They always had successful contacts when the game warden and his Bushmen trackers were on active service.

The Sparrows held no military rank. The white wardens and rangers were loosely designated non-commissioned officers and they spent whatever spare time they had in the sergeant's and warrant officer's mess.

Mike’s Bushman trackers were relegated to the unranked soldiers' quarters. There they were well looked after by the white troopies of the RLI and by the older black soldiers of the RAR. The trackers’ role in the war effort and their specialised expertise, were much respected by everyone. So much so, in fact, Mike had a hard time convincing the young soldiers that the Bushmen would be unable to track properly during the day if they persisted in plying them with so many free beers every night.

Tom, of course, spent his spare time in the officer's mess. Mike and the brigadier, therefore, saw very little of each other when Mike was at Mount Darwin. Tom, nevertheless, always insisted on Mike's company at the JOC commander's dinner table at least once a week during each of the game warden's three-week tours of duty.

Mike's peremptory day-time summons to the C.O.'s office, therefore, was something out of the ordinary.

Tom Hubbard was alone when his adjutant showed Mike through the door. The brigadier looked up and smiled warmly at his old friend.

“Hello, Mike. Good to see you.”

"Tom…" Mike nodded, acknowledging the commanding officer briefly.

They shook hands.

"Come… sit down."

Mike took one of the several easy chairs arranged in front of the JOC commander's desk. Tom Hubbard sat in another.

"My congratulations on that last contact, Mike. You're getting quite a reputation… the whizz-kid tracker and killer of gooks."

"I've got the best trackers, Tom. You know better than anyone else that its Ben and Mbuyotsi who deserve all the credit."

"And you and I know, too, Mike, that it's not just the Bushmen's tracking ability that brings the success. It's the team work. And don't belittle your own tracking. I happen to know you're not such a bad tracker yourself."

"I'm sure you didn't call me here to pin medals on my chest, Tom. What's up?"

The brigadier smiled benignly. He sat back in his chair twiddling a pencil between his fingers.

"There are still no flies on Michael Campbell, I see."

The game warden waited patiently.

"I called you in this morning, Mike, because we've reason to believe that you've become a marked man with ZANLA."

"Shit! Not again…"

"It seems so… I remember when we kept finding your name in the notebooks of the ZIPRA gooks we killed at Binga."

"And that forced the department to transfer me to the Gonarezhou. You know that, of course?"

"It was at my instigation."

"Fuck you, Tom!" The expletive burst angrily from Mike's lips. He became strangely agitated. "If I'd known that at the time I'd have personally kicked your arse 'til your nose bled… or I'd have punched your damn nose in… despite your bloody rank."

There was no one else present so neither of them had to stand on ceremony.

Tom laughed. "I had to, Mike. As the Officer Commanding the Binga District I had no choice. You had become a very special target. The ZIPRA high command in Lusaka had found out that it was your tracking that was responsible for all our successful contacts. They were all set to murder you in your house one night. And they'd have done so when you least expected it…

and maybe they'd have taken out Nikki, too… Binga was only three miles across the lake from the Zambian shore remember?

"ZIPRA really wanted you out of the way, Mike."

The short silence that followed was electric. They were both thinking back six… seven… years to the time when the ZIPRA war was at its height. ZIPRA had, indeed, then wanted Michael Campbell out of the way.

"Anyway… You didn't want to leave the Chizarira at the time, Mike. I know. But now you love the Gonarezhou just as much."

Mike laughed, lightening the atmospheric pressure. *"More so… if that is possible."*

What Tom Hubbard had just said was true and it returned the game warden's aroused passions to an even keel. Mike always became totally committed, and emotionally attached to the game reserves that he administered. That was a fact… a quirk of his nature. It was something that was quite beyond his control.

"So you agree… I am right?"

"Yes… You're right… Of course you're right, dammit. But what's it this time? Was my name in one of the notebooks of the gooks we killed the other day?"

"No… No names this time. But there was a woman asking questions about you."

"A woman?"

Tom nodded.

"She was a good looking Shona woman, Mike. From what I gather, she was probably in her middle to late thirties. She claimed to be the wife of Chief Rushinga."

"I don't understand."

"She was not the wife of Chief Rushinga…" Tom's eyebrows were raised in emphasis. "SB has already checked her out."

"So who was she then? Rather, who is she?"

The brigadier took a deep breath. He snorted softly and an enigmatic smile twitched at the corners of his mouth. *"You're not going to believe this,"* he said slowly. *"She was the Sectorial Political Commissar of ZANLA's Chaminuka Sector."*

"Shit!"

"Yes! And 'shit'… precisely. Big Shit!"

The JOC commander looked at Mike very seriously. "You know, we

would never have got this kind of information a few months back, Mike. But now… the tribespeople seem to have loosened up. All this has happened since the demise of ZANLA's feted Rain Goddess… or should I say War Goddess."

"Svikiro…" Mike corrected him. "Her proper title covers a multitude of more sins."

Complacent though he seemed to be on the surface, Mike's mind was spinning… trying to piece together the implications of Tom Hubbard's information.

"Whatever…" Tom Hubbard said almost impatiently. "Anyway… we now know that this woman… the commissar woman… operates under the Chimurenga name of 'Motoh'… 'Comrade Motoh'. We've heard the name before – once or twice – but we didn't know Motoh was a woman. And we didn't know her rank either."

'Comrade Motoh?' Mike mused. 'Comrade Fire.' "Motoh" means 'fire' in Chi-Zezuru." Mike explained.

"Fire? Doesn't 'Muliloh' mean fire, too?"

"Yes… but in Sindebele. 'Muliloh' is the Matabele name for fire."

"That's interesting… ZANLA's Sectorial Commander for Chaminuka has adopted the nom de guerre 'fire'. So has his Sectorial Political Commissar… who it turns out is, strangely, a woman."

The brigadier pondered the possibilities.

"There could be some connection… You know, that little bit of int. could just be significant. Thanks Mike. All these little snippets help to build up our picture of ZANLA. It may be just coincidence… the 'fire' thing… but I'll get SB to check it out all the same."

"Could be they're a man and wife team?"

"Now there's a possibility, Mike."

"Could be he's an Ndebele and she a Shona?"

"Uh-uh…" Tom Hubbard shook his head. "Not in ZANLA. There are no Matabeles in the ZANLA hierarchy. That we already know for sure. The Matabeles and the Mashona hate each other far too much.

"No, Mike. ZIPRA is Matabele… ZANLA is Mashona… They are split right down the middle on tribal lines.

"Anyway, that's not what I brought you here for this morning."

"It was to warn me that I might be a target again?"

“Yes…” the JOC Commander said soberly. “I want you to watch your arse, Mike. More than you normally do. When one of ZANLA's top ranking field officers starts asking after your health, it gets me worried… and so should you be worried, too, Mike.”

Mike Campbell laughed cynically. “Shit, Tom… What more can they do to kill me? The trackers and I are already the first ones to walk into the ambushes they lay for us on their spoor.”

“I dunno what else you can do, Mike. But being forewarned is also being fore-armed.”

Anna Moyo (nee Mashonganyika), the much feared and rapidly becoming infamous Comrade Motoh of Chaminuka, had committed a major blunder. Her personal concerns for Michael Campbell, her one-time teenage lover, had injudiciously exposed her soft underbelly to the Rhodesian SF.

Chapter 44

A WEEK after the Chimoko massacre Anna had reason to visit Marymount Mission. When she arrived, there were two SF army trucks standing in front of the mission station. This was not unusual since the Rhodesian security forces were very visible throughout the war zone every day.

Anna was not afraid of operating right under the noses of the mabunu soldiers. She did it all the time because she was confident that her false identity as Chief Rushinga's wife, *and* the fact that she was a woman, provided her with adequate protection. She had not, however, been back to Rushinga since the killing of Chimoko and his family, so she was not yet aware that her cover there had now been seriously blown.

At that point of the war, not everyone within the tribal communities of the north-east was yet cowed by the umbrella of absolute fear… fear of ZANLA… that was soon to envelop the whole of the Hurricane Operational Area. So when the SB began making discrete enquiries about the mysterious fourth wife of Chief Rushinga, they gathered a considerable amount of valuable intelligence. Anna would not have been quite so complacent that day, therefore, had she known the extent of the information that the likes of Hugh Ritchie had already gleaned.

The people were now well aware of the fact that Anna slept with Muliloh. They did not know that she and Daniel were man and wife. But, because they understood she was *Muliloh's woman*, everyone was very fearful of betraying her. Most people, with justification, believed that as long as Muliloh lived, if anything happened to Comrade Motoh, Muliloh’s retribution would be swift and terrible. So Daniel's rank and his reputation, and the fact that Comrade Motoh had become known as the sectorial commander's wench, provided yet another protective shield for Anna Moyo. And the more Plan-B began to achieve its objectives the stronger that protection became.

There were a number of black SF soldiers lounging about in the shade of a big tree near the trucks. They were joking and laughing together… and teasing one of their colleagues who was being clearly and blatantly solicited by a young Shona woman.

Anna scowled at the whore's wanton performance. And from a distance she

watched the salacious game the woman and the soldier played together. Presently the man got to his feet and allowed himself to be led away… tugged away… by the laughing seductive and licentious temptress. They disappeared into a nearby hut. Anna had no illusions about what they were going to do in that hut.

"There is a young woman at the mission… a mahouri… who is fraternising with the black soldiers… Smith's black soldiers." Anna stated the fact succinctly.

Ernest Chenanga, the ZANLA contact man at Marymount, frowned.

"She is wearing a blue skirt and a white blouse and she has red tennis shoes on her feet. She is undoubtedly a whore."

"That must be the young sister of Sabooku Kawandireh," Chenanga said. "She works in Salisbury and is visiting her family here at the moment."

"She is a whore?"

"A mahouri? Yes, I think so. At least that is what the people say. They say she makes a lot of money plying her trade in the big city."

"Does she not know there is a war going on here?"

"If she does not know that then she is an impossible fool. Everybody knows there is a war going on, comrade."

"Then she must be on the side of the mabunu."

"Why do you say that, Comrade Motoh?"

"She is providing comfort to Smith's black troops. Right at this moment she is having sex with one of them in a hut down the road."

"Those aren't soldiers, comrade. They are baboons. The woman is plying her trade with a baboon. Perhaps she will give to him one of her city diseases." Chenanga laughed… but it was a hollow laugh. He was now patently agitated… nervous. Comrade Motoh had not approached him without serious intention. He now wondered what it was she wanted him to do.

'The man is an idiot. He is being placatory,' Anna thought sourly. 'He is making excuses for the whore.' That made her angry.

"It is people like that whore, comrade, who bring death to the vakomana of ZANLA. Besides jigging with him in private, she may be telling that soldier the secret stories she has heard since she has been visiting here."

She glared at her contact man dangerously.

“Remember… She is a whore. Making money out of men is her religion. She may be tempted by the big rewards the mabunus are offering for information.”

Chenanga had clearly not thought about that possibility. He could see that Comrade Motoh's anger was now vibrant. His body began to tremble with a fear that, without warning, had suddenly swamped his soul.

“Comrade Commander Muliloh would not be pleased to hear what you are saying Comrade Chenanga. He would not be pleased to know that his contact man at Marymount approves of Shona whores giving comfort to the black puppets of Smith's regime.” Anna’s voice was threatening. “Those black soldiers are just as much the enemy of ZANLA, comrade, as are the white mabunus. They are sell-outs. And that whore, too, is a sell-out.”

Chenanga was now very conscious of Anna's deep and serious displeasure. She was no fool. It had been a grave mistake to try to fob her off. She was a very, very dangerous personage and not one with whom any sane man should toy.

Fear gripped at his belly now. It tightened his chest muscles and flushed his body with an uncomfortable heat. In his funk he began, unconsciously, to wring his hands. His head sank into his shoulders and he looked disconsolately at the floor. He did not try to counter her scathing attack.

The silence that followed her denunciation lasted several long moments. And all the while Anna continued to berate him with an intimidating cold stare. The atmosphere was tactile.

“Is Comrade Gideon still here?”

“He is not far away, Comrade Motoh. I can get a message to him by sunset.”

“Good,” Anna said brusquely. “Tell him I want him to hold a pungwe at Kawandireh's village at midnight tonight. I will be there. And I want him to bring all his vakomana with him.” A wicked smile twitched at the corners of Anna’s mouth. “How many men does he have?”

“Fifteen.” Chenanga was looking worried now.

“That's a good number.” She paused. “And I want you to arrange that the woman's family be present at the pungwe. All of them. Especially Sabooku Kawandireh. And make sure the whore is there, too.”

“Yes comrade.” The man swallowed nervously. “I shall do exactly as you wish.”

“You will be there, too, Comrade Chenanga.” Anna's eyes were like ice. “I think a little demonstration will help you to understand what this war is all about.”

Chapter 45

BEN and Mbuyotsi had taken to calling the helicopters their *taxis*. The choppers were their regular means of transport, ferrying them from incident to incident, across the length and the breadth of the Hurricane area. They had become very laid back about the fact that the strange flying machines uplifted them from the JOC and deposited them at whatever place on the map demanded their expert services; and by the fact that the aircraft returned them to the JOC at the conclusion of their every day's mission. Rarely did the trackers travel by wheeled transport, and when that was unavoidable the Bushmen were affronted.

The trackers did not work every day. Sometimes there were no incidents for a week or more. When that happened they languished, bored-stiff, in the barracks. When at a loose end they were never allocated mundane patrol tasks as the other soldiers were. Their's was a very specialised job and it was very important. When they were not actively tracking terrorists, therefore, they remained on stand-by at the JOC ready to move out at a moment's notice.

It often transpired that Mike Campbell and his trackers were the first at the scene of a ZANLA crime… even before the SB detectives had reached the location. So they were often the first SF witnesses to the many brutal murders that resulted from ZANLA's Plan-B. Then, in the absence of the SB, Mike had to himself determine the events that lead up to the crime. This was necessary because it enabled him to get the measure of the terrorists that he would be following for the rest of the day… and the enemy numbers they would have to contend with should they successfully make contact.

This was the case when the Roman Catholic fathers at the mission reported the murder of the Marymount whore.

The two helicopters touched down, one after the other, alongside Headman Kawandireh's village. One dropped off Mike and his trackers, the other his four man protection stick. On this occasion the four soldiers were young and spirited RLI troopies, their white faces and arms, like Michael's, were smeared with black camo-cream. The RLI were all young men, some straight out of school, but they were well trained, well disciplined and very effective soldiers. And their black masks enhanced their fearsome looks.

Despite each man's similarity, Mike's commanding deportment identified him clearly as the group's leader when the eight men skirmished into the village… carefully checking out every hut and the people contained within them. They were looking for the possible presence of armed and hidden guerrillas. Every village visitation following a murder incident now required the same disciplined and thorough search.

Hugh Ritchie had warned Mike that a murder might well be staged to entrap him… the body being used as a bait to lure him into a carefully prepared ambush. If ZANLA had been watching him, Hugh warned, they would know it would be the game warden and his Bushmen who nearly always reacted first when a murder was reported. The young soldiers who accompanied him that morning, however, made quite sure that no ambush would be sprung on this occasion.

When the village had been cleared and secured, and when the four RLI troopies had taken up their defensive positions on the perimeter, Mike walked up quietly to the group of silent tribespeople present.

They were sitting in a huddle in the middle of the hut complex… three men, several women and many children. Their big eyes were sad and wild and frightened-looking. And they stared anxiously at Mike as he approached them.

When he was standing over them they would not look him in the eye. They dropped their eyes and they looked down at the blanket that lay on the ground in front of them. The brightly coloured rug patently covered a spread-eagled human body. A pair of feminine bare feet stuck out from under the blanket at one end – the ankles still tied with raw hide riems to wooden stakes that had been driven into the ground.

Mike squatted down ignoring the body. When his eyes were level with theirs, he introduced himself to the headman politely, using all the customary Shona courtesies. This fact, and the impeccable Chi-Zezuru language that he spoke, seemed to impress the people. Visibly they began to relax.

"What happened here, Mdala?" Mike addressed himself to the old sabooku.

The grizzle-haired old man looked Mike straight in the face. His eyes were rheumy. They were inflamed from a long time crying. His lips quivered as he tried to speak. He shook his head. The words would not come.

Then abruptly he looked away and he clamped his jaws together… firmly tight. A sudden thought had made him change his mind. He had decided not

to talk at all.

The sabooku's baleful gaze wandered. In time, however, his eyes came back to rest on the colourful shroud… and on the shape of the body that lay beneath it.

"What happened, Mdala?" Mike coaxed him gently. "You have nothing to fear from me."

The old man looked at the white man again. Again his lips quivered… as though he really wanted to speak. Then, silently, his countenance clammed up tightly once again.

"They killed our sister, Bwana," one of the older women volunteered bravely.

Mike turned his attention to the woman who had spoken. He asked her encouragingly: *"Who killed your sister, Amai?"*

"The vakomana of ZANLA!"

"When did it happen, Amai"

"Last night, Bwana."

"What time last night, Amai?"

The woman lifted her hand flatly towards a high point in the sky. *"When the moon was about that high, Changamireh… It was late."*

'Changamireh' was the title the Mashona gave to their latter day kings… to the Mambo kings… to the sons and grandson's of Mwene Mutota long after he had died. The fact that the old crone had applied to him that honourable rank meant that he had acquired the woman's respect. He determined then to listen very carefully to what she had to say because he knew now that it would be the truth.

She had spoken of the moon. Mike looked into the sky to where she had pointed. He tried to recall when the moon had risen the night before.

"Ten-klok." Mbuyotsi said from behind him. *"Maybe twelve!"*

Mike took the tracker's word. He looked at his watch… calculating. The terrorists had a seven to nine hours start on them. But first he had to find out what had happened here last night.

"Tell me what happened, Amai."

"No!" The old sabooku interjected fiercely. He was clearly shaken… and wild. *"You will tell this marungu no more."* The master of the household had clearly passed down a command. He expected his senior wife to obey it.

Mike felt the group withdraw. They were battening down the hatches. But

there was more spunk in the old girl than met the eye.

"I shall tell him what he wants to know," the woman said defiantly. "We cannot live our lives in fear of what the ZANLA animals might do to us."

"They will kill you, too," her husband remonstrated passionately. "They will come back and kill us all."

"She was your sister, Baba," the woman cajoled. "She was your sister… How can you protect the stinking hyenas that did to her what they did last night?"

The old headman hung his head shamefully. He cupped his hands over his face and he began to weep. In that one abject action he abdicated his family responsibilities to his more resolute wife.

"They held a pungwe here last night, Changamireh," the old woman explained. "And they accused Margaret, our sister, of being a sell-out. She had only just come to visit us from Salisbury, Bwana. She did not know the rules that the vakomana have laid down here."

"And what of those rules was your sister accused of breaking, Amai?"

"They say she gave comfort to the soldiers of Smith. They say she slept with one of the black soldiers who visited the mission station yesterday."

"And did she do that, Amai?"

"What does it matter? Young women are young women. And young women make love with young men. It has happened since time began."

"But there are good young Shona men she could have slept with… Shona men who are not soldiers of the mabunu, Amai. The vakomana told you that she was a sell-out because she chose to sleep with one of the black lackeys of the white man and not one of them."

"You understand the rules of ZANLA better than she did, Changamireh. That fact cost Margaret her life."

"Tell me what happened here last night, Amai. Tell me all of what happened."

"After that whore of Muliloh had pronounced her guilty, Baba…"

"What whore of Muliloh, Amai?"

"She calls herself Comrade Motoh, Changamireh. A woman vakomana of the fire! Like that condensed milk baby Muliloh, himself. He, too, calls himself a vakomana of the fire."

The game warden smiled inwardly.

Calling Muliloh a *condensed milk baby* implied that he was the son of a

whore. Prostitutes had a reputation for rearing their babies on condensed milk because, it was alleged, they were always far too busy plying their trade to feed their bastard children from their own breasts.

"And this Comrade Motoh… are you saying she sleeps with the magandanga Muliloh?"

"All the time, Bwana… All the time. Everybody knows that when they are both in the same area they sleep together."

'That's a very important piece of intelligence,' Mike thought happily… excitedly. 'If the SF could only identify this Comrade Motoh… and keep tabs on her… she would eventually lead them to Muliloh. Both Tom Hubbard and Hugh Ritchie will be very pleased with this information.'

"Are you sure, Amai?"

"Ahhgggh," the old woman exclaimed disgustedly. *"Shuwah – shuwah – shuwah. Troos Gawd."* She flicked the fingers of her right hand dramatically and she held the hand up to the heavens. *"Do not doubt my word, Changamireh. What I am telling you is the truth."*

"What else can you tell me about this woman, Amai… this woman who calls herself Motoh?"

"She tells everybody that she is the wife of Chief Rushinga. But that is not true. She is hardly ever at Rushinga."

"So where does this Comrade Motoh live, Amai?"

"Everywhere and nowhere, Bwana. She is always on the move. ZANLA have contact men in most of the village lines and it is they who find accommodation and food for her when she visits them.

"She was here last night… in this village. It was she who accused our sister, Margaret, of being a sell-out. But by this time tomorrow she may be up in the Masoso… or in Mount Darwin itself."

"I see… So she has gone?"

"Yebo, Bwana. She has gone. She is like the smoke from a fire… she disappears into thin air."

"And who is the ZANLA contact man at Marymount, Amai?" Vital information was spilling in a deluge from the woman's mouth. It was running like very dry salt from an upturned table cellar. Mike realised that he must keep the fountain flowing and hope that his memory would not fail him. Thus far he was sure he could remember everything that she had said.

But her husband had been listening, too… with growing alarm. He knew that she had already said far too much. He also knew that if what she had so

far told the white man ever reached the ears of the vakomana, his wife would quickly follow in the footsteps of his sister. Hopefully he would be able to swear the family to secrecy. But he must stop his wife's lunacy quickly.

"Hold your tongue woman," he commanded her. "Do you, perhaps, have a death wish that you have told this white man so much?"

"His name is Ernest, Changamireh," the woman said ignoring her husband. "Ernest Chenanga. You will find him easily. He lives not too far from the mission… ipumalanga … on the side the sun rises."

"Stupid… You are a fool woman. If you value your life… if you value all our lives… you will shut your mouth."

'Ernest Chenanga… Ernest Chenanga… Ernest Chenanga…' Mike ignored the old man's ravings and tried to imprint the name in his memory.

"Thank you, Amai. You are a very brave woman."

Mike tried desperately to play down… to ignore… the continuing protestations of her now vociferous and wildly gesticulating husband. The old sabooku's envenomed objections were coming fast and furious now. But his wife continued to take no notice of him.

"I am tired of this war, Bwana. We are all tired of this war. We are tired of all the time being pushed one way by the mabunu soldiers and the other way by the vakomana. It is time we showed our courage and resisted the vakomana. They say they have come to give us freedom but all they have brought us is fear and death.

"I want the mabunus to win the war, Bwana. The white man, at least, would not do to us what ZANLA did to our sister, Margaret, here last night."

"You were going to tell me what they did to your sister, Amai?"

"They tied her to the ground, Changamireh. They hammered stakes into the ground and they tied her ankles and her wrists to the stakes with riems… with raw hide ropes… and they raped her, Bwana. All fifteen of the comrades. They raped her. One after the other."

'Fifteen… Holy shit!'

"And while they were raping her they told her that if she had wanted a man she should have chosen one of the vakomana. The vakomana, they said, were always willing to make love to a loyal Shona girl. They all displayed their huge tools to her. They pushed their big mboras right into her face and they forced her to look at them. Then they pushed their pieces of meat into her… one after the other… like rabid dogs poking a bleeding bitch on heat."

“But that did not kill her, Amai. That did not kill her.”

The woman nodded her head forlornly. *“No. That did not kill her, Bwana,”* She said sadly.

The woman sat for a while in silence. She cast her mind back to the terrible scene of the night before. The images of what those animals had done to her husband's young sister were emblazoned indelibly on her memory. The terrible details would remain with her forever.

The silence was poignant. Even her husband stopped his ranting.

“How did they kill her, Amai?” Mike spoke in a soft and gentle voice.

The old woman shook her head at the memory. “When the vakomana had finished with her, Changamireh, they stood around her and they urinated all over her… but mainly they pissed in her face. And all the while they were laughing at her.”

She paused. The telling of the story was clearly ripping at her heart but she was determined to tell the white man everything that she could remember. She had to compose herself before continuing.

The game warden waited patiently.

“Then, Changamireh, they took a matepeh from the fire. A long thin pole… It was about this size…” She wrapped the fingers of her right hand around her thin left wrist. “It was as long as a man is tall… It is there beneath the blanket now. They had the pole with them when they arrived and the first thing they did… even before the pungwe began… was to put its one end into the hot embers of the fire. No one then understood why they had done that. And it burnt slowly all the while the stinking dogs were raping her.”

Mike Campbell needed to be told no more. He understood precisely what the terrorists had done with that pole.

“I understand what you are about to tell me, Amai. It will hurt you to tell me more. So please… do not tell me any of the details.”

“She did not cry out while they were raping her, Bwana. But she screamed when she realised what they were going to do with that burning matepeh.” The woman continued her monologue as if she had not heard him. “She fought like a lion to break the bonds that held her down. But they held her down. They held her still. And two of the dirty jackals held her vagina open with their hands whilst another rammed the burning end of the matepeh deep into her private part. And the man who held the pole leaned on it, pushing it deeper and deeper into her. And he kept on leaning. And he kept on pushing. And Margaret kept on screaming and writhing on the ground. Then she

became unconscious… And then she died. It took her a long time to die, Changamire… a long, long time."

The old woman's tongue was stilled at last. She had told her story. She looked up at the game warden with big, liquid eyes. *"We left her body just as it was,"* she said then quietly, *"so that you can see that we did not lie. That is what we all decided to do last night, Bwana… to tell you the truth. You must excuse my husband for losing his liver today. It is not easy to have* tsibindi… *to have courage… when you know that the vakomana will be coming back."*

Mike reached out and he touched the old woman gently on the shoulder. "There is nothing wrong with your tsibindi, Amai. You have the courage of a lion. Thank you. We shall try to catch the magandangas who did this terrible thing to your sister."

Mike lifted the blanket from the spread-eagled corpse. He had to verify what the old woman had told him. What he saw was just as the old amai had described it. The once soft brown skin of the young whore's starkly naked body was tinged blue-grey in death. Her ankles and her wrists were still tied to the wooden pegs with rawhide riems. The rope had cut into her flesh from her struggles. Her legs were spread wide and the matepeh, with its burnt charcoal end, was still thrust deep into her vagina. And there was the wet evidence on the ground of the urine the terrorists had pissed all over her.

The tracking that whole day was very difficult. Not only was the terrain hard and unforgiving but the terrorists used every trick in the book to hide their spoor. They clearly *knew* they were going to be followed.

Incensed by what they had witnessed that morning, the trackers and the soldiers were determined to find the savages that had murdered the young woman so cruelly in the night. They stuck to the terrorists' spoor, therefore, for as long as there was light enough to follow it.

It was dusk before the trackers found the ZANLA gang… and when they caught up with them they had their pants virtually lying down around their ankles. When the sun had gone to rest the vakomana had felt safe. They broke cover prematurely from the ambush positions that they had held all day long… moving out in a bunch, laughing and joking amongst themselves. At that precise moment the trackers crested the last rise and looked down on their position. They were easy victims to the guns of the determined young white soldiers.

The engagement was short but furious. It ended with the surviving terrorists bomb-shelling into the evening dusk. The RLI corporal wisely refused to sweep the killing ground in the dangerous half-light of the dying day.

They slept that night at a safe distance from the contact area. They set up claymore mines, on short wire tripods, out from their scattered sleeping places. The young soldiers called the mines ‘slabs of chocolate’, alluding to the way the steel had been segmented with grooves to divide the steel plate that would be blasted forward when the charge behind it was detonated. They said, ghoulishly, that there was one piece of steel ‘chocolate’ reserved for everybody who walked into their trap.

They took turns at sentry duty throughout the night. And for many hours they all lay and listened to a wounded man in the contact area as he moaned and screamed and shouted for help. Nobody even mentioned the fact that they could hear him at all. Silence at midnight told the SF team that the man had succumbed.

In the morning they discovered the bodies of five dead vakomana.

There was a blood spoor, too. One man had been wounded. They followed the blood until they found his body later in the day. He had died of his wounds during the night. By then it was too late to take up a new set of tracks. So, the rest of the vakomana, nine terrorists in all – who had bomb-shelled out of the killing field the previous evening – were able to make good their escape.

Chapter 46

"S*LUMMING it again, hey?"* Mike tapped the seat of the bar stool next to him.

Hugh Ritchie's police rank prescribed that he should patronise the military officer's mess at Mount Darwin. He only visited the sergeant's-and-warrant-officer's mess by special invitation.

"Hi, Mike… It's good to have you back." The SB man slipped onto the proffered seat. He looked around the bar. There were only two other customers present. *"It's very quiet… Still early?"*

Mike nodded. "What'll it be, Hugh?"

"A Castle, please."

"One beer and one Castle Lager, George." Mike said to the black barman behind the counter.

The SB man looked at the game warden quizzically.

"This is lion country, Hugh," Mike sniggered like a mischievous schoolboy. "All good Rhodesians drink Lion Lager. Castle doesn't qualify as a beer."

Hugh laughed. "You reckon?… I'll let you into a secret," he said with greatly feigned deception. "I, too, prefer Lion… But you army slobs drink so much of the damn stuff I can never be sure of getting a really cold Lion when I need one. And, in this stinking heat, I'll take an ice-cold Castle in preference to a luke-warm Lion any day. And because you guys have such a fetish about Lion there's one thing I can always be sure about… there will always be a cold Castle in the fridge."

"So…" Mike tried to think of a suitable retort. None came to mind.

They both laughed.

The barman placed the two beers in front of them.

"Just stick them on my tab, George… Thanks." Mike said to the barman. Then, turning back to his guest, he said: "How's the war been going, Hugh? Got a handle on my secret admirer yet? That Comrade Motoh woman."

Mike didn't bother to ask if they'd killed Muliloh during his absence. The

whole country would have heard if they'd managed to collar the now infamous *Butcher of Chaminuka*. He took a long draught of his beer and enjoyed the luxury of feeling the cold beverage sliding down his parched gullet.

"No!" The policeman sat with his elbows on the bar counter, the beer in front of him. He contemplated the condensation as it ran down in rivulets on the outside of the glass.

"The whole of Hurricane has shut up like a clam, Mike. Our kill rate has dropped right off."

"Intimidation?"

"You don't know the half of it… It's been fucking terrible. Went from bad to worse after you left the last time. But it's quietened down a bit now… ZANLA's Plan-B has been a great success."

"Plan-B?"

"Yaah… Plan-B… We've got to know a lot about ZANLA's modus operandi in the last month. As long as that old witch Nehanda was alive…"

"The Svikiro Nehanda, you mean."

"Yes…" Hugh looked puzzled at Mike's interruption.

"Nehanda is the spirit, Hugh… She's been dead for centuries."

"O.K. But you know what I mean dammit… As long as the Mbuya Nehanda was alive the people did what ZANLA told them to do… willingly. Then, when the old hag died, things changed." Hugh took a gulp of his beer and swallowed heavily. "By then the people were fed up with the war. And they were fed up with ZANLA, too… especially after Mbudzi tried to foist a new Svikiro Nehanda onto them."

"They say the spirit that possessed the new svikiro was an imposter…" Mike offered the information he had gleaned. "I've heard all about it."

"You sound as though you believe in all that spirit crap, Mike?"

"The raw Mashona tribesman believes in it and that is all that matters." Mike opined. "…You were saying the people were fed up with ZANLA?"

"Yes Mike… That's why, after the old witch died, we suddenly got a flood of information and massive cooperation from the locals. They believed that the spirit of Nehanda…"

Mike smiled, raised his eyebrows and inclined his head. The SB man returned the gesture derisively.

"They believed that the spirit of Nehanda had deserted ZANLA. So…

wanting the war over and done with… and wanting a return to normality… the people decided to throw ZANLA to the wolves."

"To the SF?"

"That's right… The local people couldn't care a shit about the war, Mike. And they couldn't care a damn about ZANLA either. All they wanted… all they still want… is a bit of peace and quiet to return to their lives.

"And, for a while there, we were winning, Mike. We were winning hands down. It all started when old Chimoko helped us get that big group of fifty one."

"So what has happened? What's this Plan-B all about?"

"Plan-B, Mike, is the new ZANLA war strategy. ZANLA's Plan-A was tied up with Nehanda… with using her influence to get the local people to help them with the war. And it worked… as you well know. For a long time the people helped ZANLA… willingly.

"That's how Rex Mbudzi and Company managed to snivel in right under our noses at the very beginning."

"And when the Mbuya Nehanda died…" Mike already knew the answer. "Plan-A stopped working."

Hugh nodded. "They then pulled their Plan-B out of the bag."

"You've been doing your homework, Hugh… You have been doing your homework."

"That's what SB is all about… You wouldn't believe all the pies we've got our fingers into at the moment, Mike."

"I believe what I can see and hear, Hugh… What I can see and hear… But, c'mon, Hugh. What's this Plan-B all about?"

"The teachings of Mao Tse Tung explain it all… Ever read the Thoughts of Mao Tse Tung, Mike?"

Mike shook his head. "The Little Red Book… Ian Allen always said I should get a copy and read it."

"I've got a couple of copies in the office… taken off gooks who no longer have any use for them…" Hugh Richie laughed. "Keep reminding me to let you have a copy… Rather than a banned publication, Mike, The Little Red Book should be made compulsory reading for every Rhodesian soldier. It'd get them to understand what we're really up against here."

"That's exactly what Ian Allen used to tell me… Anyway… we're digressing, Hugh. What the hell is ZANLA's Plan-B?" The SB man's

explanation had begun to beat all about the bushes. It was exasperating.

"Basically it amounts to ZANLA terrorising their own people, Mike… making the tribal people so shit scared of the vakomana that they dare not do anything other than support ZANLA."

"That's what the murder of Chimoko and his family was all about, wasn't it? The gooks found out he was responsible for that big kill… the 51… and they made an example of him?"

"Yes." The policeman nodded. "Chimoko was the first victim of Plan-B. But there have been a lot more cases since then… Now… anyone ZANLA discovers collaborating with us… or anyone they even suspect of collaborating with us… they make an example of him… or her. And they make his or her death so bloody terrible that it scares the seven shades of green diarrhoea out of everybody else."

"That's why they killed that whore at Marymount, too. She was fraternising with SF soldiers."

"I forgot… You did the tracking on that one, didn't you Mike?"

"Yes… We eventually got six out of the fifteen gooks that had killed her. Bloody savages…"

"Yaah… Well… I've got some bad news for you about that scene, too."

"Oh?" Mike was immediately attentive.

"You know the old woman who gave you all the information, Mike… the old headman's wife?"

"Yaah!"

"Just after you were stood down from your last stint, the gooks came back for her. And they made a very good example of her, too. It's no bloody wonder the people have all shut their mouths again."

"What happened?"

"They cut out her tongue…"

"Oh, shit. NO!"

"Then they cut off her lips…"

Mike looked at the SB man in horror. Hugh took a deep draught of his beer before continuing.

"And her nose…"

"Fucking hell!"

"And her ears…"

Mike was stunned.

"Then they chopped off all five fingers on both hands."

"FUCK!" Mike spat out the expletive with angry vehemence. He did not know what else to say. The frown on his forehead was painful. *"The poor… brave… old bitch."*

"Then they made the other wives cook the bits they'd cut off… and they made the old girl eat her own flesh."

"Oh, Shit… No! What kind of animals are these bastards?"

Hugh shook his head sadly.

"We casevacked her out by chopper to Salisbury. She's back home now and over the worst, I'd say… but she's totally disfigured for life. And she's utterly fucked up mentally. A total zombie… Now she's a walking… living… advertisement for ZANLA in the Marymount area." He took a deep breath.

"Nice people we're doing business with in this damn war… It's a lovely war, hey?" Hugh Ritchie concluded.

Hugh took another long draught of his beer, draining the glass. He put the empty vessel carefully down on the counter before continuing.

"That's ZANLA's Plan-B, Mike… And it's working. We haven't had a squeak out of the locals for about a month, now."

"Can't say I blame them…"

Mike looked at Hugh quizzically. The way the SB man spoke told him there was more to come.

"We picked up a wounded gook at the Rusambo Mission hospital. You guys had hit him in the arm during that same contact. The bone was shattered. They had to amputate it. He was one of the group that gang-raped and killed the whore."

"So we got seven out of the fifteen… not just six… And?"

"We got a whole lot of int. out of him about Plan-B…

"We also picked up the contact man the old woman had named. He told us that ZANLA had heard about her spilling the beans… about her telling you that Motoh was Muliloh's woman… about who the local contact man was… He said Muliloh had already instructed the detachment commander to go back and sort-her-out."

"So what did you do? Couldn't you provide her with some kind of protection?… Lay an ambush?"

"We did… At least we tried. We had an ambush in place for a week but we couldn't keep it there forever. We also offered to move her and her whole family out… to a safe place… to a place that was far from the war zone."

“And…?”

“The old sabooku refused to move.”

“Shit… Silly old bugger.” A great anger for the stupid old headman built up inside Mike's breast. *“I hope he's kicking himself now.”*

“Hind sight and all that… What you've got to realise, Mike, is that Plan-B wasn't then fully operative. They didn't know that ZANLA would come back. And ZANLA had then really only just started with their heavy atrocities.”

“He knew… Hugh. He knew… He told the old girl that ZANLA would be back.”

“Now everybody knows… And you know what… they came to get her the very next night after we pulled off the ambush.”

“They knew the ambush was in place? They knew when it had gone!” Mike was not really surprised.

“They knew… Their intelligence system is bloody good, Mike!”

“Shit…”

“Look… Can I buy you a beer in this place?” The policeman looked at the barman and twiddled his index finger between their two empty glasses.

“Not a damn. You're my guest this evening, Hugh.” Mike turned to the black barman. “Two Castles, please, George.”

“Mixing your drinks?”

“Having a Castle after a Lion? Yes… Why not? I'm taking your advice. I feel like a really cold beer.”

“It'll give you the shits… mixing your beers.”

“Fuck off,” Mike laughed.

But Hugh Ritchie had not been joking. The game warden's stomach began to loosen up at around midnight.

Chapter 47

THERE were four Selous Scouts in the O.P.… three Mashonas and one white man. The white man had black camo-cream on his face and arms and, except for his ragged beard, he looked no different from his companions at a short distance. Only his eyes were different. They were a cold and piercing blue. Those of the Africans' were a silky dark brown.

The observation post was located in a wide crack high up on the precipitous face of a huge granite kopje. It had an earthen floor and the canopy of a squat mountain acacia tree hung tight over their heads providing the men with sparse shade during the day.

They could not be seen from below. Nor could they be seen from any of the lower-lying surrounding hills so the men were able to spread out and relax. They took turns to observe the target village… code-named *Alpha*… and to watch the rest of the village line, the huts of which were stretched out along the valley floor far below them. The only thing that bothered the men was boredom.

"Harry." The black man on watch called over to his troop leader.

"Yaah? What is it Kong?"

"Come… Something's happening."

King Kong… which was the man's Chimurenga name… had once been a ZANLA guerrilla. He'd been captured and cleverly *turned* by the Selous Scouts, and he had then joined their ranks.

Serving ZANLA members all knew what happened to their one-time fighting companions should they ever be captured – and then escape. Through bitter experience ZANLA had learnt that captured comrades were often very cleverly, and quickly, converted to the Rhodesian cause by SB officers assigned to the dreaded sku'zapo. Selected terrorists would sometimes be allowed to *escape,* and once they had infiltrated back into their former units they worked for the mabunu as deadly fifth columnists.

All *escapees* who returned to ZANLA, therefore, were considered suspect. Most of them, sooner rather than later, quietly disappeared. So many returned escapees had proved to be defectors, in fact, that the ZANLA hierarchy were not prepared to gamble on the fact that they just might be clean. It became ZANLA policy, therefore, to simply *dispose* of all such potential security risks. Consequently, once captured, a ZANLA freedom fighter was *finished*

in more ways than one.

This fact became well known to the freedom fighters. And it worked in Rhodesia's favour. Once a ZANLA fighter had been captured it was relatively easy to turn him, and most joined the sku'zapo with enthusiasm. They had, after all, not much going for them back in their former units. The ranks of the Selous Scouts were, consequently, full of ex-ZANLA combatants.

The white man rolled off his nylon sleeping bag and crawled over to where the one-time ZANLA terrorist sat peering through his binoculars. Harry Tennyson was well pleased with Kong… so much so, he had appointed him second-in-command of his unit. Racism had no part in the Selous Scouts' structure. The sku'zapo was the only unit in the whole Rhodesian SF that was *completely* non-racial.

"Take a look at the sabooku's village."

Harry lifted his own binoculars and looked down at Village Alpha.

There were a number of women sitting in the deep shade cast by the wide thatched eaves of their huts. A toddler wandered across an open space and disappeared into a darkened doorway. There was no evidence of the dogs and the chickens he had seen before. They, too, he surmised, must be lying quietly in some hidden patch of cool shade. The midday temperature was very high.

In the rough bush-pole cattle kraal in front of the huts there was a man struggling with an ox. He had fastened a heavy raw-hide riem around the base pedicle of the animal's horns and he was pulling on the rope fiercely. Two mujibas were beating the animal's rump with sticks. It was clear they were trying to extricate the beast from the knee-deep manure-sludge on the floor of the kraal and to force it out through the stockade entrance.

Harry quickly cast his field glasses over the other villages further down the line. He could see no movement there at all. That was not surprising. It was siesta time. Everybody… and everything else that was alive… was sleeping or otherwise idling away the hot hours of the day in whatever shade they could find.

He brought his binoculars back to the headman's village. Nothing had changed. And the tranquil, languid ambience of the scene was projected back through his glasses into their hidden camp.

"What do you see, Kong?"

"See that man in the cattle kraal?"

"Yaah… What about him? He's trying to get an ox out of the kraal."

“This morning I watched him select that animal out of the herd. The mujibas took the other cattle out to graze and they left that ox behind… on purpose. It wanted to follow the other cattle but the man wouldn't let it out. Why do you think he did that?”

“Why do you think he did that?”

“He's going to kill it.”

Harry looked at Kong… his excitement rising. *“Meat for Muliloh's meeting?”*

The black scout nodded. “We Mashona don't kill big oxen like that for food. A big beast provides far too much meat for one family. We kill goats and sheep for food… and chickens. Cattle are bred for lobola… for bride prices. They are used for milk production and for ploughing. Or they are sold on the cattle auctions for cash.”

“How do you know he is going to kill it?”

“Why else would he want to drag it out of the kraal in the middle of the day? In this heat he's certainly not going to start ploughing his fields.”

Harry nodded. What Kong said made sense. Both men returned their binoculars to their eyes. They watched the performance below in silence.

“How will they kill it?”

“Cut its throat likely.”

“One man and two boys?”

“They'll tie it down first.”

Harry tried to visualise that gruesome performance.

Cutting the animal's throat was one thing. But for the two boys to hold the big animal down whilst their father did the dirty deed was quite another matter.

“How many men can one ox feed?”

“How long is a piece of string?” Kong answered cheekily. “Over a hundred… for a day or two. It will certainly be enough to feed the number of vakomana that are likely to attend Muliloh's meeting.”

“So…” The white man's teeth flashed from the grubby darkness of his face. *“If the man kills the ox then we know Muliloh's meeting is on.”*

King Kong grinned and nodded. *“That’s the way I see it.”* The white man clapped Kong on the shoulder happily and they both chortled softly. And, lying together side by side, they patiently watched the man and the two picannins as they fought with the stubborn beast.

After a seemingly ridiculous struggle they managed to get the animal out

of the kraal. They then led it quietly away like a docile and obedient lamb.

They took the ox behind the village and into the dense bush beyond. The further they travelled the more the thick vegetation obscured their moving figures. Eventually they stopped.

At that point five shadowy forms grew out of the heavy undergrowth. One of the strangers took the rope from the hand of the ox's owner. Another conversed with the man.

"Ah-haaah," Harry exclaimed excitedly. "You see what I see, my friend."

"Vakomana," the ex-terrorist said positively.

"You sure? See any weapons?"

"No weapons. But they are ZANLA. Of that I am sure."

"Hey, you guys," Harry twisted round to arouse and to address their two dozing companions. "Get over here with your glasses. We've got five gooks visual."

The four men lay in a row looking over the rim of the rock shield in front of them. They all had field glasses glued to their eyes. Harry quickly explained the situation and urged everyone to look for weapons. All they needed was one glimpse of one weapon. One sighting of a single AK-47… or a loaded RPG rocket launcher… would be enough. Gooks loved to carry loaded RPGs around with them. They thought it made them look macho to the girls.

Unexpectedly the ox collapsed. It dropped as if pole-axed. Its brown bulk disappeared suddenly into the green shrubbery. Shortly afterwards the soft flat crack of a rifle report drifted up to the hidden observers.

Harry Tennyson looked at Kong in utter astonishment. *"The cheeky bastards,"* he said, his eyes wide with surprise. *"They've shot the bloody thing."*

Kong smiled. "It's easier than cutting its throat," he opined.

"They must be fucking confident there are no SF about," one of the other men stated the obvious.

"They've probably had a ground coverage team canvassing this place for weeks." Harry remarked. "Sectorial Commanders don't call a full scale meeting of their various detachments without first checking out the venue very carefully."

"Anyway… That's all the confirmation we need. You don't shoot an ox without a rifle."

Harry turned then to one of the other scouts. "Judas… Get the Darwin fort

on the air. At last we've got something worth-while to report."

The Selous Scouts, being a clandestine operations unit, did not use the normal military barracks at Mount Darwin… or anywhere else. Whenever they operated out of their permanent base at the Andre Rabie Barracks just outside Salisbury, they constructed their own corrugated-iron-walled *fort*. The most important feature of their forward base forts was that no one could look into the encampment from outside. And when they deployed, the scouts left the fort in lorries with closed canvas sides, normally during the hours of darkness. In the middle of most forts there was sufficient space to land a helicopter.

Within the fort the scouts had their own mess which was shared by officers and privates alike. The sku'zapo was one big happy family. There was also an ops room and they had their own radio communications room. Their radios operated on frequencies not used by other SF units, and they used their own shackle codes.

"Darwin's on the air," Judas called over to Harry.

Harry moved on his hands and knees over to where Judas had set up the radio. There was a sputnik aerial hanging from the branches above their heads. It was an SSB radio that automatically scrambled the messages as they were transmitted.

"Zero this is call-sign Two-Seven-Bravo."

"Two-Seven-Bravo, this is Zero. Go. Over."

"Zero. Please advise Sunray we have five gooks visual just behind Village Alpha at this time. They have just shot a big ox. Over."

"Roger that, Two-Seven-Bravo. Does that mean Operation Crucible is on Red Alert? Over."

"Zero. That is Roger. Over."

That short message sent ructions through the fort at Mount Darwin. Inside the fort, two platoons of bored men, who had been patiently waiting for this signal, sprang into action. Their task now was to make their final preparations for battle.

Outside the fort there was nothing to betray the hive of frantic activity that was taking place within it. The only thing that a casual observer would have noticed was the Commanding Officer leaving the fort in a hurry, in his open

Land Rover. The time had come for Major Donald Higgins to report developments to the JOC Commander… and to coordinate with him his final logistical needs for the springing of his very carefully laid trap.

For the past two weeks, Hugh Ritchie and the scouts' O.C. at Mount Darwin, had been carefully and quietly spreading their nets. Ever since SB had received word of the planned Chaminuka sectorial meeting, Hugh and Don Higgins had worked together round the clock to put some meat onto the bones of that initial piece of intelligence. All their hard work was now coming to a head. The potential dividend was huge.

The noose they had so carefully prepared for the neck of the Butcher-of-Chaminuka was ready to be placed over Daniel Moyo's head.

At precisely four o'clock that afternoon, four middle-aged white soldiers of the Territorial Force Reserve, wandered casually into Village Alpha. Their arrival at the village set a furious cat amongst the pigeons.

“What the fuck are those TF idiots doing there?” Harry Tennyson fumed. “Judas… Get the fort on the air.”

The scouts in the O.P. watched in bewildered frustration as the four soldiers approached a white-haired old man in the village. The old sabooku was sitting alone in a deck-chair on the edge of the village basking in the late afternoon sun. The soldiers began to converse with him.

“Zero… This is Two-Seven-Bravo. Please advise Sunray there are four TF details inside the village at this time. They are talking to the old sabooku. Over.”

“Confirm four TF soldiers. Over.”

“That is affirmative. Over.”

“Standby.”

In less than a minute the radio crackled into life again.

“Two-Seven-Bravo. This is Sunray Zero.” It was Major Higgins himself. “Confirm you have a TF call-sign visual. A four-man-stick. Over.”

“That is roger, Zero. Over”

“Confirm they seem to be on a regular patrol. And confirm they are questioning the old sabooku at this time. Over.”

“That is roger. Over.”

There was a long pause.

“Two-Seven-Bravo,” the radio operator came back on the set. “Roger your last transmission. Sunray wants you to standby.”

At that very moment the major was stabbing angrily at the starter button on his Land Rover. He revved the engine once… loudly… and the gates of the fort opened wide. He disappeared through the gateway at a high rate of knots leaving behind a huge cloud of choking dust.

"Have you seen any magandangas recently, Mdala." The patrol leader spoke in halting Chi-Lapalapa.

"Magandangas? What are magandangas young man?" 'This stupid white soldier must think I'm brainless', the old man thought derisively.

The ancient sabooku played stupid. He was, indeed, very old. He was also very frail. He was very thin, too, and wrinkled, and his shock of snow white hair made it easy for him to look simple-minded. But he was far from senile.

"Magandangas… Ma-terrorista, Mdala. Have you seen any ma-terrorista around here lately?"

'Is this marungu really so stupid?' the old headman thought contemptibly. 'He is truly a half-wit if he expects any responsible Shona person to truthfully answer a question like that. If only he knew who it is that lurks, at this very moment, in the bushes just behind the village.'

"Would that be the people who call themselves vakomana… and ZANLA?"

"Yes… YES… Those are the ma-terrorista of whom we speak, Mdala."

"Yes. They were here…" The old man showed willing, nodding his head affirmatively.

The soldier's interest sharpened.

"There was a group of vakomana who came here. Ten of them. They ate here. We told the marungu masodjas all about it at the time. But that was a long time ago, Bwana. A long time ago."

"When? When was that, Mdala?"

"Oh… About two months ago. Maybe three… When they left here they said they were going into the Portuguese territory. The border is not far from here."

The soldiers' interest immediately waned.

"And you have not seen any magandangas since then, Mdala."

"No… We hear sometimes that they have been here… and there. But they have never come back to this village."

"He's lying," one of the other soldiers said angrily. "He's seen them, all right. At night this place is probably crawling with gooks. Twist his arm a bit

and he'll spill his guts."

"*Calm down, Don. Calm down,"* The stick leader cautioned the man.

"*That area has been frozen for two fucking weeks, Tom,"* the major shouted at the JOC Commander. That was a fact of which Tom Hubbard was well aware. The brigadier had himself ordered the area frozen, and he had himself prohibited all other SF units from entering it.

The scouts often called for a defined part of the war zone to be designated a *frozen area*. This temporarily denied regular SF units to patrol in that area. It also allowed the scouts to operate clandestinely within such an area… to carry out special forces tasks… without fear of being compromised by ordinary military patrols.

The fact that the scouts regularly froze parts of an operational area earned the sku-zapo its SF nick-name: *The Eskimoes*. Only Eskimoes worked in frozen areas!

"Fucking amateurs. Can't those stupid fucking TF fools read a bloody map?" The major was almost beside himself with fury.

At that moment Captain John Hillary, the brigadier's adjutant, came into the CO's office. He reported: "The nearest call-sign we have to that locstat, Sir, is a TF unit that is reported to be about ten miles south of Village Alpha."

"Check it out, John. Give them a shout on the radio and find out if they are right now, perhaps, in a village talking to a white-haired old man. If they are, tell them to get the hell out… chop-chop. Get them to move as fast and as far as they possibly can in a due south direction. I don't care where they end up. Just get them the hell out of the Op Crucible freeze. And have them picked up by chopper at dusk."

"*Roger."* The adjutant slipped out of the office.

"If it's them they'll get their arses kicked when they get back, Don."

"A fat lot of good that'll do us… By now they'll have fucked up the whole operation. Crucible's blown. And we were so fucking close to getting our hands on that bastard Muliloh."

"We don't know that Crucible has been blown, Don… We don't know that at all. If those TF soldiers have compromised the operation I'll be just as mad about it as you are right now. But… first of all… let's see what we can do about getting those TF idiots out of the shit they've got themselves into."

Anna had been chatting with a woman of the village when the four mabunu soldiers entered the compound. Their arrival alarmed her because of the imminent gathering of Daniel's detachment commanders and their vakomana.

Once she had recovered from the initial shock, however, she reasoned that the soldiers' presence was, perhaps, a good omen. If they had known about the ZANLA meeting, the mabunu would not have sent what was obviously a routine army patrol to visit the very village at which ZANLA's sectorial meeting was scheduled to take place that night.

Anna also noted that the soldiers' security behaviour was sloppy. This marked the four white men down as amateurs which further reinforced her growing sense of assurance.

Nevertheless, when they started talking to the old sabooku she moved closer to their position and she strained her ears to listen to their conversation.

Anna was now fully aware that her cover as Chief Rushinga's wife was blown, so she was keeping a much lower profile than usual. She now masqueraded as the wife of a junior headman… or of a simple villager. She changed *husbands* constantly as she moved about Chaminuka. Nevertheless, she was aware that the soldiers and the police were making regular enquiries about an itinerant woman of her description. On one occasion they had come very close to catching her.

So Anna did not now boldly approach the four white men and enter into conversation with them, as she would have done just a few months before. She was astute enough to realise that it had been that kind of behavior… specifically her bold approach to the SB detective at Chimoko's village… that had led to her exposure. She was not about to repeat that same mistake. Instead, she sat down with her back to the wall of a nearby hut and she watched the pantomime from a distance. She wanted to hear what the soldiers were saying to the old man, and more importantly what he was saying to them.

Unfortunately, she was just too far away to hear all of what had been said. But she was generally satisfied that the old man was conducting himself well. Furthermore, the fact that she had placed herself in a position where the old sabooku could clearly see her, she knew, would add to his circumspection.

Suddenly a garbled communication erupted from the radio that one of the

soldiers carried in his back pack. He turned up the volume.

"JOC Darwin are calling us, Duke," the soldier with the radio shouted to his patrol leader.

The man who had been speaking with the old sabooku hurried over to the radio. He spoke into the hand-set. Anna could not hear what it was he said. Nor could she hear the response. Only mumbling and crackling noises. Nevertheless, she detected a high degree of urgency in the communication.

The patrol leader removed a large map sheet from a thigh pocket of his camouflaged trousers. He opened it and laid it out on the ground. He and his three companions squatted round the chart and began to argue loudly.

There followed further exchanges on the radio.

"SHIT," the lead soldier cursed explosively. His loud profanity was heard by everyone in the village.

The four soldiers then left the village abruptly, hastily pushing their way through the brush barricade that surrounded the open ploughed field next to the village huts. And they began slogging, post haste, across the uneven ploughed soil of the open land.

The precipitous departure of the soldiers alarmed Anna. She watched, puzzled, as the four men moved off at a speed which was patently as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Zero. This is Two-Seven-Bravo. Come in please, Over." Harry had positioned the radio set right at the front of the O.P. crevice now. That meant he could look down on the village and use the radio at the same time.

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Zero. Go. Over."

"Zero. The TF detail has left the village. I repeat. The TF detail has left the village. They are proceeding due south. Over".

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Roger. I shall advise Sunray. Have you anything further to report? Over."

"Negative. Zero. Over."

"Roger Two-Seven-Bravo. How are your batteries. Over."

"Zero. This one's okay. And we've still got two spare nicads fully charged. Over."

"Roger Two-Seven-Bravo. We're still receiving you fives. Remain on standby. Zero standing by."

The transmission ended.

When the soldiers were out of sight Anna hurried over to the old man. *"What did you say to the mabunu, Mdala?"* Her voice was urgent, officious and very demanding.

The old man explained to her the nature of his conversation with the soldiers.

"Why did they suddenly run off like that?"

"Their voice box told them to hurry to a certain place. A flying machine… a herikoptah… is coming to pick them up."

"Do you understand the marungu's language?"

"Enough to have understood that much."

"What else did they say on the voice box?"

"I don't know. It all sounded very strange… And I do not understand the marungu's language that well."

Anna examined the old man's face carefully. The look in her eye was cautiously suspicious. But the old sabooku was not intimidated. He returned her look boldly.

"You said nothing to them of tonight's and tomorrow's meeting here, Mdala?"

"I am not a fool, young woman. I am not a fool."

"The vakomana will all be coming in tonight. It is too late to change our plans at this stage. If you have betrayed ZANLA, Mdala, it will not go well with you."

"I said nothing to the marungu soldiers about ZANLA, comrade; or about the meeting here tonight and tomorrow. You have nothing to fear on that score. But if you are worried why don't you just get your vakomana to shoot the mabunus? You have enough men with guns in the bushes behind the village to do that easily. Killing those stupid soldiers will be like stealing eggs from chickens."

"If we did that, Mdala, it would bring every mabunu soldier in creation to this village. That is the last thing we need right now."

The old man pursed his lips and he nodded his head. What the woman said made sense. His respect for her military acumen went up two notches.

Anna continued to look at the old man… for a long time. Thinking… Probing… Wondering… Finally she convinced herself that what he had told her was true. She accepted his word and relaxed.

What Anna had said about it being too late to change their plans now was true. There was no way at all of getting messages to the incoming ZANLA

forces in time to stop them arriving at the village, *en masse*, during the now close-approaching hours of darkness.

Anna lifted her eyes, raking the surrounding hills. She wondered if there was anyone up there… the sku'zapo perhaps… watching them at that very moment.

She discarded the idea. There was no way that anyone could be hidden anywhere within sight of the village. For the past ten days she had personally supervised the recce patrols conducted by an army of mujibas during the day. Every morning at the crack of dawn… before they did anything else… the village youths checked all the roads in the area for fresh sign of mabunu soldiers who might have passed by during the night. They had carefully examined the major and the minor foot paths for a distance of five miles around the meeting place. And during the day, whilst they were herding their parents' cattle, the mujibas had searched for the tracks of mabunu soldiers in the surrounding and high rugged hills.

In all that time ZANLA's local boy-scout battalion had seen no mabunu tracks at all. Not one. It was a strange and puzzling state of affairs. Anna had expected them to find at least *some* evidence of security force activity. But there had been none. Nothing at all. It was as if the mabunus had suddenly stopped fighting the war. The area had become a vacuum and *that* fact still worried her.

ZANLA had not yet fathomed the sku'zapo tactic of *freezing* areas and all that that implied. Had they understood it then, as later in the war they did, the meeting would have been immediately cancelled. But ZANLA did not *then* know the significance of a sudden cessation of normal SF activity.

Nevertheless, when Tom Hubbard had frozen the area and when all overt SF activity had suddenly ceased, Anna's suspicions had been intuitively aroused. It was for that very reason that the unexpected appearance of the four mabunu soldiers at the village, right on the very eve of the big meeting, had come as something of a surprise … and a relief. It had somehow kicked the mysterious silent ambience of the area back to an acceptable level of normality.

Anna was not to know that, this time, she had been completely out-manoeuvred by SB and the sku'zapo. The scouts had carefully entered their O.P. position in the dead of night. They had worn sheaves of grass tied to their feet to obscure their human spoor. And they had arrived five full days

before Anna's local mujiba force began its systematic recce patrol programme.

"It is her Harry. It is Comrade Motoh." Kong pulled his binoculars tightly into his face. He was clearly excited.

"Are you sure, Kong? You did not operate in Chaminuka. All your service was in the Nehanda Sector."

"Absolutely. It is her. I met her at the Mgagao training camp in Tanzania."

"That was a long time ago."

"It is her, dammit. Don't you want to believe me, Harry?"

The ex-terrorist brought his field glasses down from his face and he looked with some indignation at his white superior. Despite the rubber-cased instrument that was pressed into Harry Tennyson's blackened face, Kong saw that the white man was quietly chuckling to himself.

Harry could feel Kong's angry and enquiring look. It made him grin all the more. But he kept the binoculars pressed into his eye sockets, focused on the village below.

"I believe you, Kong… I'm pulling your leg. What other Shona woman would question an elderly sabooku after he had been visited by mabunu soldiers?"

The white sku'zapo leader examined Anna from head to toe. He was determined to soak up all her details for as long as she remained in his sight.

She wore a faded blue skirt. Her floral blouse was of a darker blue and it was flecked with crimson figurines of some kind. The cloth dook on her head was white. He quickly wrote all these facts down in a grubby notebook.

"It is her," Kong asserted, grinning to himself now. *"It is her… I would recognise her anywhere."* Placated, he placed his binoculars back against his eye-brows and he, too, gazed down again at Chaminuka's now infamous Sectorial Political Commissar.

Presently Anna turned away from the old man and she disappeared from their view amongst the huts.

"Zero. Two-Seven-Bravo."

"Come in Two-Seven-Bravo."

"Zero. We have just identified the woman Motoh in the village. I repeat. We have identified the woman known as Comrade Motoh. Over."

“Two-Seven-Bravo. Confirm you have a woman visual who you have positively identified as Comrade Motoh. Over.”

“Zero. We no longer have her visual. She went into one of the huts. But I confirm we have identified one of the women in the village as Comrade Motoh. Over.”

“Is that a positive I.D. Over.”

Harry grinned at Kong.

“That is affirmative. Zero. One hundred percent affirmative. Over.”

“Roger your last transmission, Two-Seven-Bravo. Sunray will be delighted. Over.”

“We have nothing further for you at this time. Two-Seven-Bravo standing by.”

There was a large moon in the star-spangled sky that night. It was five days before full moon. That meant at sunset the near spherical white orb was already high in the eastern sky and climbing. As ZIPRA had been in the 1960s, the ZANLA guerrillas were always more active when there was a full moon shining. The bright luminescence of a high full moon provided them with enough light to march confidently during the hours of darkness. So, from sunset onwards, group by group, the detachment commanders of ZANLA's Chaminuka Sector converged on the village.

Harry and his sku'zapo companions wrapped their nylon sleeping bags around their shoulders for there was a gentle cold breeze blowing high up on the kopje. And they watched and they waited, and they listened, as the gathering of the Chaminuka clans took place below them.

To assist them in their task the scouts had brought along with them a very powerful light-intensifier telescope. It had a front lens that was fully nine inches in diameter and it clearly exposed the countryside beneath them in highly magnified and fully recognisable luminous green images.

Shortly after sunset the scouts erected a collapsible parabolic reflector… a dish antenna… in the centre of which they fixed a microphone on a stem. Leads trailed down from the microphone to a set of padded earphones. This enabled the operator to canvas the countryside beneath them for sounds and to direct the man with the telescope to the location of the incoming guerrilla forces even before they were visual.

By ten o'clock that night eight different bands of men had reached the village. Anna immediately directed each one to the small forest of dense bush

in the ravine two hundred yards away behind the huts. There the scouts could see the glow of fires, but they could not see what was going on. Nevertheless, the regular stream of women from the nearby villages, with basins of steaming white sadza on their heads, and huge clay pots of mahewu, told the hidden watchers that the ZANLA men were being well fed.

The parabolic reflector was picking up a soft hum of human voices from the thicket.

By midnight the number of group arrivals had risen to twelve. At one o'clock, the dogs began barking far down the kraal line again. Another group was coming in.

“Fucking hell,” Harry exclaimed. “That's thirteen groups. With about five men per group that makes… what?… sixty-five top Chaminuka gooks all gathered together in one place. And that's not counting Muliloh's H.Q.”

“They will have left their cadres back in the hills somewhere,” Kong said confidently. “The hills all about here will be swarming with the riff raff. The commanders will only bring their top lieutenants to attend the meeting. They will have deployed the rest of their detachments to back-stop positions. It will be the cadres duty to provide an outer security ring whilst the senior staff meeting is in progress tomorrow.”

“Whew… There's going to be one hell of a punch up here tomorrow morning.” Harry sounded envious of those who would be fighting.

“There's three different groups coming in now, Harry. It's not just one group.” Kong was manning the telescope. Harry moved over and had a squizz into the eye-piece. Sure enough, there were the unmistakable luminous images of three different groups separated, the one from the other, by some fifty yards. They were wending their way slowly and cautiously along the footpath that led to Village Alpha. He counted the figures carefully.

There were five men in the first group, five in the second, but only four in the third. He wondered what had happened to the fifth man of that detachment.

“The five men will comprise the detachment commander himself,” Kong explained. “And his detachment-ranking political commissar, his security officer, his logistics officer and his medical officer.”

“The top-ranking gooks in the whole of the Chaminuka sector…” Harry grinned. “And God alone knows how many of Chifombo’s Military High Command are in those bushes behind the village right now, too.”

“That will depend on the importance of the meeting.” Kong opined.

“Reckon Mbudzi could be there?”

Kong shrugged his shoulders in the dark. “Anybody could be there. If we knew what the meeting was all about, we'd have a better idea who from Chifombo… if any… might be attending. But if Motoh is there Muliloh is bound to be present.”

“Well… Even if it’s only the top brass of Chaminuka, Kong, tomorrow's fire-fight is going to be hell of important. If we can knock out this bunch of gooks we'll effectively paralyse ZANLA's operations in the whole of Chaminuka.”

Harry Tennyson's body began to tingle.

At 03.00 hours Harry Tennyson made his final sitrep[xxv] to the Darwin fort.

“Zero. This is Two-Seven-Bravo. Come in please. Over.”

“Two-Seven-Bravo. Go. Over.”

“Roger Zero. Everything is quiet down there now. Seems they've all gone to sleep. No more gooks have arrived. Our final tally comprises the original group… which arrived we don't know when. We think that must be Muliloh's headquarters staff. Then fifteen different groups arrived during the night… all plus or minus five men each. So we reckon there are between eighty and a hundred top ranking gooks down there right now. Over.”

“Confirm they are still all camped in the thick bush of the ravine just behind the village. Over.”

“That is affirmative. Zero. Over.”

“O.K. Two-Seven-Bravo. Remain on watch and remain on standby. H-hour has been set at 05.30. I would suggest you change radio batteries now and erect your relay aerials for the A-60s on the ground. We'll need your help in the morning. Over.”

“Zero. The relay aerials are already up. We're all ready for H-Hour here. Over.”

“Roger Two-Seven-Bravo. Sunray conveys his best wishes. Says you guys have done a damn fine job. Over.”

“Roger, Zero. Thank you. Two-Seven-Bravo standing by.”

The sku’zapo trap, code-named *‘Operation Crucible’*, was ready to be sprung.

Chapter 48

THE old sabooku had vacated his sleeping hut for ZANLA's sectorial commander and his woman. Daniel and Anna were asleep, wrapped in each other's arms in the old man's bed, when the distant drone of approaching aircraft brought Daniel, in a flash, out of his slumbers. He sat up… listening.

"What's the matter?" Anna asked, still fuzzy with sleep. The sweet and tantalising scent of their love-making rose out of the blankets around her. It swamped her senses with delightfully salacious thoughts.

"Aircraft…"

Anna became instantly awake. She was out of the bed before Daniel.

"They're coming here," she said with emphatic certainty. "I knew there was something wrong. I just knew it."

They dragged on their clothes hurriedly.

"It was the old man… The sabooku. He must have said something to the mabunu soldiers who were here yesterday. That was why they left in such a hurry."

"Then he will pay for it." Daniel said venomously, dragging his shirt over his head. He abandoned his boots. In fifteen seconds he had the door of the hut open and was casting his eyes to the grey-blue western skyline. There, over the crests of the hills, he saw the bulbous glass noses of six Alouette helicopters advancing towards the village. And behind the helicopters were bigger aircraft… DC.3s… Dakotas… Four of them. Daniel knew the Dakotas would be carrying paratroopers.

The village was, without doubt, the target.

"Run, Anna," Daniel urged. *"Run…before they get overhead and see us."* He placed his hand in the centre of Anna's back and shoved… propelling her away from the hut towards the next village down the line. He took off in the opposite direction, running crouched over… low… along the dead brushwood fence at the edge of the open field.

Daniel had nearly a hundred trained and high ranking guerrillas in the heavy thicket behind the village and twice that number in the surrounding hills. But he knew it would be suicidal to make a stand. ZANLA was a guerrilla army. It was not trained, nor was it equipped, to fight the white man's counter insurgency forces head on… and the mabunus enjoyed an unchallenged supremacy in the air. The ZANLA forces hadn't a snowball's

hope in hades of winning a pitched battle against such odds.

The ZANLA fighters' only chance was to bombshell… to create confusion. Every man would have to look out for himself. And the commanders who survived would pick up the pieces when it was all over.

Daniel ran like a dark ghost… keeping the grey-black brush line fence between himself and the advancing helicopters. All he had on was a pair of brown PT shorts and a light-weight East German camouflaged shirt. In one hand he carried his Chinese chest-webbing with four full magazines. In the other his new AKM assault rifle.

The helicopters were approaching fast. If he didn't get under cover soon the sharp-eyed pilots would see him.

He dived under the broken dead branches of the fence-line… just before the first helicopter took up a hovering position over the village. The other machines began touching down… briefly… one after the other… in the open field. Each one disgorged four fighting soldiers.

Daniel rolled onto his back and squirmed his way under the brushwood… lifting branches with his hands… pushing with his heels… shuffling with his shoulders and elbows… using every means possible to worm his way deeper and deeper into the cover. Finally, he could go no further.

He arranged his rifle so that it lay on his belly, the muzzle pointing towards his toes. He cocked the mechanism flicking on the safety catch. He could fire from that position and he would go down fighting if he had to.

All around him grew sparse, tall stems of grass… of this year's, last year's and the year's before growth. It had been protected from the grazing cattle by the rigid brush of the fence line. There were also drifts of dry tree leaves from last autumn's fall. They had all fetched up alongside and inside the bushy windrow. They, too, provided cover.

Daniel threw handfuls of the dry grass and the dead brown leaves onto his belly, onto his chest and over his legs, as best he could. The debris did not cover him but the mottled effect broke up the stark outlines of his dark figure.

Then… suddenly… there was a helicopter hovering directly overhead. It forced him to lie absolutely still. He watched the technician leaning far out of the aircraft… directing the pilot down. The machine descended seemingly right on top of him. The backwash from its rotors blew more grass and leaves and dust over and up against his body.

The aircraft came down within spitting distance. Four soldiers jumped

from its belly before its wheels had touched the ground. They were fierce-looking men, two blacks and two whites. The white soldiers' faces and arms were covered in black camo-cream. They sported bushy beards. One black man had a Rastafarian hair style that hung in dirty brown stringlets from beneath a freckled forage cap.

These men, Daniel realised instantly, were sku'zapo soldiers. They were cold-blooded killers. His blood froze over.

The helicopter rose into the air and raced off towards the ravine behind the village. The screaming racket of its engine following like a trailing shadow.

The sku'zapo soldiers were running towards him, their feet thumping the ground. He could hear them breathing… hear the squeak of their webbing. Something rattled in one of their packs.

He lay absolutely still. There was nothing else he could do. He had to rely entirely upon his immobility. He knew that death lurked mere feet away from his skimpy retreat.

Obeying brief grunted commands and quick hand signals, the four men pushed through the fence line on either side of Daniel's position. One man stepped on the ends of the dead branches under which he had taken refuge.

Then they were through the fence and into the trees beyond. Daniel lay still… relieved. He turned his head to watch the soldiers skirmishing professionally up the gentle slope of the wooded hillside.

The people of the village were running about in a mad panic now. Daniel could hear them shouting. Some were screaming… crying. They had burst out of the village in all directions and the sounds of their hysterical flight came to him from all around. The villagers knew that a huge battle was about to commence. They were terror-stricken by the thought of being caught in the cross-fire.

The Rhodesian SF had a very prosaic attitude towards villagers who fed and hid terrorists. If a fire-fight occurred in a village that was guilty of harbouring gooks then the villagers only had themselves to blame if they were killed or injured in the battle. And whereas the SF did not purposefully go out of its way to kill civilians, they did not hold back their fire if such a villager was in the way when they had a terrorist in their sights.

The K-Car circled the village. The pilot and the technician, and the Selous Scout captain on board… the fire force commander… watched the people

fleeing their huts. They waited for armed terrorists to emerge. No such animals came out. Very soon the village was devoid of civilians. The villagers were all fleeing down the paths… some over the open veld… men, women and children… all seeking the comparative safety of the open bush… or sanctuary in the homes of their friends in nearby villages. Confusion reigned. Ahead of the melee ran Anna Moyo… ZANLA's Sectorial Political Commissar. She was putting distance between herself and Village Alpha… as much distance as she could and in the shortest possible time. She ran like the wind.

The army captain spoke to the pilot of his command gunship using the aircraft's closed-circuit radio. He wore a pilot's blue inner helmet with earphones and a face mask with the transmitter. *"O.K. Pete. They're all out. If there are any gooks in the village now they're still inside the huts… Let 'em have it."*

Battle commenced when one of the G-Car helicopters spotted a group of terrorists hiding in the ravine. A chattering burst of machine-gun fire ripped through the cold morning air drawing first blood for the SF.

Then came the single, heavy detonation of the command K-Car's 20 mm cannon. The H.E. shell ripped through the thatched roof of the sabooku's sleeping hut where Daniel and Anna had so recently been sleeping. It exploded on the floor.

The roof of the hut lifted off its pole-and-dagga walls. It blew apart in the air ten feet above the ground. And the poles of the walls, in a trice, split apart like the petals of a daisy. Some were blasted right out of the earth and sent skittering away across the open ground. Shards of the hard, dry mud that had held the poles together flew about the deserted compound like pieces of lethal shrapnel. And where the hut had once stood there now mushroomed a cloud of suspended brown dust.

A second G-Car began firing it's machine-guns into the ravine thickets. The K-Car fired a second cannon shell into another hut, demolishing it instantly. One by one it destroyed all the bigger huts.

Two helicopters swept the shallow wooded hillsides on either side of the thicket pocket… speculatively strafing suspicious-looking clumps of thick bush below. Another machine traversed the woodland above the contact area.

The guerrillas were pinned down. They began firing back at the helicopters. White Soviet bloc tracers laced the air in lazy, smoky spirals as

the bullets expended their energies high in the air above.

Bullet holes ripped through the perspex shield of one helicopter. The pilot quickly pulled his aircraft away from the trouble spot. The machine was otherwise undamaged. It continued to fly around the target area. Nevertheless, return fire from ZANLA became intense, forcing the gunships to keep their distance.

The sound of gunfire on the ground now came from all around and the sku'zapo troops began bracketing the thicket with 60 mm mortar bombs. And there was the heavy *swooshing* sounds of RPG-7 rockets being fired at the hovering aircraft.

The rockets were ineffectual and inaccurate anti-aircraft weapons. Their smoking vortices whizzed off into the high vacant blue. Time fuses in their warheads exploded the heavy missiles harmlessly high in the air above. Some detonated on impact when they returned to earth.

Daniel lifted his head and watched two Dakotas dropping paratroopers in two long lines half-a-mile away beyond the ravine. The slow-flying transports seemed ridiculously low, the green nylon chutes having barely enough time to pop open before the soldiers were on the ground.

He looked over his head and saw another two Dakotas dropping paratroopers behind him.

The mabunu soldiers were everywhere. He was surrounded. His whole command was bracketed. There was nowhere for the freedom fighters to go. But Daniel was well hidden, so he lay doggo. Maybe… just maybe… the mabunus would not find him. There were twelve long hours left until nightfall.

Five minutes after battle commenced a Canberra bomber cruised slowly over the village on its whispering jet engines. Its crew reviewed the battle in progress on the ground below. The sleek jet was a thousand feet above the ground and the fire-force commander in the K-Car carefully explained the lay out to the bomber pilot above.

Two helicopters dropped coloured smoke grenades in a circle around the ravine and then withdrew to a safe distance. The woodland and heavy thicket in the ravine had become the Canberra's target.

The jet made three runs at its target, each time dropping one sachet of bouncing shrapnel bombs. There were a hundred bombs… the size and shape of small footballs… in each sachet. They were released through the aircraft's

open bomb-doors, one sachet at a time. Bright red in colour, the bombs dropped like a bucketful of ping-pong balls cascading willy-nilly into the treetops.

When they hit the ground they bounced six feet into the air. Only then did they explode each one sending a sheet of flame and violent shock waves, and a wall of steel ball-bearings, racing and singing through the thicket cover. And because of the irregular way the bombs fell, and the uneven slopes of the ravine floor, they hit the ground at varying intervals… and they bounced off at different angles… sending a prolonged ripple of explosions and shrapnel into the terrorists' hidden positions.

When the cacophonous detonations of the first bomb drop had died away, the screaming and moaning, and the shouting of wounded men filtered back to Daniel. He was happy to be some distance back from all the carnage. There was also the sound of authoritative voices… of ZANLA commanders shouting instructions to their men.

The Canberra came round again and just before it released its second load those guerrillas who had survived the first onslaught broke from the heavy cover. They began running, every which way, out from the central target area. The helicopters gave chase. And the Rhodesian soldiers on the ground were in position and ready to receive them.

After it had dropped its third and final load… on a then largely lifeless ravine… the Canberra turned away. It flew quietly back towards its New Sarum air force base in Salisbury. The crew would be back home in time to enjoy a hearty breakfast in the officer’s mess. They gave little thought to the carnage they had left behind.

Before the jet bomber had disappeared two Lynx support aircraft arrived. They circled at a distance awaiting instructions to attack. They had twin booms joining the single tail plane at the back… from which they derived their guerrilla name: *The aeroplane with a hole in the middle*. Small though they were, the Lynxs were not toys. They were fast and agile machines and both carried two frantan bombs each containing fifty gallons of gellotined petrol. They were each also armed with two pods of sixteen matra rockets.

“One-Nine. Two-Seven-Bravo. Over.”

At last Harry Tennyson was able to break through the heavy battle chatter on the radio. This time the fire-force commander heard his signal.

“Two-Seven-Bravo. One-Nine. Go. Over.”

“One-Nine. About one minute before you were overhead the village two gooks split from one of the huts. One of them was a woman… definitely Motoh. She went south-east down the village line. She was clear of the contact zone before you were overhead.

“The other, I'm sure, was Muliloh. They must have been sleeping together in the hut… the first hut you took out. He was armed with an AK and he ran westward along the brush fence next to the ploughed land. Unfortunately he was on the other side of the fence-line from us and half the time we couldn't see him. Just before you reached the village he disappeared. Over.”

“Fucking hell. I saw the bitch… Why didn't you tell me this before. Over.”

“One-Nine. I tried to. I've been trying to tell you since you arrived. But I couldn't break through the heavy radio traffic. Over.”

“Shit! O.K. Give us descriptions… quickly… Over.”

“Muliloh was dressed in brown shorts and a grey camo-shirt with short sleeves. He carried an AK. No hat.

“Motoh was dressed in a pale blue skirt and a darker blue blouse with red markings. She was bare-headed. Over.”

“Roger that Two-Seven-Bravo. Standby.

“Yellow-Two… This is One-Nine. Did you copy that from Two-Seven-Bravo. Over.”

“One-Nine. Affirmative. Over.”

“Go see if you can locate Muliloh. He may be hiding in the bushes somewhere to the west of the village. I'll alert the stop groups behind him. They can prepare a reception committee. Over.”

“Roger. Wildo.”

One of the helicopters turned away from the ravine. It flew back towards Village Alpha.

“Yellow-Four. One-Nine. Over.”

“I copied that One-Nine.”

“Roger Joe. You got a description of Motoh. Go see if you can find her. Over.”

“Roger-Dee.”

A second cyclone broke away and began sailing down the village line scattering the already scared-to-death villagers as they ran to escape the battle that was raging behind them.

A helicopter floated slowly towards where Daniel lay in hiding. Its jet

engine screamed raucously in his ears. The down draft of its rotors stirred the grass and swirled the dead leaves all about him. It was only thirty feet about the ground.

Daniel lay on his back… quite still… he screwed up his eyes to disguise his facial features. As the aircraft approached him he could clearly see the pilot peering through the forward perspex. The technician was hanging over the twin barrels of his machine-guns, his hawk eyes probing every possible nook and cranny that could hide a man in the veld below.

The machine was flying so slowly and so low to the ground, Daniel was tempted to lift his weapon and to place a bullet into the exposed pilot's throat. There would have been no point in firing into the man's chest. He knew that helicopter pilots and their technicians wore flack-jackets that would protect them from the under-powered AK bullets. But a bullet in the man's throat… or in his face… would be fatal. And such a shot, from this range, was well within Daniel's capabilities.

He resisted the temptation. Instead, he lay as still as a frightened mouse watching the screaming hawk-like aircraft as it sailed on towards him. The pilot was peering into the brush of the fence-line. The technician was scouring the bush on the woodland side of the fence.

The helicopter came on. The pilot was looking directly down at him… right into Daniel's scrumpled-up eyes.

'The man must see me… surely?' Daniel prepared himself to fire his AKM.

The machine was overhead. Then it passed him by. And it progressed slowly on up the fence line beyond.

'Thank God… He didn't see me'. Daniel's heart was beating fast. He heaved a huge sigh of relief. He was trembling. And when the tension drained away he was left in an icy cold sweat. *'That had been close!'*

Intuitively, Daniel sensed that the helicopter crew had been looking, specifically, for Comrade Commander Muliloh. That meant someone must have seen him leave the village. And that *someone* had reported what he had seen to the mabunu soldier in the helicopter.

'The area was still full of traitors… sell-outs.' The thought made Daniel very angry.

He listened to the disconnected noises of the spreading battle. The sound of gunfire was all around. The rattle of disjointed bursts of automatic weaponry came to him from here, there, and everywhere. The sounds told him that

those of his men who had survived the initial attack had dispersed. He was pleased about that. They had a better chance in a running fight.

He wondered how Anna was faring.

Comrade Motoh had disappeared. The helicopter crew searched the local villages for a woman wearing a blue skirt and a blue blouse with red flecks. They found nothing.

The fire force commander could not afford to use two of his gunships in a game of hide and seek for long. Soon both machines were recalled to assist with the many scattered contacts that were taking place across an ever expanding battle zone. All he could hope for now was that his troops would pick up Muliloh and his woman when they swept the contact area after the battle.

At seven o'clock the air force ground support unit arrived in two mine-protected lorries. Ahead of the lorries ran a mine-detector *'pookie'* – a special light-weight vehicle that would not detonate a landmine. Its purpose was to pick up the existence of any piece of metal on or in the ground beneath the wide metal-detector plates attached to its chassis. The lorries carried drums of fuel and ammunition for the helicopters; and ammunition for the soldiers. Later in the morning yet more vehicles came to the village. Hugh Ritchie was in one of them.

The fire-force commander set up a mini-JOC at Village Alpha. There the Alouettes landed and refueled… and re-armed… at regular intervals, using a part of the open field as an LZ right next door to where Daniel lay hidden. An ample fuel supply allowed all six aircraft to remain airborne, in support of the intermittent ground actions that erupted from time to time, throughout the day.

All day long Daniel lay quiet and immobile… watching and listening to all that was going on about him. Throughout the day heavily armed soldiers came and went from the battle command post, many of them walking right past ZANLA's sectorial commander. Nobody saw him. Nobody was looking for a terrorist in hiding so very close to the SF combat headquarters. By the end of the day the contacts were scattered and each battle site was swept clean by the attacking SF forces.

Daniel's emergency bolt hole had proved to be an entirely satisfactory hiding place.

Chapter 49

JUST before sunset a helicopter, returning from a brief battle in the hills, flashed over a low knoll at tree top height. All around were broken rugged hills. The chopper surprised a lone African woman hurrying along an isolated foot path. Taken by surprise, she stopped and dashed behind the trunk of a large tree next to the path. Too late! The pilot had seen her. She was ten miles from Village Alpha and in the middle of nowhere. The path quite obviously connected two long village lines in parallel river valleys and she was moving from the one group of villages to the other.

The aircraft flew straight past.

The woman was clearly not an armed terrorist so she was of no particular interest to the airman. The pilot, nevertheless, was nagged by the fact that she was alone… and that she was still deep in the bush close after sunset. It was impossible that she could make the next village line before the onset of the curfew.

Then he remembered hearing the description of Comrade Motoh early that morning. He turned his machine around, precipitously, earning some caustic remarks from his technician, and he flew back to have a better look at the woman.

She had disappeared.

It did not take the pilot long to relocate her, however, because the dominant pale blue colour of her clothes was in striking contrast to the dark green foliage of the thick bush under which she was crouching.

He hovered over the woman, just fifty feet above her, and he examined her clothing.

“One-Nine. This is Cyclone Yellow-Five. Over.”

“Yellow-Five. One-Nine. Go. Over.”

“One-Nine. Can I speak to Sunray. Over.”

There was a pause.

“Yellow-Five. One Nine. Sunray speaks. Go. Over.”

“One-Nine. Confirm the description of Comrade Motoh. Was she wearing a pale blue skirt and a dark blue blouse with red motifs? Over.”

“That is affirmative. Yellow-Five. Over.”

“Roger, One-Nine. I have a woman visual at this time. Her clothes match

that description. Over."

"Where are you Yellow-Five. Over."

"Standby," The pilot quickly worked out the coordinates from the map on his knee. He transmitted a six figure map reference back to the command post.

"Standby Yellow-Five. I'll just plot your position on the map."

In thirty seconds the captain was back on the air. "That's in the middle of nowhere, Yellow-Five. Where is the woman now. Over."

"Crouching twenty feet away under my nose, One-Nine. Over."

"Is she alone, Over."

"Affirmative."

"O.K. Yellow-Five. I'm going to send another cyclone with an army stick to assist you. I really would like to take this woman alive. Are their LZ possibilities there? Over."

"There are lots of rocks and trees and bushes around, One-Nine. We may have trouble finding an LZ. Over."

Both the pilot and the technician began looking for a suitable place where a helicopter could land. It was not going to be easy.

Just at that moment the woman erupted from her cover and began running along the path.

"She's off…" the pilot shouted over the radio.

He gave chase, finding and keeping a steady position just above and behind his quarry. She looked back once at her hovering Nemesis. Then she ran on.

"What's happening Yellow-Five? Over."

"One-Nine. We've still got her visual. She's running along the path now… but she can't get away. How quickly can you get your support group here? Over."

"Fifteen minutes. Twenty at the most. They're scrambling right now. Over."

"The light's fading fast, One-Nine. I don't think we've got fifteen minutes… And my fuel is getting low. Over."

There was a pause. "O.K. Yellow-Five. Keep your position for as long as you can. If you have to break off… or if the light gets too bad… pull her… Take her out. Over."

"And if it's not Motoh?… If she's just a tribal woman from one of the villages? Over."

“Tough shit… She'll be shot breaking the curfew. Your orders are to take her out rather than lose her. Is that clear? Over.”

“Affirmative. One-Nine. Affirmative. Over.”

The woman began walking… working her way from one thick clump of trees to the next. Periodically she waited… resting… leaning her back against the far-side of a large tree trunk. Then she moved on. She was clearly getting used to the helicopter following her as she moved through the bush. She was gaining confidence by the minute.

All the while the light was fading. Dusk turns to darkness precipitously in tropical Africa but both the pilot and the technician could still see the woman clearly. Her pale blue skirt shone like a beacon in the gathering gloom.

The in-coming helicopter was still six minutes out when the technician's voice burst excitedly on the pilot's eardrums.

“There she goes… She's stripped off her clothes. She's running like hell, naked, back along the path behind us… Slimy son of a bitch.”

The pilot looked down into the dark shadows beneath the tree canopy. He could still see the pale blue skirt. But now he realised that it had been fastened to the tree trunk that the woman had been standing behind.

“Quick… Turn round or we'll lose her. She's taken off her clothes, I tell you. She's running starkers.”

The pilot needed no further urging. He spun the machine round on its axis and retraced his route back up the path. *“She's gone,”* the technician said with exasperation. *“I saw her right here just a second ago… She must be here somewhere, dammit… Wait… There she is. She's standing behind that big tree over there.”* The tech pointed over the pilot's shoulder to where he could see her naked form peering at them from behind a thick black tree trunk.

The helicopter hovered directly over her. She broke cover again and began running through the jumbled woodland. Her brown naked body was difficult to see now in the ever darkening twilight.

The pilot realised then that he could wait no longer. If he did not act quickly he was going to lose her. *“Rupert…”* he said quietly to his tech. *“Take her out.”*

The pilot turned his aircraft sideways-on to the fleeing figure beneath him… sliding the machine gently across the hillside… giving his side-kick

the best opportunity at the running… weaving… target.

There was one short burst of fire from the two machine-guns. The woman crashed to the ground. Her body lay kicking convulsively on the hillside below.

“She's dead,” the tech said. “Shuwah… Shuwah.”

There was no question about it. She was dead all right. The pilot pulled on the collector, pushed down on his left rudder pedal, and simultaneously opened the throttle. The aircraft lifted and turned smoothly for Village Alpha.

“One-Nine. This is Cyclone Yellow-Five. Over.”

“Yellow-Five. One-Nine. Sunray speaks. Go. Over.”

“Roger One-Nine. The subject is dead. I repeat. The subject is dead. The light was getting too bad. We had to take her out. Over”

“Damn!” the captain said passionately as he handed the handset back to his radio operator. *“Tell both the choppers to come home, Jack. Yellow-Five can pick up the body in the morning.”* The radio operator began transmitting the captain's message.

“Damn!” the C.O. said again to his second-in-command. *“I wanted that bitch alive.”*

“Better dead with us than alive with ZANLA,” his lieutenant intoned wisely.

“True… True.” The captain agreed. Then he smiled. “What the hell am I down in the dumps for? We've just had a hugely successful battle… and we've killed Chaminuka's infamous sectorial political commissar.”

It had, indeed, been a great day ending with a gigantic coup.

Comrade Motoh was dead.

Chapter 50

“FORTY eight dead. Six wounded and captured. Two captured unwounded. That's not a bad tally.” Three days later Hugh Ritchie was still jubilant at the results of Operation Crucible.

“That's fifty six fewer gooks out there. And all of them sectorial or detachment rank officers.”

“Against three scouts dead and five wounded,” Major Don Higgins lamented. He did not like post mortem sessions which included such statistics.

“We've got to be realistic, Don,” the JOC commander said soberly. “We can't expect to go into battles like Crucible and not suffer casualties.”

“I suppose so. I guess I'm really disappointed because we didn't get Muliloh.”

“Nor, so it transpires, did we get our lady friend, Motoh. Just what happened there, Hugh?”

“Simple… The woman we killed was wearing Motoh's clothes… but it wasn't her.”

“Are the men who identified Motoh in the first place quite sure that this woman… the one that we killed… was not the one they saw leaving the huts that morning?”

The three men were sitting in comfortable easy chairs in the brigadier's office. They were relaxed and had drinks in their hands. The post mortem, as usual, was developing into a constructive brain-storming session.

The major shook his head. “No Tom… The woman they saw in the village was Motoh, all right. And the man was Muliloh. The man who identified Motoh… one of my chaps in the O.P. knows her. He actually trained with her at ZANLA's Mgagao camp in Tanzania.”

“He's an ex-terr? A gook?”

The major nodded. He was well aware of the distaste the brigadier felt towards the Selous Scouts' practice of employing *turned* terrorists. He did not comment on that issue, however, but added*: “He's totally reliable.”*

“And the prisoners as well as the villagers confirm that both Motoh and Muliloh spent the night together in the sabooku's hut, Tom.” Hugh Ritchie clinched the argument. “There is no doubt about that. It was them all

right."

"So what happened? How come they slipped through our fingers?"

"We can only guess… The woman we killed was a gook who went by the Chimurenga name of Marilyn Monroe." Hugh Ritchie laughed derisively. "She was a fairly low-key political commissar of the Mazoe detachment… based in the Madziwa mine area. One of the captives was from the same detachment, and he identified the body positively."

"So Motoh and this woman… this Marilyn Monroe character," the C.O. smiled wryly at the flamboyant nom de guerre, "must have both escaped from the contact area. And somewhere along the way they met up and changed clothes?"

"It's a common enough practice… gooks changing clothes… Tom." Hugh continued. "As you know, they often wear three or four different coloured shirts and up to three pairs of trousers at the same time. And when the SF have seen them… and are in hot pursuit… the gooks discard one layer at a time to confuse their pursuers."

"BUT…" the major added, "both Hugh and I believe that this time our friend Motoh had a much more sinister motive."

"You mean she set the woman up? She was a patsy."

"Precisely," the major said. "She was a decoy. We think that Motoh realised that someone… a villager maybe or a captured gook… would sooner or later tell the SF what clothes she had been wearing. So we believe that… after escaping from Village Alpha… our friend Motoh was quite desperate to find someone who would change clothes with her. She was lucky to find another female gook who would do so without being too suspicious of her intentions. And Motoh held the rank, of course. The woman probably was given no option."

"So our Miss Monroe was a sacrificial lamb?"

Both men nodded.

Hugh Ritchie took several long glugs of his cold beer. "There are no flies on our friend, Motoh," he said with grudging admiration. "And once she had on her new camouflage she simply disappeared into the woodwork."

The brigadier snuffled. *"You've got to admit. Her plan worked."* He shook his head. He, too, couldn't help but admire the woman. *"She just disappeared?"*

"Yaah… Ssssptt," Hugh Ritchie said, expressively snapping his fingers. *"Like a puff of steam in the air."*

“And Muliloh? What happened to him?”

“Gone… the same way. He just disappeared into thin air, too. But…” Hugh added quickly and with emphasis, “we know he was in the bag that morning. He was definitely in the bag. But somehow he, too, slipped through our fingers.”

“Together with about forty other gooks,” the brigadier added unhappily. “I suppose we can't expect one hundred percent results everytime. And we did well enough. Fifty six is not a bad head count and they were all high-ranking officers.”

“But we missed the big fish, Tom,” the major said disappointed. He wagged his right index finger in emphasis.

“Two big fishes… If you count Motoh,” the JOC commander added.

“We'll have better luck next time.”

“Which brings us to the question of a next time.” Tom Hubbard was keen to bring the conversation round to their next move. “Have you guys got any bright ideas about what we should do now?”

“We keep the area frozen,” the major said immediately. The brigadier frowned. He had assumed he would now be able to begin normal patrolling in what had been the Crucible freeze area. It was particularly important that his ground coverage boys be allowed back in. The area had only been frozen to effect the execution of the Crucible operation.

“Don and I have thrashed this idea out at some length, Tom,” Hugh Ritchie said. “Our O.P. was not blown… so we left it in position. We think Muliloh will believe that someone in the village is a sell-out… that someone in the village passed on to us information about his long planned sectorial meeting… Hence the SF attack. We are sure he will be back in the area… and soon. After the drubbing we gave him he will be looking to save face. He will be looking for scapegoats.

“It’s happened at the detachment level after nearly every successful contact we've had. The ZANLA detachment commanders have nearly always… sooner or later… returned to the scene and conducted a witch hunt… smelled out the evil spirits. Someone is nearly always identified as a sell-out and he, or she, is then executed… or mutilated.

“We do not believe that things will be any different at the sectorial command level.”

The brigadier's face brightened. “By God… You know, I think you might just be right. Muliloh might come back.”

“In anticipation of your agreement, Tom,” Hugh said… encouraged… “we have not brought anyone in for questioning. As you know, whenever we have a major contact at a village we normally bring in the whole caboodle for some intensive interrogation. This time we questioned the locals only briefly in the field… and we have left everybody in place.”

“The villagers are the bait?” The JOC commander nodded his head with understanding. He chewed on his lower lip thoughtfully. “You realise, of course, that if your new trap works you've sentenced someone in that village to death… probably the old headman. Maybe the whole village. I don't have to remind you that Muliloh has wiped out a whole village once before. If he comes back at all it will be to make an object lesson of that village.”

“We considered that, Tom,” the SB man was clearly undeterred. “But whether we set a trap for Muliloh using the villagers as bait, or not, it’s not going to make any difference in the long run. If Muliloh wants to exact revenge it’s going to happen anyway… sometime.”

“True… That's true enough,” the JOC Commander conceded. “Poor bastards. These poor fucking tribespeople get it in the neck whatever happens.”

“It'll only stop when we put the protected village idea into operation,” Hugh Ritchie opined. “When we put the people into collective villages… when we put security fences around their villages and provide the people with armed guard units. Only then will the locals get a bit of peace and quiet.”

“Next financial year…” The C.O. asserted. “I'm reliably informed that we begin the protected village programme next April… and a minefield, too. We'll be laying anti-personnel mines between two fences all along the border. That'll slow ZANLA down when they move back and forth between here and Mozambique.”

“But that's not going to help us now, Tom. If we're going to catch the Butcher of Chaminuka we're going to have to hang the old sabooku from Village Alpha, out to dry.” Hugh Ritchie was totally dispassionate about the idea.

Tom Hubbard sighed. *“Poor old bastard.”*

It was a callous plan. Knowing… or believing… that Muliloh and his blood-thirsty louts would sure as hell come back to seek revenge for the successful SF attack. The government could protect the old man and his

family by shifting them to some other part of the country. That would be the civilised thing to do. But it would not put paid to Muliloh. And if they could just knock *him* off… that one man… half the war would be won.

"It takes a thief to catch a thief, Tom. If we're going to catch Muliloh we're going to have to think like him… and act like him." The SB man smiled sombrely.

"And behave without a soul… like him…" Tom sighed wryly.

Hugh Ritchie nodded.

"During Crucible we were able to resupply our O.P.," the major explained. "The men are set there now for another month if needs be."

"And they *are poor buggers, too. What a fucking job!"* Tom Hubbard shook his head at the thought of the four scouts stuck up on their hillside eyrie for yet another month.

"War's tough," the major grinned. "The men didn't complain."

"They are exceptional men," the brigadier opined.

"Sir… All my soldiers are good men… including the ex-gooks." The major's smile was challenging.

Tom Hubbard nodded. He didn't know how they did it, but the scout's use of captured ZANLA terrorists certainly seemed to work.

"O.K. Don… Hugh," The JOC Commander made up his mind. "You've got it. I'll keep the area frozen for another month. Just keep me posted."

The final die was now cast!

Chapter 51

TWO weeks after the *Crucible* battle the moon was in another cycle. The night was velvety black and the stars sparkled in the blue-black firmament overhead. The conditions were not conducive to night operations by anyone.

King Kong was on listening watch. He sat bored, half-asleep, his nylon sleeping bag wrapped tightly about his shoulders. Behind him he could hear the laboured breathing of his three companions. They were all fast asleep. Harry began snoring. Kong lobbed a pebble at him. It struck the white man's sleeping bag. Harry grunted. His snoring stopped.

The barking of village dogs alerted Kong. Someone was afoot in the village line. There were several dogs involved in the ruckus, all, so it seemed, in the first faraway village down the valley.

Presently the racket stopped and the silky silence of the night returned.

'One of the villagers out for a pee,' Kong thought.

He looked at the luminous dial on his watch. It said twenty minutes past eleven. Soon it would be midnight and his two hour duty would come to an end. Judas was the man scheduled to take the next shift. Kong would then be able to sleep right through until the dawn.

There came the sound of more dogs barking. This time it seemed a little closer. He guessed it came from the next group of family huts along the village line. Kong now listened more carefully. The bark of one dog was definitely much lower pitched than any from the first group. They were a different pack of dogs!

As before, the barking petered out. Absolute stillness returned to the night save for the monotonous calling of two nightjars in the faraway distance. A barn owl screeched as it flew along the hillside below the O.P. And there was the gentle, perpetual, sighing of the wind in the branches immediately above his head.

Kong waited expectantly… listening.

Another pack of dogs began barking… from what he judged was the third village along the track. Now he knew for sure. There was someone walking along the track on the valley floor.

He shuffled over to Harry. Gently he shook the white man's shoulder.

"Huh… What's up?"

"We've got a visitor, Harry. There's somebody walking up the valley."

Harry crawled out of his sleeping bag and, wrapping the warm nylon shroud around his shoulders, he joined his colleague on the outer edge of the crevice. Kong explained what he had heard… and what he surmised was happening. The barking of the dogs subsided.

They waited.

Bark… Bark… Bark. The next pack of dogs started up.

"Open up the dish and the mike," Harry commanded Kong in a whisper. "We'll try to confirm what's going on before we call the fort."

"Shall I wake…"

"No. Let them sleep. Let's see what we've got first."

Harry moved to the light-intensifying telescope pointing it into the black void beneath them. Looking through its powerful lens, despite the blackness of the night, he could see the trees, the bushes and the huts below him with absolute clarity.

He focused the telescope on the vacant track that led past the long line of family thatched hut complexes. The village where the dogs were now barking was too far off even for *this* powerful instrument. But whoever it was out there, if they *were* walking along the track, would have to come into his view sooner or later.

They waited. Kong holding the listening earphones tightly against his head… Harry with his face glued to the rubber eye-pad of the telescope.

"Zero… Two-Seven-Bravo. Come in please. Over."

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Zero. Go. Over."

"Zero. We have ten gooks visual. I repeat. We have ten gooks visual. Please advise Sunray. Over."

"Roger. Two-Seven-Bravo. Standby."

The radio went dead.

Harry looked down at the luminous green figures. They looked spectral in the strange light. He counted them again. Two men on the track far out in front. Six in the centre… including a woman. They presumed she was a woman because she was wearing a dress of some kind… a skirt maybe? Another two men, the rearguard, followed at a distance.

Six were armed with AK-47s. There was one RPG rocket launcher. Two RPD machine-guns. The woman appeared to be unarmed.

'Comrade Motoh?'

Far down the village line the dogs began barking again. And, even at that

distance, the sound of banging plank doors and of angry voices floated up to the hidden observers.

"What's going on, Kong?"

"I can only guess… I think there's a group of vakomana in the rear. They're waking up the villagers."

"They're going to hold a pungwe?"

"Looks like it," Kong agreed.

"A fucking kangaroo court… So you were right, Kong, you were right." The one-time ZANLA terrorist, now completely *turned*, was serving his new masters well! It had been his idea to remain in O.P.

"I just knew they'd come back." There was a ring of satisfaction in Kong's voice.

"Sunray will be pleased he listened to you… and SB."

The sound of someone blowing into the transmitter interrupted their discourse.

"Two-Seven-Bravo. This is Sunray Zero. Come in please. Over." Harry recognised the voice of his commanding officer.

"Zero. Two-Seven-Bravo."

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Confirm you have ten terrorists visual. Over."

"That is affirmative, Zero. They are proceeding to Village Alpha. There is one woman amongst them. Over."

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Can you confirm the woman is Motoh? Over."

"Negative, Zero. Negative. But it could be. Over."

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Confirm they are armed? Over."

"Affirmative, Zero. Mostly AKs. One RPG. Two RPDs. We have more to report. Over."

"Go ahead. Over."

"Zero… There are people talking and shouting farther down the village line. We believe there are more terrs in the rear. We think they are waking up everybody all along the village line for a pungwe. Over."

"Roger that Two-Seven-Bravo. Do you believe then that Campfire is a GO-GO? Over."

"Affirmative. Zero. Operation Campfire should be on red alert at this time. If we can confirm a pungwe it should go to green. Over."

"Roger, Two-Seven-Bravo. Campfire is on red as of this time. Anything

more to report? Over."

"Negative. Over."

"Roger Two-Seven-Bravo. I will remain personally on standby at Zero until green. Zero standing-by."

"Two-Seven-Bravo standing by."

Major Don Higgins laid the handset down on the radio operator's table. The grin on his face ached. He picked up the telephone on the desk.

"Get me the JOC Commander."

"Yes, Sir."

He waited.

"Tom?"

"Don? What fucking time is it?" The brigadier's voice was thick with sleep.

"Near as dammit to midnight."

"This had better be good then."

"Yaah," the major chuckled. "Sorry to get you up in the middle of the night. But Campfire is, as of now, on red alert. We anticipate going to green within half-an-hour."

"So he has come? Muliloh is there?"

"We think so. My guys have ten gooks visual at this time including one woman. They have just arrived in the Village Alpha line. But it seems there are others about who are waking up the villagers for a pungwe. If we can confirm a pungwe in the making, I'm putting Operation Campfire on green alert. I'll give you a buzz when that happens."

"I'm getting up now, Don… I'll be in the JOC ops room in five minutes. I've got a feeling in my water…"

"Zero… Two-Seven-Bravo. Over."

"Go ahead Two-Seven-Bravo. Sunray speaks. Over."

"Roger Zero. We can confirm the gooks are gathering the people together for a pungwe. The villagers are all being herded towards Village Alpha. Over."

"Roger Two-Seven-Bravo. How many additional terrorists can you confirm. Over."

"About twenty, Zero. About twenty at this time. But there are people coming in all the time. There are bound to be more terrs behind them…

herding them along. Over."

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Can you confirm a pungwe is in the making? Over."

"That is roger, Zero. One hundred percent affirmative. Over."

"Thank you Two-Seven-Bravo. As of this time Campfire is on green alert. I say again. Campfire is on green. H-Hour will be 05.30 hours. I am now proceeding to the fort ops room. Zero on standby."

Chapter 52

NEARLY two hundred people were gathered at the village. There were men and women and children… from teenagers to tiny infants strapped to their mothers' backs. *Everyone* in the old headman's village line had been mustered for the pungwe.

They were arranged in a tight half-circle. Those in front were sitting on the ground or squatting on their knees and heels. Those at the back stood, shoulder to shoulder, peering over the heads of their kinsfolk in front.

Behind the people there was a ring of angry ZANLA freedom fighters, their communist weapons trained onto the backs of the unwilling and terrified spectators.

The people… worried but still curious… all gazed in silent awe into the central arena. It was illuminated by seven paraffin storm lanterns… the lamps fixed to the tops of long roofing poles. The village men had pulled the poles from the shattered huts of the battle-scarred village and hurriedly tamped them into deep holes the terrorists had instructed them to dig in the ground.

The old sabooku, his snow white head glowing starkly in the amber light, sat crestfallen on a rickety plank chair in the middle of the stage. His skeletal hands fidgeted nervously in his lap. His rheumy eyes looked out from beneath downcast brows. They flitted from one familiar face to another in the tight-packed crowd. Behind him stood three ZANLA guerrillas… their faces grim… their AKs trained casually on the old man's back.

A press-ganged team of local men dragged a large and heavy log into the circle of light from somewhere in the darkness. They left it, as instructed, lying cross-wise in front of the old man's chair. Their labour done, the men retired into the throng of anxious villagers.

No one spoke, but the sounds of dry coughs and wet sniffs came from the gathered populace. And the people fretted and shifted their positions needlessly. Their silent activity betrayed their restless nervousness.

The scene was set but nothing happened. The people's anxiety grew.

Then, suddenly, Comrade Sectorial Commander Muliloh emerged from the darkness behind the old sabooku. Unlike his vakomana, who were all dressed in a variety of civilian clothes, he wore East German camouflage battle fatigues. A ZANLA combat cap sat at a rakish angle on his head. And his

AKM, with its steel-frame-butt folded, hung casually on its strap from one shoulder. Chinese chest webbing, containing four banana-shaped AK magazines, each packed with 28 rounds of ammunition for his AKM assault rifle, was fastened tightly around his upper torso.

An immaculate silence swamped the gathered throng. Even the nervous coughing ceased. Everyone's eyes focused fearfully on the dreaded *Butcher-of-Chaminuka.*

Muliloh walked authoritatively to centre stage. He stood in front of the old man's chair, his back to his selected victim and he glared at the mass of villagers before him.

"PAMBERI NE ZANLA." Forward with ZANLA. He shouted the guerrilla salute, thrusting a clenched fist into the air.

"PAMBERI NE ZANLA." The crowd responded automatically… loudly. A forest of clenched fists rose above the crowd.

Muliloh placed one foot on the log. He punched his own fist into the air again.

"PAMBERI NE CHIMURENGA." Forward with the Revolution.

"PAMBERI NE CHIMURENGA."

This time the people echoed the guerrilla commander's chant with even greater enthusiasm. Again their fists rose up in the black-power salute.

"PASI NE MARUNGU." Down with the white man.

"PASI NE MARUNGU."

"Zero. Two-Seven-Bravo. Over."

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Go. Over."

"Call Sunray to the set. Over."

"Standby."

Harry Tennyson waited impatiently. His eyes never left the eye-piece on the telescope.

"Two-Seven-Bravo. Zero. Sunray speaks. Go. Over."

"Roger Sunray. We have Muliloh visual at this time. He is addressing the pungwe. Over."

"Roger that Two-Seven-Bravo. Campfire is a Go-Go. H-Hour is still 05h30. But it's nice to have confirmation of our friend's presence. Are you sure it's him? Over."

"Affirmative… One hundred percent sure. We're even picking up his voice on the mike. Over."

“Roger. Maintain your surveillance. Over.”

“Zero… We might be able to snivel in quietly and take him out. Over.”

The major thought deeply about that suggestion. It might just be worth it to make sure they got Muliloh. He'd be a prize kill even if his men only got *him*.

“Two-Seven-Bravo. Has he posted sentries? Over.”

“Affirmative.”

“How far out from the pungwe are they positioned? Over.”

“Standby.”

Harry shifted the telescope and located the nearest guard. He was lying prone behind an RPD machine-gun on bi-pod legs, facing outward from the village. Harry calculated the distance between the man and Muliloh. *A hundred and fifty yards!* The next sentry along was about the same distance out. So was the third picket that he could see. He knew there were others but he could not see them.

“Zero. About a hundred and fifty yards. Over.”

“Two-Seven-Bravo. That means you'd have to take a poke at him from about 300 yards. Over.”

“Roger Zero. But I think I can take him from that range. I've got a good night-scope. Over.”

“Two-Seven-Bravo. Scrub it. Thinking is not good enough. Besides that, it’s pitch black outside. There's no knowing what noise you'll make coming down the hillside from your position. Maintain your O.P. We'll get the bastard when we spring Operation Campfire in the morning. Over.”

“Roger Zero. Two-Seven-Bravo standing by.”

Harry Tennyson was greatly disappointed. He looked at his watch. It was already ten minutes past two. It had taken time for Muliloh to muster all the reluctant spectators, and the time was galloping by.



Muliloh watched solemnly as the host of black fists slowly lowered into the sea of frightened faces. The pungwe had begun.

Daniel stood for a long time in complete silence. And, with cold dark eyes, he examined the anxious expressions on the faces that looked back at him.

“You all know,” Daniel began his harangue, “that the Mashona people hold the land sacred. Chinonyera is how we describe its sanctity.”

There was a murmur of agreement from the crowd.

“It is in the land that we bury our dead. It is in the land, and in the hills, and in the trees, and in the air, and in the waters of our land that the spirits of our ancestors roam.”

The people again concurred. Many in the crowd nodded their heads.

“The land belongs to everyone… and yet to no one. It is held in trust for the people by our elders… by our elected chiefs and sabookus…

whose duty it is to allot to each family enough land to grow their crops and enough grazing to feed their cattle."

Nobody disagreed. What the fearsome Muliloh said was all true. Visibly the people began to relax.

"You all know that many years ago the white man came to our country. He took the gold out of our hills and he took the best of the agricultural land for himself. And he divided the land into large farms. Some of these farms he gave away to the first white settlers who came to Mashonaland when the Ndebele king, Lobengula, was still alive. Lobengula gave our land to the mabunu… even though the land did not belong to the Ndebeles. In later years more farms were demarcated and these were sold by the Rhodesian government to the many white people who came afterwards. And those farms did not belong to the Rhodesian government either. They belonged to the Mashona people…

"That land was our land, comrades. All of it. It was the ancestral land of the Mashona people."

Muliloh's audience became now belligerently vociferous in their agreement.

"The marungus… the white men… did not bother to consult with the Mashona people about what they did with our land. They simply took it from us and they claimed it for themselves. And they were not at all concerned that they disturbed the resting places of our forefathers."

Daniel was a good orator. He could feel the crowd warming to his address.

"When the white men did this it angered the people. It angered the great mhondoro spirits. It angered the midzimu spirits of the villages, too. And the Svikiro Nehanda of that time, together with the Svikiro Kagubi, encouraged the people to rebel against the white people's occupation of their land. And they fought the first Chimurenga War to rid our land of the white invaders."

Everyone agreed. They knew their history.

"That was a long time ago," Daniel continued slowly. "That was in 1896… just three short years after the marungus defeated the Matabele impis in battle and sent King Lobengula to his grave in Pashu's country near the great Zambesi."

The crowd was now listening intently.

"The marungus defeated the Mashona people then… and they hanged the

Svikiro Nehanda… and the Svikiro Kagubi. The Svikiro Nehanda went to the gallows screaming abuse at the white men. And she swore that the great-spirit Nehanda would one day raise a big army and that this army would sweep the white man back into the sea from whence he had come."

Daniel paused to let that information sink in.

"That time has come, comrades… my friends. You all know that the great mhondoro spirit of our people, Nehanda, has given her support to ZANLA. ZANLA is the army about which that old svikiro spoke so very long ago. And the Mbuya Nehanda, when she was alive, told your chiefs and sabookus that the people should support ZANLA because the vakomana of ZANLA are the soldiers of Nehanda.

"And your midzimu spirits have consistently confirmed all this."

Muliloh was getting to the point of the pungwe and the people sensed it. A new tension gripped the air.

"Some of us forget that the mbuya also said that the vakomana of ZANLA would be the spear of Nehanda… and that anyone who did not support her soldiers would feel the sharpness of that spear."

The crowd was now cowed… hushed. Daniel waited. His malevolent, threatening glare canvassed the anxious faces in front of him. The people averted their eyes fearfully.

"My friends… comrades… ZANLA is here to liberate you from the slavery of the white man. You are oppressed even though many of you don't know it."

He paused.

"We are six million black people in this country," he said in explanation, "and the whites are only two hundred-and-fifty thousand. Yet they own more than half the land. And the land they claim as their own has the richest soils in all Zimbabwe. And even if you had the money, none of you people here could buy a farm. Land ownership is reserved for the white man. The black people of this country cannot own land… They cannot buy land even though it already belongs to them."

Daniel paused again. The silence was complete.

"The whites have big and modern schools," he continued ponderously, "and for their children education is free. It is compulsory for white children to attend those schools. By contrast, we have very few schools. They are grossly inferior and we have to pay school fees. Less than one in a thousand of our children ever have the chance of attending high school."

Again Muliloh paused.

"The marungus have modern hospitals… even in the smallest towns… to which we Mashona do not have access. Comrades… You all know that even if you are dying, the marungus will not treat you in one of their whites-only hospitals. Only in Salisbury and in Bulawayo are there hospitals that are especially reserved for us black people. Most of us have to be satisfied with simple rural clinics when we are sick… which are too few and too far away from where most of our people live."

All this was true, BUT…

In all his rhetoric, Daniel studiously avoided mentioning the fact that the country was barely eighty years old; that it had been elevated from a state of pagan savagery to a modern Christian state in that short time solely because of the white man's ingenuity and enterprise; that all the developments… including the schools and clinics and modern hospitals for the country's black people… were paid for solely by monies derived from white tax-payers; that his audience paid no income tax whatsoever; and that economic reality dictated that the country's social and welfare advancements could only progress in concert with its material development capabilities.

The white man's pocket was not a bottomless pit!

There were huge natural and understandable cultural differences between the races, too. And a gigantic chasm existed between their respective standards of living that would take, at the least, another two generations to fully bridge… another fifty years! The Rhodesian government understood these issues and it had declared that it was trying to achieve social and racial equality, but that it could not happen overnight. The elevation of Rhodesia's black majority to the white man's standards could only happen through a process of slow evolution.

The run-of-the-mill black man, on the other hand, had not asked to be elevated to the white man's standards. He was quite happy just being himself. All he truly wanted was equal treatment and equal opportunity… particularly for his children. And he wanted it quickly… yesterday… and because the white man's progress in this regard was tardy, the black political leaders of the day had chosen revolution as the means to achieve their ends.

The reality of the overall socio-political situation in Rhodesia at that

time was, to be candid, a parody of enigmatic contradictions. On the one hand, it was a product of lethargic historical traction… things took time to develop in a young and pioneering country. Economically and socially the system could not be pushed… or it would break down. On the other hand, political reality dictated that the white man would procrastinate with the advancement of the country's long term socio-political objectives at his peril. It was a truly vexing problem. It was a classic catch twenty-two situation. In the end it was Africa's irresistible whirl-wind of change that dictated the final outcome.

To admit to, or attempt to rationalize, any of these truths, however, would have negated Daniel's purpose. Nevertheless, despite these socio-economic realities, what he said about racial inequality in the country was true, and he well knew that the black people were hypersensitive to these perceived iniquities. Muliloh was careful, therefore, to project only those political issues that were hot… those that supported his argument.

Daniel glared now at his congregation, forcing the people's attention.

"There are also no senior jobs for black people in this country… in Zimbabwe. Think about that. We Mashona cannot become officers in the government's civil service… or in the army… or in the police. And we cannot become the soldiers who drive the ndeges… the aeroplanes… that we see in the sky.

"And… what is, perhaps, more important than all these things… the black majority has no say in how our country should be governed… except through those representatives the white man has appointed… representatives who are stooges of the white man.

"None of us has a vote, my friends. We cannot elect the people we ourselves want to represent us in government.

"All the marungu wants us black people for, is to do the lowly jobs that the white man does not want to do himself. And he pays us slave wages for any work that we do perform."

Once again the people warmed to the ZANLA commander. They agreed with all he was saying. He was causing their emotions to rise… and to fall… like an erratically jerked yo-yo. But the underlying tension remained. The atmosphere of the pungwe was vibrant.

"None of you can deny any of these things. You know that all I have said is true. And you know that ZANLA is fighting to change all these things.

ZANLA will lift the yoke that the white man has placed on the backs of all your necks. And when ZANLA wins this war, we will give the top jobs in government… in the army… in the police… and in the air force… to the black people of Zimbabwe. We will have more hospitals. And all our children will be given a proper and free education. Only ZANLA can do these things for the Mashona people… for the new Zimbabwe. For ZANLA is truthfully the army of the people. So you will agree that anyone who is an enemy of ZANLA is an enemy of the people."

Daniel looked appraisingly over the people before him. Their silence was suddenly deafening. He waited for a voluntary reaction. None was forthcoming. The people now knew that the purpose of the pungwe was about to be exposed… And they were fearful.

"DO YOU AGREE?" He shouted at them.

"WE AGREE." The response was immediate… powerful.

Daniel smiled maliciously.

"Very well then, my friends… so now I need you to help me. I need you to help me identify an enemy of the people."

An icy hush came over the gathered villagers. The crux of the pungwe was at hand. The people's fear could not be denied. It was manifest in their total silence.

"You all know that two weeks ago there was a great battle fought here at this village."

There was a rumble of assent.

"A great many vakomanas were killed in that battle."

Nobody said a word.

"As you all know, the commanders of ZANLA were due to have a meeting here… and someone from your village line told the mabunu soldiers about that meeting. That was why we were attacked."

Silence.

"Would you say that ZANLA would be justified in calling that someone an enemy of the people… a sell-out?"

There was a muttered response.

"I asked you," Daniel repeated angrily and louder. *"…I asked you if you think that person was a sell-out?"* To get an answer from the villagers was like pulling teeth.

"YES."

"Good… Well then… Let me tell you how it happened…" Daniel moved to

the side of the sabooku's chair. He looked at the petrified old headman but spoke to his audience.

"On the afternoon before the meeting was due to take place," he said, articulating his words carefully, "four mabunu soldiers visited this village. They spoke to your sabooku here."

The old man was shaking visibly. He tried to focus his eyes on a knot on the log in front of him. But they were wild eyes and they wandered everywhere.

"What is your name, Mdala?"

"Peter Chikamba." The man's voice quavered thinly.

"PETER CHIKAMBA," Daniel repeated the man's name loudly… theatrically.

"Well then comrades… the mabunu soldiers spoke to the man you know as Peter Chikamba. The man who is seated here, right now, before you. He is your sabooku."

The ZANLA Sectorial Commander hesitated. The tension heightened.

"Nobody heard what Peter Chikamba said to the mabunu soldiers," Daniel continued slowly. "But whatever it was, they used their voice-box to tell Chikamba's story to their soldier chiefs."

A hum of incredulous mutterings erupted from the gathering.

"Then comrades…" Daniel continued. *"Then the mabunu soldiers left in a very great hurry… In fact they almost ran away over the open field."* Daniel pointed in the direction of the nearby ploughed land. But all the while he continued to look down fiercely at the old man.

"Isn't that right Peter Chikamba?"

"I told them nothing about ZANLA." The sabooku was recovering his courage. His voice was resolute.

"Then why did they so suddenly and so hurriedly leave the village? From what I have been told they did not even wait to finish their conversation with you?"

"Their voice box told them to leave. It said that a helicopter was coming to a certain place to pick them up."

"So you understand the language of the mabunu, Peter Chikamba?"

"A little… Enough."

"And what else did the voice box say? And what did the soldiers say into the voice box?"

"I don't know. I did not understand it all."

“But you did understand enough to know that a helicopter was coming to pick up the mabunu soldiers at a place that must have been somewhere south of the village… for that is the direction they headed when they left here.”

“Yes.”

“In fact, comrades,” Muliloh turned to address the crowd. “ZANLA knows that the mabunu soldiers were picked up by a helicopter that same evening in the next valley… on the other side of these hills.” He pointed southward.

“Now… I wonder if any of you can tell me why the mabunus did not send a helicopter to the village to pick up the soldiers right here? Here at this village? After all… there is a big open field right next to the village where they could easily have landed a helicopter… In fact, they landed all their helicopters here during the battle two weeks ago.”

Silence.

“I'll tell you why, comrades. The mabunus did not send a helicopter to this village because Peter Chikamba here told those white soldiers about ZANLA's meeting…”

“NO… NO… THAT IS NOT TRUE,” Chikamba blurted.

“They knew,” Muliloh continued… ignoring the sabooku's outburst… “that if they sent a helicopter here it would have disturbed the vakomana who were already gathered in the thick bush behind the village… and because it might have caused us to abort the meeting. The mabunus wanted us to stay here that night so they could attack the vakomana in the morning… which, as we all know, is precisely what they did.”

“GHAWWWW.” A chorus of disbelief swelled out from the crowd. It was an indictment.

‘The people believe *Muliloh!’* Anna, who was standing nearby amongst the people, experienced an enormous thrill. Goose pimples ran up-and-down her arms and up-and-down her spine. She felt immensely proud of her husband.

The sabooku looked at Muliloh sadly. He shook his head. *“I told the mabunu soldiers nothing about ZANLA,”* he protested his innocence quietly… adamantly.

“I, COMRADE SECTORIAL COMMANDER MULILOH OF ZANLA,” Muliloh's voice thundered loudly, “ACCUSE YOU, PETER CHIKAMBA, SABOOKU OF THE CHIKAMBA VILLAGE LINE, OF BEING A TRAITOR TO YOUR OWN PEOPLE… AND TO ZANLA… YOU ARE A

SELL-OUT."

The old man shook his head slowly in denial.

"HOW SAY YOU… THE VILLAGERS OF THE CHIKAMBA LINE? IS YOUR SABOOKU GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?"

The silence was stunning. Suddenly confronted by the fact they were being required to find their next Midzimu spirit guilty of treason was a challenge with which none of them wanted to be involved… especially since it seemed that Peter Chikamba's ascendance into the spirit world was imminent.

Daniel marched up and down in front of the crowd. His fury was tangible.

"Answer me, damn you," Muliloh said quietly… menacingly, "… Or I shall pronounce you ALL guilty."

The people were shocked. Dumbfounded!

"IS PETER CHIKAMBA A SELL-OUT?"

"YES… Yes… Yes… YES… YES" The response was unconvincing.

"I'll give you one more chance," Muliloh's voice was icy. "IS PETER CHIKAMBA A SELL-OUT?"

"YES!"

This time the answer came back strongly… as one unified voice… as a roar. It illustrated a point. At the pinnacle of the confrontation the people's fear of Muliloh was far greater than their fear of the Mudzimo spirits.

Daniel turned on the old sabooku then. His eyes blazed cruelly from his glistening black face. Softly he said to his accused: "Your treachery cost ZANLA many lives, old man. The men who died were my friends. My vengeance… and ZANLA's vengeance… will be sweet. I intend to make sure that the people of your village line will never forget your death this night."

The old sabooku looked the ZANLA commander in the eye. *"I did nothing against you… or against ZANLA,"* he said quietly and quite calmly now.

"Hah!" Muliloh retorted. "Lies will not save you now, old man."

The ZANLA commander turned to the people and pronounced: "You… the people of this village line… have found the accused, Peter Chikamba, guilty of crimes against ZANLA… guilty of crimes against his own people. It is now my duty to sentence this man to death.

"As the Mbuya Nehanda once said, those amongst you who become sell-outs… those who become the enemies of the people… will suffer the vengeance of the great-spirit Nehanda. They will feel her spear which is

carried by the vakomana of ZANLA."

"THE GREAT SPIRIT NEHANDA DESERTED ZANLA A LONG TIME AGO," the old sabooku said loudly to his people, rising proudly and defiantly to his feet.

There was a serenity… a majesty… about the old man that commanded respect. He understood he was going to die, but he was determined to go down with his flag flying proudly.

"You talk of the great spirit Nehanda as though you owned her." he said more quietly to Muliloh. "But nobody owns the mhondoro spirits of the Mashona people. And she will cut you down, too, as surely as you will kill me here tonight…"

The flat of Muliloh's hand caught the frail old man a resounding blow on the side of his head. It sent him reeling backwards. He fell to the ground stunned.

"Joe Chikamba," Muliloh spoke into the crowd. *"Come forward."*

A frail middle-aged black man stood up from amongst the crowd. He looked hesitantly at the guerrilla leader.

"Come forward," Daniel commanded… beckoning with his hand. The man threaded his way through the women and the children that sat in front of him.

"Jacob Chikamba."

Another man stood up.

"Come forward."

Slowly, gingerly, the second man came forward, too.

"Sam Chikamba…"

"Petros Chikamba…"

"Jairos Chikamba…"

Peter Chikamba had five sons. They ranged in age from sixty years old to about forty. They stood now, shaking with fear, in the centre of the arena dominated by the awesome presence of the notorious ZANLA commander.

At that moment ten guerrillas came out of the darkness behind Muliloh. They formed a threatening ring around the new actors on the stage. The fighters were all armed with AK-47's, the shiny fixed bayonets of which gleamed in the pale yellow light. And the sharp points of the blades hovered menacingly, inches from the brothers' midriff spines.

"Longhisah yena…" Prepare him… Daniel commanded, flicking his head briefly towards the old man.

Two of the ZANLA men effortlessly picked up the dazed old sabooku from where he had fallen. They threw his stick-like body viciously down next to the log. Each grabbed one of his ankles. They swivelled and dragged him roughly into a position that left him lying on his back with his lower legs resting over the heavy log. They let go of his ankles. And they resumed their menacing position behind the old man's frightened sons.

"You… You," Daniel indicated two of them. "Kneel down and hold your father's feet."

The two selected brothers hesitated. They looked at each other. They looked back at the ZANLA commander… bewildered.

"DO IT… NOW!" shouted Muliloh.

Both men jerked forward as the tips of bayonets jabbed into the thick muscles of their lower backs. They collapsed next to the log on their knees and they took a tentative hold of their father's ankles. Blood flushed through the backs of both men's shirts… but they were oblivious to their wounds.

"You… You… Come round here and hold down his body." This time the selected brothers did not wait to feel the sharp pricks of the bayonets. They stepped over the log and arranged themselves over their father's sprawled out body. Their wild eyes searched his face for some kind of guidance. What they saw astounded them.

Peter Chikamba appeared quite calm. Somehow he had guessed what was going to happen, and his mind had shut itself off from the terror of the moment. His body was quivering with anticipation, but… like a buffalo that has been caught by a lion… his scrawny flesh was swamped with numbing endocrines from his brain. They would blank off much of the pain and the horror that he now knew was about to come.

Sam Chikamba was the last son standing. He was the youngest and the strongest of the five brothers. Muliloh chose him for the most terrible task of all. The man was standing alone now… forlorn… within the ring of ZANLA freedom fighters. Nervous tics twitched the muscles on his face.

A malevolent glee shone in the ZANLA leader's eyes as he looked upon Sam Chikamba. He held his right hand out sideways from his body and snapped his fingers imperiously.

Muliloh's heart still ached for all the good men he had lost in the Village Alpha battle. His personal revenge for the old man's treachery was, indeed, going to be sweet and salutary.

A terrorist emerged out of the darkness carrying a heavy felling axe. The ZANLA commander took it from him. He hefted the axe in both his hands. And he ran the ball of his thumb along the carefully honed edge of the blade. He could have shaved with it… and he smiled his approval. The old sabooku kept his tools in immaculate condition.

Muliloh handed the axe to Sam Chikamba. Then he stepped back a short, safe distance.

The silence was deafening. There was no doubt in anybody's mind now regarding Muliloh's intention. All the people's hearts beat furiously. Nobody moved. They were, to a man, mesmerised by the expectant horror of the moment.

"Chop his legs off," Muliloh commanded Sam Chikamba quietly.

One of the old man's wives, upon hearing the command, began to ululate… softly and gently. And in her mental torment she swayed backwards and forwards amidst the otherwise immobile throng. Her keening voice rose and fell eerily in the silence of the night.

A terrorist took one step into the crowd and, with the butt of his assault rifle, he clubbed the woman viciously on the temple. The blow instantly extinguished the disquieting sound. She fell backwards, unconscious, amidst her family. No one said a word. No one dared go to her aid. The apprehensive hiatus returned.

Sam Chikamba looked on helplessly. His eyes were wild with anguish and disbelief. *'This was surely not happening?'* He looked down at his father and saw the incredulous faces of his four brothers staring up at him. He looked past them, amazed, into the calm, sorrowful eyes of his father below.

"Do as the jackal says," his father said quietly. "His day will come. And when he goes to meet the spirits of his ancestors, he will have to atone for what he is about to do this night."

Sam Chikamba's chest heaved. His body shook violently. His face was blank. His eyes were wide and wild. Suddenly he turned on Muliloh the heavy weapon rising menacingly in his hands.

"NO!" The ringing voice of his father… instantly… urgently… commanded him. But it was the ring of threatening bayonets immediately surrounding him which halted the flow of Sam Chikamba's actions.

The swinging axe stopped… poised in mid-air.

And the axe man looked down at the steady phalanx of sharp and polished blades. They were all pointed at his ample waistline.

Slowly he lowered the axe. He stepped back from the ZANLA commander. The bayonets retreated.

Muliloh's smile was cynical… taunting. It made Sam's blood boil. But it was his terror that truly controlled his palpitating emotions.

"It will not help our family if you die, too, my son." The old man's voice was strangely calm. "Do as he says. I am old anyway. It is time that I joined the spirit world."

"I cannot do this, Baba," Sam said to his father. "I cannot cut off your legs."

Muliloh snapped his fingers. Immediately a wall of bayonets, silently, targeted on the exposed four backs of Sam's crouching, cringing brothers. Others were directed at his own midriff.

"You have a choice, Sam Chikamba," Muliloh's voice was cold, menacing. "Either you cut off the legs of this sell-out, or the five Chikamba sons will meet their ancestors before their father does."

"Do as he says, Samuel."

"I cannot, Baba. I cannot."

"He will kill me anyway, my son. I do not want to go into the next world accompanied by the spirits of my sons."

Sam Chikamba, big as he was, began to cry. Silently the tears poured down his face. His bladder opened, unconsciously, sending a deluge of hot urine running down the insides of his trouser legs. It puddled on the ground at his feet being immediately absorbed by the hard dry soil. It left a damp smudge on the sand. Everyone saw it. Nobody said a word. Huge sobs racked his heavy frame.

"*Cut off his legs*." Muliloh's voice was sharper, vicious now. He was growing impatient.

The ZANLA commander looked at one of his men. He flicked his eyes at one of the two brothers crouched over their father's body. The terrorist stepped forward. He casually stuck the point of his bayonet into the man's back. In the same fluid movement he ripped the blade upward.

There was a frightened, disapproving, murmur from the crowd.

The wounded man screamed. And he fell forward across the body of his father. But he recovered quickly. And sobbing, whimpering, he looked fearfully over his shoulder at the terrifying, resolute face of the ZANLA commander.

The blade had not penetrated deeply but the slashing thrust had opened up

the muscles on the man's back. Blood poured from the wound. It saturated the man's shirt and it ran in a stream onto the ground beneath his rump.

"I shall count to ten, Sam Chikamba. If you have not cut off this sell-out's legs by the time I stop counting, you will watch all your brothers die."

"ONE…"

The silence was tangible.

"TWO…"

"Do as the mpisi says, my son. This hyena will not himself see another day."

"THREE…"

"Muliloh…," the old sabooku addressed himself to his executioner. *"What you do not understand is that…"*

"FOUR…"

"…I will shortly become the new midzimu spirit of this village line."

"FIVE…"

"And when I am the midzimu I shall be able to speak directly…"

"SIX…"

"…with the mhondoro spirits."

"SEVEN…"

"And I shall speak to Nehanda about what…"

"EIGHT…"

"…you have done this night."

"NINE…"

"She will see to it that you join us quickly…"

"TEN…"

"…in the spirit world."

Four bayonets drew backwards in readiness for the fatal thrusts.

Samuel Chikamba roared out his fury… his anxiety… his fear… and his confusion. He lifted the big axe high and he brought it down hard and square on the naked shin bone of his old father's left leg. The blade severed the limb neatly and bedded itself deeply in the hardwood log beneath.

There was a horrified gasp from the crowd.

The old man's leg came away in the hand of the brother who had been holding it. The man fell back onto his buttocks, dropping the obscene twitching flesh as though it were leprous. He stared at it in disbelief as it lay in the dust, the severed muscles squirming in nervous reaction.

"AAIIEEEEE," the old man lamented loudly. The truncated part of his leg lifted off the log. It wavered hesitantly in the air, squirting away his life blood in two heavy, pulsing columns, drenching both of the men at his feet.

"Aghhh… Aghhh… Aghhh…" Disapproving exclamations burst again, involuntarily, from the horrified spectators. Blind now to all else about him and still roaring with his mental agony, Sam Chikamba twisted the axe handle. The embedded blade came free from the wood. He lifted it high into the air again and brought it down with all the skill of a practiced forester onto his father's second shin bone.

There was a loud *thunking* sound as the blade once again sank deeply into the wood. The leg sheared off just below the knee. And blood from the second amputation began to squirt across the stage.

The old man screamed. He wrestled furiously but with pathetic weakness, against the strength of his two sons who were holding him down. As he thrashed about, the stumps of his legs waved in the air, showering everyone in the vicinity with his crimson gore. The two brothers clung grimly to their father's tormented, contorting body. They were confused, bemused and terribly frightened, and they did not know what else to do.

Samuel Chikamba released the wooden shaft of the heavy axe and he collapsed onto his knees on the dusty ground. He began to bawl like a baby.

"FAKAH." PUT (the blades in). Muliloh's command was cold… callous.

Ten ZANLA freedom fighters turned on the sabooku's five sons. And, like sharks in a feeding frenzy, they plunged their bayonets into the backs, and into the bellies, and into the sides of their victims. Again and again and again.

The five men rolled over and over on the dusty ground, twisting, turning, writhing in their bid to escape the thrusting jabbing blades. And they shouted. And they screamed. And their blood, flowing copiously, mixed with that of their father's on the naked baked ground of the village enclosure.

The crowd watched… shocked… frozen. Many of them wanted to flee the horrible massacre. But one look at the menacing forms of the ZANLA men behind them was enough to keep them rooted to the ground.

Then it was over. The bodies lay silent, quivering, twitching on the ground. One stretched out a leg languidly, the toes splayed reflexively in the man's final throes of death. Blood leaked, or pulsed, or pumped from the myriad wounds.

The killers wiped the bloody blades of their bayonets on the clothes of

their victims. Then they stood back and silently, casually, faced the terror-stricken crowd.

An electrified, expectant, hush cloaked the gathering. “He whom you found guilty of being an enemy of the people has felt the spear of the great-spirit Nehanda,”

Muliloh intoned sombrely. “Never forget that it is ZANLA who carries that spear. And ZANLA has now punished the family of the sell-out Peter Chikamba.

“Let this be a lesson to you, my friends. The freedom fighters of ZANLA intend to win this war against the mabunu. And we are going to win it… for you… for the people of the new Zimbabwe. ZANLA is your army. ZANLA is the army of the people. And ZANLA cannot afford to allow you, the people, to harbour our enemies even if they are your relatives.”

There was a strange, nagging, urgency in Muliloh's heart now. He was inured to such killings but tonight he was restless. And he knew that tonight's executions were not the cause of the turbulence that boiled within his breast. He wanted desperately to get this night behind him.

At the back of his mind was the certain knowledge that there was a huge task of reconstruction ahead of him, and he felt ashamed of the outcome of the recent battle at Village Alpha. The mabunu had outwitted him. It was a major set-back… both politically and militarily… but he had to look ahead. The strength of ZANLA's Chaminuka Sector had to be rebuilt. His control over the people had to be restored. And he wanted to get on with those tasks without delay.

He also knew there was more to his inner disquiet than just those simple facts. In his heart he knew what it was. The old man had put a curse on him. He could not shrug it off and he felt strangely vulnerable.

Daniel looked at his watch. It was three-thirty-five. *‘Damn.’* It was later than he had realised.

“Comrades, my friends, I must leave you now,” he continued hurriedly. “If you value your lives do not report this matter to the mabunu for at least twenty-four hours. If any of my men are followed by marungu trackers tomorrow I will come back to find out why. Is that understood?”

“Yeboh… Yeboh… YEBOH.” The murmur of agreement was unconvincing. But Daniel had no time now to hype up their enthusiasm.

“I do not expect to have to come back here to teach you any more lessons about your loyalty to ZANLA. This must be the very last time.”

Silence.

"PAMBERI NE CHIMURENGA." Forward with the Revolution. Muliloh punched the air with his fist.

"PAMBERI NE CHIMURENGA." A forest of fists rose above the crowd. But the people's response was no longer enthusiastic. There was clearly an absence of passion.

"PAMBERI NE ZANLA." Forward with ZANLA.

"PAMBERI NE ZANLA."

Daniel wished he had more time. These people needed re-education. But he did not have time this night. Anna would have to deal with that matter later.

"PASI NE MARUNGU." Down with the white man.

"PASI NE MARUNGU."

"Muliloh…" a faint scraping voice issued from the scattered pile of bloody cadavers on the ground. The old sabooku was grey and bleeding rapidly to his death. But eternal darkness had not yet swamped his soul.

No one moved. Everybody had heard the old sabooku's call. The deafening silence was charged with a mysterious awe… for Chikamba's voice seemed to have come from the dead. Everybody listened.

Muliloh looked down at the shrivelled old body with its shortened legs and waxen face. Peter Chikamba was lying quite still now, a pool of viscous blood gathering where his feet once used to be. Only his eyes seemed still alive.

Mesmerised, the ZANLA commander stared into those lackluster orbs. He did not answer. But he listened.

"I shall be joining the spirit world in a few moments' time." The old man's face was shining with perspiration. He swallowed often. He exuded the coldness and the bleakness of death. "I want you to know that the first thing I shall do when I am dead, is to speak to Nehanda about what you have done this night."

"You are a fool old man. Nehanda will not speak with the spirit of a sell-out."

"But I am not a sell-out, Muliloh… I did not betray you… I did not betray ZANLA."

After his ordeal, when his life was almost over, the old man could *still* plead his innocence! A strange and foreboding coldness gripped at Daniel's

heart.

“With my last breath I promise you this, Muliloh… You will not see the setting of another sun. Before the coming day has turned to night, Nehanda will call upon you. And you will have to answer for all that you have done to her people.”

The ZANLA commander stared into the earnest face of the dying sabooku. At the very moment of his death he had reinforced the curse. Muliloh shivered. And as the light faded from the old man's eyes Daniel recognised a look of triumph in his victim's smile.

Peter Chikamba's head rolled to one side. And his eyes looked into the faraway night with a vacancy that told of his demise. His spirit had finally departed. It had entered the world of the dead. And an ominous churning in Muliloh's innards brought an icy sweat to his body.

“Hah! The old fool…” Muliloh turned brazenly back to the crowd.

The people were standing immobile… spell bound. They had heard and they had witnessed the whole affair. They did not scoff… as Muliloh had done… at the old man's dying statement. They understood that, with his last breath, Peter Chikamba had heavily loaded the Butcher-of-Chaminuka with a grievous malediction.

‘I must not show that I am affected,’ Muliloh thought. *‘I must not show weakness.’* But deep inside himself Daniel was quaking. He was thinking about his ancestral spirits. At that moment he was not sure what he believed. He was not sure at all. And he questioned himself: *‘What if the spirits are real?’*

Forcibly he pushed his growing panic aside.

“You may go back to your beds now, comrades… my friends.” Muliloh's words ruptured the bewitching moment. “The pungwe is over.”

The ZANLA fighters moved to one side. The people, shocked to the core of their very beings, began to disperse silently.

Chapter 53

“ZERO… Two-Seven-Bravo. Over.”

“Roger Two-Seven-Bravo. Go. Over.”

“Please advise Sunray the pungwe is breaking up. Over.” Within seconds Major Don Higgins was on the air.

“Two-Seven-Bravo. This is Zero. Sunray speaks. Confirm the pungwe is breaking up. Over.”

“That is affirmative. Over.”

The major looked at his watch. 03.52 hours. There was still over an hour and half to go to H-Hour.

“Confirm you still have Muliloh visual.” In the heat and urgency of the moment the major dispensed with formal radio procedure.

“Affirmative. He's still in the village. But the people are moving out… and lots of terrs are going with them. They are dispersing in different directions… bomb-shelling. Over.”

“Can you see Motoh? Over.”

“Negative. Haven't seen her since the beginning of the Pungwe. Female gooks have been conspicuous by their absence all night. Over.”

“Does Muliloh look as though he's going to leave? Over.”

“Not yet, Zero. He's talking to four other terrs behind the huts at this time. Over.”

“O.K. Two-Seven-Bravo. Look… We're banking on Muliloh and Motoh having a how-d'you-do before he moves out. SB tell us they never miss an opportunity when they get together like this. He normally leaves the village line at first light. And at the crack of dawn we're going to ring the target area… saturate it… with paratroopers. We'll also have eight cyclones there at H-Hour. Their job will be to find Muliloh. This time he won’t escape. Roger that so far. Over.”

“Roger… Zero. Over.”

“So… We want you to keep a sharp eye on Muliloh and Motoh. Note which hut they go into… and don't let your eyes leave that hut. Muliloh won't leave until the first rooster crows. Motoh normally stays in bed until it is fully light. So the first two cyclones to arrive will drop off troops to take her alive. You'll have to direct our chaps to the hut she's in. And you'll have to tell the fire force commander where Muliloh went, too. Roger that? Over.”

“Roger. Over.”

“That's it. The success of Campfire depends on your observations now, Two-Seven-Bravo. Keep me posted. The minute Muliloh makes a move, let me know. Over.”

“Roger Zero. Wildo. Two-Seven-Bravo standing by.”



Daniel broke away from his headquarters group and moved over to where Anna was waiting for him. She was standing in the darkness behind one of the huts.

“I've got to go, Anna. It’s getting on for four o'clock. I want to be across the border by first light.”

“You're not staying? I've got a hut organised for us down the line.”

“No. Not this time, Anna.”

“But”

“No buts, Anna. I've got this feeling in my gut that tells me I must go. I must get back into Mozambique. Now that the Portuguese have stopped fighting FRELIMO there, I'll be safe once I'm across the border.”

Anna took his hand. “He put a curse on you Daniel… the old man.”

Daniel suppressed his agitation and snuffled a feigned derision. “What can a dead man's curse do to me, Anna? You don't believe in all that spirit stuff do you?”

Anna embraced him tightly. She did not reply.

“Anna… You don't believe in Nehanda…? Do you?”

Still she remained silent.

“Come on,” he said, cajoling, pushing her away from him. He tried to examine her face but all he could see were the whites of her eyes in the starlit darkness. *“There are no such things as Mashona ancestral spirits, Anna. Nehanda does not exist.”*

“But I feel very strangely frightened tonight, Daniel. Terribly frightened! I don't like all this killing. There must be a better way.”

“There is no other way, Anna. There is no other way. The killing will only stop when we have taken control of Ian Smith's government. The cause we are fighting for is just. We cannot allow weak people to betray ZANLA.”

She clung to him as a vine does to a post.

Daniel held her tight. He kissed her on the top of her head.

“I want you to make love to me, Daniel… now… here… before you leave

for Mozambique. Let’s go to the hut… here… quickly… then you can go.”

“There is no time, Anna. I am late already. I must go.” But she would not release him. And when he brought his hand up to stroke her face he felt the tears on her cheek. “Everything is going to be all right, Anna. Believe me. Nothing is going to happen to me. But I must go. And I must go right now.” He pushed her away from him.

“As soon as it is light, get the mujibas to herd the cattle… and the goats and the sheep… over our tracks. Tomorrow of all days I don't want our friend Michael Campbell on my trail.”

“Don't joke about that, Daniel. Michael and his trackers are superb. Every time he has taken up the spoor of our vakomana he has found them. The last person I want to see here in the morning is Michael Campbell.”

“If I leave now, by sun-up I will be in Mozambique, my sweetheart. FRELIMO is in full command there now. There the war is over. The mabunu won't follow us into Mozambique… not now. Once I am across the border I shall have nothing to fear from our old friend Michael Campbell… But now I really must go.”

Anna pulled Daniel one last time to her breast. She hugged him tightly. Then she pushed him away. *“Go,”* she said with a sudden urgency. *“Get into Mozambique before it is light.”*

Daniel held her by the shoulders. He kissed her on the forehead. “I'll be all right. Just you look after yourself tomorrow, you hear? You have tomorrow morning to make sure the mujibas hide our tracks. By lunch-time at the very latest I want you out of this valley. I'd like to think that you will be at Rushinga before curfew tomorrow night.”

“I'll be there… Go now. Get yourself safely into Mozambique.”

Then, suddenly, he was gone.

Anna stood still in the darkness and she listened to her husband's footsteps as he disappeared into the night. An ominous foreboding gripped at her heart.

“Zero. Two-Seven-Bravo. Over.”

“Two-Seven-Bravo. Sunray speaks. Go ahead. Over.”

“Roger Zero. Sorry Sunray… Muliloh, and a group of four other terrs, is leaving Village Alpha at this time. They are proceeding in a north-north-easterly direction. Looks like they're heading for the border. Over.”

The major looked at his watch. 04.03 hours. Less than ninety minutes to H-Hour. He's foregone his usual fuck with Motoh… damn him. SB have got

their intelligence all ballsed-up this time.'

"Roger Two-Seven-Bravo. Watch where he goes. Over."

"Roger… Wildo. Two-Seven-Bravo standing by."

Major Don Higgins rushed to the adjacent ops room. He moved quickly to the big map on the wall. Village Alpha was ringed with a series of coloured wax crayon marks on the plastic overlay.

Captain John Houston, the major's second in command, was standing in front of the map making pencil notes on his battle charts. He had been appointed fire-force commander for Operation Campfire, and was already bedecked in his fighting gear. The green straps of his chest-webbing criss-crossed between his shoulder blades. His face was already blackened with camo-cream.

"Muliloh's moving out."

"Shit…" Houston automatically looked at his watch.

"He's heading in a north-north-easterly direction with four other gooks. The rest have bomb-shelled out of the village."

"Fuck it… He's heading for Mozambique."

"How far is the border from Alpha?"

The captain looked at the map assessing the distance accurately. "Eight miles… He can do that in an hour-and-a-half easily if he gets a move on. He'll be across the line before H-Hour."

"It's a dark night, John… There's no moon. He'll not make as much distance as he would if the moon was bright."

"Fuck it… I thought this time we had him in the bag."

"We might still get him, John. I have an idea… But it will be touch and go… The RLI are ready to move out of Salisbury. They've got four Daks loaded with troops right at this moment… I think we can still use them to good effect."

"Change of plan, Tom… The bird has flown. He's on his way back to Mozambique with four of his mates. The rest have bomb-shelled out of Alpha."

The telephone reeked of tobacco.

"FUCK IT! We've got shit for luck with this bastard." There was a solid ring of frustration in the Brigadier's voice.

"I think we can still catch him with a change of plan."

“Then we'd better start jumping around. Shoot, Don. What's your plan?”

“First of all, Tom, we know there is a heavy FRELIMO presence just across the border. Are you prepared for a punch-up with FRELIMO… if it comes to that?”

“You're thinking of hot pursuit into Mozambique?”

“If necessary…”

“If it means we get Muliloh… Yes, dammit… Now… What's your plan, Don.”

The major explained what he had in mind… his primary plan… and then, if that failed, his alternative option.

“Both sound O.K. to me,” Tom Hubbard responded. “We don't have much of a choice anyway… do we? To get Muliloh, anything is worth a try. So… We're going to have to rely on tracking him down from Alpha? And if he crosses the border we follow in full force if necessary! And hope that the forward flying choppers, and stop groups, will slow him down.”

“Affirmative… We've got some good trackers on hand, Tom… the best tracker team in the scouts. We'll have them at Alpha as soon as there is enough light to follow Muliloh's tracks.”

“Negative Don… I want my man Campbell to be assigned. You know as well as I do that he and his Bushmen are the best trackers in the country. Besides that, they've got a sixth sense that's uncanny.”

“Tom… This is a Selous Scout operation. I know that Campbell is good but my trackers are just as good… better! And I don't want any civilians mucking things up. I want to use our own trackers.”

“No go, Don… Not on this one… On this one I'm going to pull rank and you won't change my mind. If there is one chance in a million of finding Muliloh, Campbell will be the man to do it. The best I can do is to offer you a place on Campbell's team. Send one soldier over here with one of your radios. He can be responsible for maintaining proper comms with your other call signs.”

“We don't have much time to argue, Tom…”

“We're not arguing, major. That's an order. Choose a man and get him over here by 04.30 hours. And make sure you tell him that Campbell will be in command of the tracking team on the ground.”

“Now… Whose your fire-force commander?”

“John Houston… But Tom…”

“Major… You said it yourself. We don't have any time to argue. The

operation will be commanded by the Scouts. The RLI paratroopers will come under Captain Houston's command once they are on the ground. I am sending an R.A.R. protection stick with Campbell. The tracking team and its protection stick will come under Houston's orders should they get into a fire-fight. Then, and only then, can your man take over command of the trackers on the ground. But I insist on Campbell doing the tracking. Is that clear, Don?"

"Yes, Sir."

Chapter 54

THE dawn was turning grey-pink on the horizon when two helicopters came skimming low over the southern hills. The mujibas had just broken the cattle out of their kraals, and Anna was directing the boys where to drive the beasts when she heard the shrill whistle of the Alouettes' jet engines.

‘Was it just a co-incidence?’ She wondered. ‘Were they going to pass the village by?’

Judas was on watch in the high O.P. His colleagues slept soundly behind him. After the excitement of the long night before he was tired… desperately tired. He was sitting upright but dozing fitfully with his green nylon sleeping bag wrapped around his shoulders.

The sound of the approaching aircraft roused him and his first thought was to search the skies for the incoming gunships. Thus diverted, he did not see Anna instructing the mujibas amongst the multi-coloured cattle far below.

Anna had learnt to survive from bitter experience by not taking chances. Immediately she heard those shrieking engines, therefore, just in case, she hurried back to the devastated village. It was lucky she did so. She arrived amongst the broken huts as the heavy whapping beat of the aircrafts' rotors told her the machines were descending into the valley.

Judas shouted back to his mates, waking them up. In the half-light he watched the aircraft drop precipitously into the valley. By the time he turned his attention back to Village Alpha, Anna was safely back amongst the huts.

It was then he saw the dispersing cattle for the first time. He had missed seeing Anna's involvement with the mujibas. It was a vital omission for, had he seen what she had been doing, it would have most certainly led to her arrest or her death.

But Judas did not see her. Once again, Lady Luck had smiled on ZANLA's notorious Sectorial Political Commissar. Thus, so simply, are the fortunes of war gained and lost.

Back in the village Anna settled herself down amongst the mourning women who ringed the six corpses. The women looked at her malignantly but their fear of the infamous Muliloh was far too great to elicit

any other reaction. Reluctantly they accepted her into their midst. And they continued to rock backwards and forwards in their grief. Occasionally one woman or another ululated loudly. But otherwise all they did was to hum, or to wail quietly to themselves.

Nobody had yet touched anything from the previous night. Even the storm lanterns still glowed with a dim light on the ends of their long poles. The six bodies lay grotesquely misshapen, mutilated and punctured just as ZANLA had left them.

Anna moved her body, swaying in unison with the women, and she keened along with them in apparent mourning. But all the time she kept a watchful eye on the approaching helicopters.

The aircraft came directly to the village and, for several long minutes, they circled low overhead checking out the scene below. Anna looked up into the determined pink faces of the flight technicians, their facial masks hanging off to one side, and at their machine-guns pointing menacingly downward towards the ground.

One helicopter flew off and chased the cattle back towards the village. The mujibas scattered with puerile screams of terror ahead of them.

‘How had they found out about the killings so quickly?’ The question tormented Anna's mind.

The white man's prompt arrival at the crack of dawn could not be pure coincidence. *‘The mabunus MUST have been informed.’* Of that fact Anna was now quite certain. *‘But how?’*

Last night had been as black as the dark side of Hades. The vakomana had come unannounced and silently in the night and they had left before the dawn. And since the battle two weeks before, there had been absolutely no security force activity in the area. Of that fact she was equally certain. The land had been devoid of all Rhodesian troops.

Both helicopters touched down in the open field. They disgorged four men each and were immediately airborne. They did not leave the scene right away, however, but circled round for several minutes looking for signs of lurking terrorists on the ground below.

The light grew brighter with each passing second. Four black soldiers of the RAR, the trackers' protection stick, skirmished through the village paying scant attention to the bodies of Muliloh's victims and the mourning women. They kicked open the doors of the undamaged huts and checked them out for hidden ZANLA fighters.

The villagers, who were still in their beds, came out at the soldiers' bidding. They stood huddled together wrapped in blankets, forlorn, in the centre of the village.

Finding the village clean, one of the black soldiers hand-signalled to the four men standing outside the village palisade. Then they moved out from amongst the huts and they took up defensive positions on the village perimeter.

Mike Campbell, his face, arms and bare legs already blackened with camo-cream, entered the village. Despite his dark visage Anna recognised him immediately. A feeling of cold terror griped in her stomach.

The game warden moved like a cat and yet like a professional soldier, too… smooth and menacing… his FN rifle at the ready. The weapon swept from side to side as he walked along. His piercing blue eyes probed every nook and cranny amongst the huts. He looked formidable with the four flat magazine pouches in webbing strapped across his chest, and he carried his heavy back-pack with consummate ease. The green fins of two Z-32 rifle grenades protruded from the flaps of his pack above his shoulders. They added to the aura of ruthlessness that pervaded every aspect of his fluid movements.

Anna pulled her shawl over her head and continued to mimic the wailing women around her. But, from under the cover of the shawl, she watched Michael’s approach carefully. Here, so menacingly close at hand, was the man who had secretly occupied a large part of her heart and her mind for more than twenty years. And despite her tension, despite her alarm, despite her hovering fear, her heart began to flutter.

Michael was followed by another white man. His face was blackened, too. His heavy beard was thick with the dark cream that disguised him. And at the rear came Michael's two trackers in their military combat uniforms. In camouflage they looked like any other of the white man’s black soldiers.

The last time she had seen them, Anna had not been close enough to really see Mike’s native companions. And, anyway, she had then been far too absorbed in watching Michael himself. Now, for the first time, she noticed the trackers' mongoloid features. Their faces looked strange. And they were tiny in stature compared to the average Shona man. She realised then that they were not normal Africans.

‘They are Bushmen!’ And suddenly Anna understood the secret of

Michael's spectacular tracking successes.

Her thoughts turned then to Daniel. It was getting light. She prayed that he had already crossed the border. He should be across the border by now. She believed that once he was inside Mozambique he would be safe. There FRELIMO would protect him. And she knew it was not now the practice for ordinary mabunu soldiers to cross into Mozambique willy-nilly. Michael Campbell, therefore, as a civilian, would probably not be allowed to cross the border even in hot pursuit.

Anna knew from ZANLA's own intelligence sources that, before the Portuguese had capitulated, the sku'zapo and the Rhodesian SAS operated in Mozambique only with the approval of the Portuguese army. No other SF forces were ever allowed to cross the border. Now that Portugal had handed Mozambique over to FRELIMO, however, she was not sure what the Rhodesians would do. The uncertainty made her uneasy.

One of the helicopters flew low over the village. The technician leant out over his guns and waved at the game warden. Mike returned the salute. The tech gave him a thumbs-up sign. The coast was clear. Then both aircraft gained height and flew off together in an easterly direction, dragging the raucous screaming noise of their jet engines along behind them.

The silence that followed the helicopters' departure was cool and refreshing.

Mike stopped in front of the mutilated bodies and he gazed down on the macabre carnage. He shook his head. A look of disgust swept across his features. There was blood and guts everywhere. The old sabooku's legs lay cold and incongruous on one side of the log whilst his truncated body lay on the other. The scattered bodies of his five sons looked like human voodoo dolls from which the pins had been extracted.

The bloody axe was still embedded in the log.

Mike looked down on the body of the white haired old sabooku. He had never realised just how much blood could spill from one man's body. It had sprayed everywhere. The log was red-black with it. The ground was specked and sprinkled with it. And two thick, congealed and already drying puddles of blood lay on the ground opposite the old man’s shortened legs. Despite the freshness of the hour, large blue-bottle flies were already beginning to gather.

“What kind of fucking animal is capable of this merciless brutality?” Mike

spat out the invective with revulsion. He was standing no more than ten feet from where Anna was seated. She heard every word… every nuance of the hatred in his tone.

She was shocked to hear him voice such sentiments. He was talking about her husband. He was talking about a man who had once been the game warden's inseparable friend. And Daniel was only following the orders of his Operational Commander, Rex Mbudzi. He had done what he had to do.

Her emotions tumbled in turmoil. Then, despite her own unexpected feeling of remorse last night, she realised that she had altogether stopped considering ZANLA's coercive activities in the vicious light that Michael now clearly saw them. She, too, had once thought about ZANLA's Plan-B in much the same way that Michael was looking upon last night's slaughter now. But did ZANLA really have any other choice?

'There is another side to the story that you don't understand, Michael,' Anna thought… and she wanted to cry that fact out. 'There are very good reasons for ZANLA's disciplinary Plan-B actions!'

Anna felt an urge to stand up and speak to Michael… to try to justify Daniel's vengeance of the night before. The old sabooku's betrayal had cost ZANLA dearly. Michael obviously did not understand Daniel's motives. But her common sense prevailed. She remained silent. She remained seated. She continued to be just one of the mourning women over whom the game warden's eyes wandered without recognition or comprehension.

Michael was following Psyac's advice. His lack of attention to the mourning women had become second nature to all Rhodesian soldiers: *'Don't involve yourselves with the women in the villages,'* the SF's psychological branch had advised. *'Strange men do not talk to the women in Shona villages. It offends the customs of the Mashona people.'* And that instruction was Anna's greatest moral comfort!

Despite her chagrin, despite her confusion, whilst Michael had been speaking she had noticed that his voice had deepened since she had last spoken with him. It now had a rich adult, masculine, timbre of which she greatly approved.

"Muliloh… Who else?" The other white man answered Michael's question. "Do you know when this happened? It looks to be only a few hours old."

Neither of the men gave a single thought to the possibility that any of the distraught Shona women near them might understand what they were saying.

Both of them unconsciously assumed that raw Mashona females would not understand English.

"Between half-past-three and a quarter-to-four," Michael answered.

Anna thought deeply. 'What time had it been?' Then: 'Good God… It must have been about that time! Daniel had left just after four. How did Michael know that?' Her mind spun in a whirl.

"And your guys had to sit and watch it?" Michael observed. "What a fucking side show…"

'They have had people watching!' Anna understood now. That explained a whole lot of things. Anna listened carefully, understanding every word, and reading a lot more between the lines besides.

'They have had an observation post up in the hills all the time.' Anna cussed herself. 'And I missed it! The old man had been telling the truth. He had NOT betrayed ZANLA at all. It was me, Anna Moyo, who had let ZANLA down. It was not the old sabooku… It was me. I was careless.'

Anna's conscience was swamped with deep remorse and she experienced a sudden bottomless feeling of great guilt. She looked down at the mutilated bodies of the six innocent victims… sadly… and a cold shiver racked her frame.

Mike looked at his watch.

"Twenty-five-to-six. We're wasting time, Julias. It's light enough to track… just. What time did they say Muliloh left the village?"

"Three minutes past four… with four other gooks," The man called Julias responded.

'They have their times and numbers exactly right, too,' Anna thought. 'And they KNOW it was Daniel. They're on to him specifically.'

Almost in a state of panic now, Anna realised that last night ZANLA had provided the Rhodesian observers with a grand stand performance. They had seen it all.

"So… they have an hour-and-a-half's start on us?" Mike smirked. "I must say I haven't ever been this close to gooks at the crack of dawn before. If the JOC can get those stop-groups down along the border… before Muliloh crosses… I think we might just be in for one hell of a punch-up before the day is over."

Dropping paratroops along the international border… across the route that

ZANLA's Chaminuka Sectorial Commander had to take to reach Mozambique… was Major Don Higgins' new and priority operational plan. His alternative idea, if Muliloh had managed to cross the line before the troops could be deployed, was to pin him down inside Mozambican territory… force him to go to ground… or seriously impede his movements… with a saturation of helicopters in the air… and stop-groups of ambushing soldiers on the ground. That would give Michael Campbell the time and the opportunity he would need to follow Muliloh's tracks into FRELIMO country, and to catch up with him quickly.

This time, there was a huge force of combined RLI and Selous Scout soldiers on hand to back up the trackers. All Mike Campbell and his trackers would have to do today was to find the elusive Muliloh. The mass of soldiers and the helicopters would then fight the battle that would bring him to book.

The Rhodesians were determined, even if it meant a serious engagement with FRELIMO, that this day they would come back home with the scalp of the Butcher-of-Chaminuka.

'Stop groups?' Anna thought feverishly. 'They're deploying troops along the border in front of Daniel! They're going to cut off his escape route!'

Anna's thoughts spun into a state of vertigo. She wished she hadn't heard the white men's conversation. She really did not want to know any of the things she was hearing.

If the mabunus succeeded in stringing a line of troops across Daniel's front, Anna realised, he would walk right into the ambushes they would prepare. Alternatively, if he became aware of the troops and was forced to go to ground, then Michael Campbell would, as sure as the sun was about to rise, track his old friend down today. There was no doubt in Anna's mind about that fact.

She looked down at the grey, waxen face of the dead sabooku… and she thought about his curse of the night before. He had said that Daniel would not see the setting of another sun. And a cold shiver ran up and down her spine.

Daniel would not be expecting pursuit. He would assume that Anna had mustered the mujibas in time to properly destroy his tracks with the cattle's spoor. And he would imagine that the diverse and bomb-shelling tracks of fifty other guerrillas in the vicinity of the village would further confuse any

possible pursuers. Daniel would fancy that the odds were stacked in his favour.

He would give no thought to being followed. He would think it would be profound bad luck that, if the mabunus came to the village at all, they would choose to follow his spoor in preference to the other abundant sign. Certainly, under completely normal circumstances, it would be a million to one chance that the trackers would locate and then follow his spoor.

But Daniel did not know about the mabunu's trump card. He did not know about the hidden sku'zapo observers who had witnessed the killings of the recent night… who had actually seen him leave with his headquarters command group… and who had obviously recognised him to boot.

Anna racked her brains. 'There had to be a way to help Daniel'.

'There was a way. Just one way! It was a certainty. If Michael Campbell was unable to follow the sign left by her husband's passage, Daniel would have a better chance of escaping.' And right at that moment the game warden was standing no more than ten feet from her.

Anna fingered her Russian Togarev. The pistol was well hidden in its soft leather holster beneath her voluminous blouse. Just one bullet would be all she'd need.

She did not think of the consequences to herself as she slipped the handgun from its sheath. That she would be killed or captured after the event there was no doubt, but that certainty did not even enter her head. It was Daniel's safety that was the issue foremost in her thoughts. With
Michael and his Bushman trackers behind him, Anna sincerely believed that Daniel had no chance. No chance at all. But, if she could stop Michael… now… she was sure her husband would find some innovative way to wriggle through the Rhodesian troops. He had always managed to do so before. If Michael's tracking ability was not a factor, Daniel had every prospect in the world of crossing the border safely into Mozambique.

The pistol was loaded. There was a round up the spout. The mechanism was primed. Gently she slipped the safety catch off and eased the hammer back with her thumb. She continued to hold the weapon under her blouse.

"Handeyhi." Let's go. Mike signalled to his trackers, initiating the start of the day's important man hunt. He turned and walked away, north-eastwards, out of the village. He passed so close to Anna when he walked by, his legs almost brushed her back.

Anna was conscious of the fact that she could have reached out and

touched him. And her confusion ran rife.

On the one hand, she wanted to jump up and to confront him, to place the pistol in his belly and pull the trigger. She was desperate to cancel out the threat he posed to Daniel.

On the other hand, she wanted to hug him… to hold him tight… to press herself up against his hard male body… to make love with him… even if it was just one last time.

She became mentally disorientated by the wild contradictions of her thoughts.

Her mind again flashed back to that last afternoon she and Michael had spent together… to the old Bushman's cave high up in the jumble of granite boulders above the Gumbora river. It was so long ago. So very long ago… Yet she still remembered it all… vividly… their contrasting naked bodies moving together in rhythmic unison. One brown, one white… She could feel… as though it were real… the delicious sensation of having him hard and thick and deep inside her. In her mind he was filling her up again. And a huge surge of sensuous vitality erupted inside her soul. After all these years she had been unable to purge her mind of her strange and compelling lust… and her contradicting love… for this charismatic white man.

"Look… the mujibas are pushing the cattle out again. They're still trying to hide the bastard's tracks," she heard Michael say. His commonplace words shattered Anna's salacious fantasies. They brought her back to the here-and-now with an abrupt and ugly thump.

The other white man spoke into his radio.

"Doesn't matter," he said confidently. "Our O.P. says the cattle haven't reached the point where they last saw Muliloh. They can guide us right onto his tracks… on the other side of the cattle."

Anna looked up at the dome of the giant granite dwala that overlooked the village. It looked just like the bald head of an old man.

'The mabunu observers must be up there right now,' she thought. 'They are watching us this very second'.

Then another thought struck her. 'They must have been watching Daniel from up there last night, too. And they had watched him walk away right up to the edge of the woodland… to the point where he had disappeared amongst the trees. How had they been able to do that… from up there… in the middle of a pitch black night?'

There were many puzzling things about the white man's ability to wage war that Anna would never understand. She had never heard of a light-intensifying telescope, let alone did she ever dream that such a thing could possibly exist.

The Bushmen converged on the white men from the far side of the nearest hut. The black soldiers filtered onto their flanks… two men on either side. They were all moving and looking towards the low-lying northern hills. They had their backs to Anna… walking directly away from her position.

‘They are going after my Daniel. They are going to hunt him down. I've got to do something… and do it fast’.

Now, Anna realised, was her chance.

She rolled onto her belly… pushing aside the woman who sat at her side… and she extracted the pistol from beneath her clothing.

The woman started to get up. *“Stay where you are,”* Anna hissed. There was a malevolence in the cadence of her voice that brooked no denial. *“Keep crying.”*

The faltering wailing chorus immediately regained its strength.

Anna positioned herself so that the women's bodies obscured her from the watchers on the hill. And she turned all her attention to the broad shoulders of the fast retreating game warden.

She lifted the Togarev in both her hands taking the weight of her shoulders onto her elbows. Carefully she placed the post of the foresight onto the middle of Michael Campbell's back… to a point just beneath his heavy pack. She brought up the back-sight vee to match it. The tops of both sights levelled. Her point of aim was dead centre in the small of the white man’s unprotected lower back.

She gave no thought now to the contradictions in her mind… nor to the churning feelings in her heart for the white man who was her target. Whatever it was she had felt for him… love… or lust… was swamped at that moment by the urgency of her desire to protect her fleeing husband.

She took up the first pressure on the trigger and held her breath.

Michael was twenty yards from her and moving away fast. She held him steady in her sights. He was an easy target. The sideways swagger in his gait was no distraction. Anna had emerged a top marksman with the Togarev at Mgagao. She was quite confident of hitting her precise target at fifty yards and more.

‘I'm sorry, Michael’, she said to him silently in her mind. ‘But you are the

enemy of ZANLA. You are an enemy of the Mashona people. I have to kill you to protect Daniel. I have to kill you so that ZANLA can win this war.'

A strange and sudden calmness swamped her whole being. She became altogether cool and collected. She felt no remorse at all about what she knew she had to do.

She held the pistol resolutely on its mark. The steadiness of her hand pulsed with the rhythmic beat of her heart, but the sights did not waver.

Michael Campbell was twenty-five yards away now. Still she held her aim… unflinching. Each moment was a lifetime. She hyped up her emotions to squeeze the trigger.

'I should hate you,' she thought… drumming up the courage to fire the fatal bullet. 'I should hate you for not fighting with us. I should hate you for fighting against us. But I can't do that. I can't hate you. This thing I have to do would be so much easier if I did hate you Michael Campbell. But… still… I have to kill you.'

He was thirty yards away. She let out her breath and took another, resolutely holding the air tightly inside her lungs. She returned the sights to her chosen point of aim.

'Goodbye Michael… my love…' Anna said to herself. 'I'm so sorry… So sorry…'

He was thirty-five yards away… and still moving.

'Damn you…' Anna began to fret. Her brow furrowed in her concentration.

Forty yards came and went.

'Damn you… Michael Campbell…'

Forty-five yards…

She steeled herself. *'It's now or never…'*

Fifty yards… The trackers converged at the gap in the palisade fence… at the entrance to the village. Michael stood still to let his two Bushmen through the opening first. Now was her chance. Her target was standing still.

Anna's mind froze over… paralysed… immobilised. And she numbly watched Michael Campbell walk quietly through the gateway. He was then outside the pole fence and beyond the effective range of her little pistol. And the intervening bush poles of the barrier protected him from her bullet.

Anna lowered the weapon an inch at a time. Her hand was shaking

violently now. Slowly she released her breath. It came out with a loud and shuddering sigh.

She had lost her opportunity. No! That was not true. She had let it slip by. Something deep inside her soul had refused to let her squeeze the trigger.

It was now too late to tip the scales of fate. Anna wondered why, after all her determined training she had been unable to do what she knew she should have done. And in that moment of self-torture… of indecisive mental anguish… she began to believe that she truly hated Michael Campbell.

'I do hate him… I do hate him… I do hate him…' Anna repeated this assertion over and over in her mind. If she said that often enough, she knew, she would come to believe it. As she watched Michael moving further and further away from her, her thoughts ranged in many contradictory ways and in every direction.

'How could I ever have believed that I loved that arrogant white man. He used me when I was young. He used my body like a dog fucks a bitch on heat… and then he pays it no more attention. He used me like all white men use us blacks… as a chattel… in his case, purely as a sexual convenience.

'And now he is going off to hunt down Daniel… his onetime greatest friend… my husband… the man I really love… the man I have always loved the most. Why did I ever go with Michael Campbell? Why did I ever let him touch me…?'

Anna's mind then again turned to the memory of those rapturous, stolen moments she had enjoyed with Michael Campbell so many years ago. And she could not deny herself the truth.

'I went with him because he was white,' she told herself more honestly. 'It was a taboo that I simply had to break. …A half-Chinese-half-Shona black girl having sex with a white man… Had the white farming community of Marandellas known what we had been up to at that time it would have destroyed Michael Campbell. Of that there was no doubt. But I did it… I forced the sex because Michael was exciting… because it had been exciting for us both to cheat on Daniel… and to cheat on the whole wide world around us, too.'

Anna knew all that was true.

'…And because Michael was proud and wild and beautifully arrogant in his youth… And because he was physically attractive… so tall and slim and athletic then… and so handsome… with those striking blue eyes… And because he developed into such a superb lover…

‘I pursued him relentlessly…’ Anna remembered. ‘I was truly like a bitch on heat with him… because I wanted him then so badly… Soooo very much… and because, when my seduction was complete, he wanted me just as much.’

Anna had known that Michael Campbell would never have made the first move on her. He was then too shy and totally lacking in confidence with a woman… and he was also so very proper. He needed prompting. To succeed, it had required that she seduce him.

‘We were young in those days…’ Anna thought. ‘So very young… And so naïve and innocent.’

A feeling of incredible confusion overwhelmed her.

‘But…’ Anna realised then with sudden astonishing clarity… ‘When all is said and done… if I am really truthful about what happened between us… All I ever really felt for Michael Campbell was an unbelievably powerful animal lust. Our teenage love… Our mutual need for self-gratification in each other’s bodies… then… was nothing more than the growing pains of youth. All we really ever had was a juvenile infatuation…

‘So why didn’t I kill him when I had the opportunity?’ Anna lamented. ‘I am now an adult’.

‘Daniel is reality now. Daniel should be my sole concern of the heart. He is my husband. He is the father of my children… our children. Why did I not have the guts to pull the trigger? She knew the answer to that question lay in her soul… and deep down in her soul Anna Moyo knew that she was at that very moment still deeply in love with Michael Campbell… and she knew, too, that she always had been.’

Now it was too late for recriminations.

The outcome of whatever was going to happen today was in the lap of the Gods. For a brief moment in time the destiny of both men had been firmly in Anna’s hands. She had had a choice. She could have positively saved her husband by killing… or even just wounding… the man she now finally admitted to herself was the only man she had ever really loved… and still loved. She could not kill Michael to save Daniel. And… although in the immediate aftermath of that critical moment she regretted that fact… it could now not be changed. If the two men met today they would have to fight it out between themselves.

Anna relaxed the hammer, slipped on the safety catch and returned the pistol to its holster.

Then she rose from the huddle of mourning women, pulling the woman who was sitting next to her to her feet. Forlornly she turned her back on the trackers. Anna glanced casually towards the observers' position high up on the mountain and the two women walked away together, slowly, arm in arm, from Village Alpha.

Behind her lay the grotesquely mutilated and contorted bodies of ZANLA's latest and unnecessary victims. Anna did not see them. The trauma and the agony of her conflicting emotions had put her mind into a state of neutral insensibility. She was conscious of nothing at all. Her mind had switched itself off.

Chapter 55

THE sun had not yet lifted above the eastern skyline when Daniel broke his strong and measured stride. He faltered… listened… then held up his hand. The four men pumping heavily along the ancient elephant path behind him came to an abrupt stop.

“Ssshhh.”

They all stood still as statues. They strained their ears to catch the sound that their commander had obviously heard. Then… all of them heard the dull droning of the distant engines.

“Ndege.” Aeroplanes. Comrade Naison said unnecessarily. Naison was Muliloh's Sectorial Security Officer.

At that moment they were all very conscious of the fact the border was less than one mile away. It was so near… yet still so far.

‘What's making me so nervous today?’ Daniel thought. ‘Why do I think the mabunu are after me today?’

Why, indeed, the aircraft could have been flying anywhere.

“LET'S GO.”

With one hand gripping the straps at his chest that secured his heavy pack on his back, and holding his AKM firmly in the other, the ZANLA chief broke into a fast jogging lope. Those behind him followed his example. They had been marching hard ever since they had left the village, but the lack of a moon had restricted their progress. They were also weary from a long night of heavy energy expenditures and of harrowing mind-sapping activities. Nevertheless, the potential threat posed by the approaching aircraft called for greater effort.

The planes drew ever closer. Very soon the guerrillas could hear their engines clearly, even above the dull, pulsing throbbing in their ears, and above the raw rasping of their labouring lungs.

The five men emerged breathless from the valley they had been following and stopped on the crest of a small knoll. They looked in the direction of the approaching aircraft.

The bulbous shape of a helicopter was clearly apparent flying low down on the faraway skyline. It was still some distance to the south of their position. The higher pitched shrieking of the gunship's jet engine was distinctly audible

above what Daniel recognized as the additional dull thrumming of a Dakota transport aircraft's piston motors.

Even as Daniel picked up the shape of the helicopter, he saw a thin blaze of white smoke trailing down towards the ground beneath it. He concentrated his attention on the strange activity of the hostile machine. It was moving directly across their front and was going to pass them by at about a half-mile distance.

"They are flying right along the border fence," Daniel stated the obvious. At a silent hand signal from him, all five men squatted, their shapes melting into the short and wiry grass. There they sat watching the approaching aircraft. And they examined each one with great intensity because inside every one of them an expanding knot of fear was taking hold of his stomach.

Another canister of white smoke fell beneath the helicopter. The stark bright pall increased in volume, and in density, as the container drew closer to the ground. A third one tumbled towards the earth. A fourth… Then a fifth… A sixth…

The aircraft did not even pause in its flight. The technician obviously had a box full of white smoke grenades at his feet. He was simply pulling their pins and tossing the canisters out of the open hatchway at what appeared to be ten second intervals.

Behind the chopper, a Dakota materialised out of the hazy southern sky. It was flying low… no more than five hundred feet above the ground. It was following the exact flight path of the helicopter that preceded it.

"They are demarcating the border and outlining landing zones for paratroopers." Daniel explained what he believed was happening. "The mabunu are going to drop troops in a long line right across our front."

"We can still get through, Comrade Commander. There is a lot of wild country along the border. And there's only a cattle fence between us and Mozambique. Once we're across they won't follow us. In recent months they never have."

"Not this time, comrade… Not today. Today they are after the Sectorial Commander of Chaminuka. And even if we were able to reach the border now we'd still have to cross the wide bulldozed line along this side of the fence. They'd spot us going over in daylight for sure… and today they will follow us across."

"You really think they know it is you, Comrade Muliloh?"

"Absolutely… I can feel it in my bones."

“How could they possibly know that it is you? And how can they know where we are going?”

Daniel laughed dryly. “I don't know the answer to either of those questions, my friend. Perhaps the great spirit Nehanda told them.”

“Haaieee. You can joke about this dangerous thing, Comrade Commander?”

“No,” Muliloh said more soberly. “We should not joke about it. For in a few more minutes we shall have a string of mabunu soldiers on the ground in front of us… and there are bound to be others already on our tracks behind.”

“You think they are on our tracks, too? Already?”

“Comrade Naison,” Daniel sneered wryly. “If the mabunus are so sure that it is me they are after today… even if they just think it is me… and if they are prepared to drop troops along the border fence in front of our escape route, they will most definitely have trackers on our trail, too… Just at this moment we are like the meat in a ham sandwich.”

“So what are we going to do, Comrade Commander?”

Daniel remained silent for some moments. Thinking… He knew they did not have enough time to get to the border now and to cross the open bulldozed line before the approaching aircraft reached them. And he just knew there were trackers on his trail behind. He had, therefore, far more bush-craft savvy than Anna had given him credit for.

But… what to do?

He looked again at the approaching Dakota. The ponderous old war plane, its camouflaged livery ominously dark against the pale dawn sky, droned on towards them. It was flying across their faraway south-eastern front. But now it was not alone. There was another Dakota flying directly behind it. And even as he saw the second plane, another appeared out of the murky grey-pink-and-yellow sky behind it. The dawn was breaking. The light was getting brighter by the second. One minute later a fourth machine took shape. They were all flying in line astern formation.

Daniel pointed casually to the four Dakota transports.

“Here they come… The mabunu are not playing games this morning,” Daniel said lightly. “Four big planes… They'll be loaded with paratroopers. And they'll be backed up by more helicopters in next to no time… mark my words.”

The five ZANLA fighters squatted on the ground together… quite still…

and they silently contemplated the long line of advancing DC3s.

"There they go," Daniel said, strangely excited by the experience.

There was an elated gleam in his eye as he watched four dark dots fall away from the leading aircraft. One after the other four green parachutes popped open. They were over two miles away, but the crackling crump of the exploding silk carried clearly to the five ZANLA fighters through the crisp dawn air. No sooner had the canopies mushroomed than the RLI troopies they carried disappeared beneath the tree line.

Another four men jumped. Another four chutes crunched open. And they too disappeared beneath the tree tops. Ten seconds later another four men fell from the same first aircraft. Only the lead aircraft was shedding its troops. The other Dakotas droned on behind… waiting their turn.

"They are dropping them at regular intervals in sticks of four. We haven't a hope of getting across the border at this point now," Daniel opined to nobody in particular. "And when the helicopters come they'll bring yet more soldiers. And they will put observers on all the high points back from the border… Soon we won't be able to move without being seen."

"Comrade Commander, I think we should move out." Naison was getting agitated. He looked nervously along their back-trail.

Daniel stood erect. "Stay down," he said calmly.

He scanned the distant horizons. Now was not the time to panic. He must work out a sound strategy for escape. From their elevated position on the hill top he could see for many miles in every direction across the rugged countryside. To their right the broken low hills rolled on to the southern horizon.

'Should they move off to the south-east?'

He looked in the other direction. Far away to the north-west… perhaps fifteen miles away on the rim of the jagged skyline… there was a prominent round hill. It rose head and shoulders above the surrounding countryside… and on its summit there stood a salient, thick-boled baobab tree. It was a giant of a tree… an unmistakable landmark. It would make a superb rendezvous point.

"Do you all see the big mu-uyu tree? There, on the top of that far hill?" Daniel pointed to the big baobab. There was a murmur of assent.

"O.K.… Here's what we are going to do. We'll split up," Daniel told his men. "We'll move out separately in different directions… And we'll meet at

that tree. I want you all to keep well away from the border… from possible O.P.s… And make your tracks as difficult to follow as you possibly can. Don't use the easy routes through the bush. Don't use paths… Walk over stones and rock-slabs whenever you can… And keep changing direction when you're on hard ground… We must slow the trackers down… Or better still, lose them. ”

“We will RV at that mu-uyu at 12.00 hours. And from there we'll move on together further to the north-west. We should be able to cross the Ruya River before nightfall. Then we'll move into Mozambique through the Nehanda sector after dark. ”

“Any questions?”

“What if we don't make it by 12.00?”

“You know the rules, Comrade Jacob… those of us who make the RV on time will move out at 12.00 hours. If you're not there by then we'll go on without you. But you should have no trouble getting there by midday.”

There was a nodding of heads. Everyone understood the plan of action. Everyone agreed.

“O.K. Let's go… Remember. Make your tracks as difficult to follow as possible.”

The five ZANLA guerrillas dispersed off the hill top. They moved away, individually, in five different directions.

As Muliloh and his men bomb-shelled off the hillock, the second Dakota began dropping its paratroopers. And, from the south-west the two helicopters recently departed from Village Alpha came into view. They were skimming… racing… over the tree-tops, their crews now eager to provide air support for the RLI stop-groups that were, at that very moment, starting to organise themselves on the rough ground along the border.

And out of the far western skies the glass bubble noses of yet another five Alouettes emerged from the misty haze of the gloomy dawn. The Rhodesians were pulling out all the stops!

Chapter 56

BEN came to a sudden halt. He studied the ground in front of him carefully. He looked to the front… to the left… to the right. He conversed with Mbuyotsi in their alien Bushman tongue, pointing to various places on the ground around them. Finally, they nodded their heads in agreement.

Mbuyotsi turned and looked at the game warden. Silently he lifted his arm, holding the forearm parallel with the ground at waist level. His wrist and closed hand were facing the ground. Suddenly he flicked his fist open… dramatically ejecting all five fingers in a wide-open splayed pattern.

"They've bomb-shelled." Mike didn't question his trackers' interpretation.

"Fuck!" The sku'zapo's profanity did not sound vulgar. It was an apt expression describing his utter frustration. This Muliloh character was as slimy as an oily snake…

The four black soldiers took up defensive positions twenty yards out… at separate points… facing away from the rounded hill top. They were very professional soldiers.

Mike looked at his watch. *'Six-fifty-two.'* They'd been tracking faster than the terrorists had been able to walk during the heavy darkness of the night before. The tracking had been easy… five men stumbling along together in the dark in a single group! It had been a cinch. The terrorists' intentions had clearly been to get into Mozambique just as soon as they possibly could. The tracking team had already gained ten minutes on their quarry.

"Dinga sporoh." Look for the tracks. Mike's instruction to his Bushmen was routine… peremptory. There was no point in wasting words.

The trackers separated and began canvassing the ground in ever widening three-sixty-degree sweeps around their position.

"Where are we now, Julias?"

The accompanying Selous Scout's name was Julias Rothman. Mike had discovered he was the youngest brother of one of his old school friends from Plumtree. And once they were firmly on the spoor the two men had chatted, quickly establishing a sound rapport.

Julias pulled a folded map from a leg pocket of his camo-denims. He looked at the hills and at the valley features all around him. He quickly and expertly pinpointed their exact location on the chart. He ringed it with a pencil mark. *"We're about half-a-mile from the border."*

“Work out a map reference… and put it in shackle. We'd better let JOC know what's happened and where we are.”

The soldier took the pack off his back and squatted down next to it. He withdrew a small note book from a side pocket and wrote down the map coordinates. Then he consulted the shackle code-sheet of the day and began to tabulate the secret cipher.

As Mike watched him his thoughts were not idle. He turned over in his mind the important events of the morning and he pondered the relevant facts. They'd been tracking for one hour and seventeen minutes. Muliloh and his henchmen had had an hour-and-a-half's start on them when the trackers left Village Alpha at dawn. H-Hour was 05.30. The crack of dawn had been H-Hour. The RLI paras had been dropped along the border at H-Hour. Everything seemed to have happened at H-Hour.

Suddenly the truth flashed into focus.

“The gooks were here at H-Hour, Julias.” Mike said with some excitement and total conviction. He always felt more confident when he understood what was going on.

Julias looked up from his task. *“How'd you work that out?”* He underlined the completed code.

“They were here when the RLI troopies were dropped… You say we're only half-a-mile from the border?”

Julias nodded. *“About that.”*

Mike smiled. “Muliloh saw the DAKs… and the parachutes… from here.”

Julias smiled, too. “They would then have known they couldn't get across the border so they bomb-shelled. That's brilliant, Mike. I think you're right.”

“And they will know now we're on their tracks behind them, too. Muliloh is no fool.”

“He won't know that for sure, Mike. He might suspect it…”

“He'll know it. If he's as good as I suspect he is he'll feel it.”

“You sound as though you're getting to understand him?”

“He's only a human animal, Julias. And he'll act and think like an animal does when he's under pressure.”

“So what do we do now? They've bomb-shelled. Which set of tracks is Muliloh's? Which way do you think he'll go?”

“He won’t go forward. Not yet. And he won’t go back either… for two reasons. One: because our last contact at Village Alpha has stuffed up the

works for him good and proper in Chaminuka. Until he gets his systems operating again he won't feel safe there. And two: he won't go back because he will know we have troops coming up behind him."

"So he'll want to try to snivel round the ends of the cordon?" Julias offered a suggestion.

"Yes… But which way will he go?" Mike pondered what Muliloh would do… what *he* would do if *he* were Muliloh.

"The scouts have O.P.s on every big hilltop back from the border now, Mike. They'll see him if he moves anywhere near the border during the day."

"Muliloh will expect that if he's any good. And he's good all right. He's one of ZANLA's best operatives. He'll probably see at least one of the choppers putting a bunch of guys down onto an O.P. position. And he'll put two and two together. So… it's my bet he'll keep well away from the border until its dark."

"They'll go to ground… separately? Make it as difficult for us as possible?" Julias was equally eager to find a solution to the conundrum.

Mike did not answer. He was thinking. He looked to his right… to the south-east. There was a continuous panorama of low, broken and rolling hills in that direction. Every one sported a sparse covering of stunted trees. There were no villages there as far as the eye could see. There was really nothing stopping Muliloh going off to the south-east.

He looked in the other direction… to the north-west. His eyes focused immediately on the distant baobab tree.

Unexpectedly… instantly… Mike's mind flashed back to his childhood days on the Marandellas farm. He and Daniel had often used such trees as rendezvous points. He remembered, particularly, the time he had met his young Shona friend, by arrangement, at the big mountain acacia tree on the high kopje across the Macheke River bridge. That was the day he had shot that fine klipspringer ram which he had, much later, discovered carried Rhodesian record horns.

Using big trees like that baobab as an RV was an old Shona custom. It was ingrained in the Mashona culture. It had been imprinted in their mentality by their bitter experiences with the raiding Matabele impis in the 1800s. After an Ndebele raid the people scattered and came together again, later, at prescribed RV points… like a big tree on a hillside, or a big rock somewhere in the bush nearby. Mike remembered the long Mashona folk stories that Daniel used to tell him… about how the Mashona operated in those heady

faraway days in the latter period of the nineteenth century.

‘That was it!’ Muliloh's strategy burst wide open inside Michael Campbell’s psyche. It erupted in his consciousness like an exploding grenade. A huge smile rampaged across his face. *‘We've got him!’*

Julias stopped his scribbling and listened.

“We've got him, Julias… We've got him.”

The scout looked up at the game warden in silent astonishment.

Mike's grin extended from ear to ear. His face was aching with its intensity. He was jubilant. *“We've got him, Julias… I tell you, we've got him.”*

“Explain.”

“They were suddenly forced to bomb-shell… right? Note… they were forced to bombshell. It wasn't planned.”

Julias nodded.

“They won’t go back. And they can't go forward. So they must go either to the left or to the right… Right?”

“Right.”

“If they bomb-shelled from here, Julias, how do you think they will meet up again?”

“Maybe they won't… Maybe they've decided to go it alone. Maybe they plan to meet up again somewhere inside Mozambique.”

Mike shook his head. “They always meet up after they bomb-shell… The Mashona hate to do anything alone… And this time they'll meet up, too… for sure. They'll have planned to cross the border somewhere much further along the line… together… tonight.”

“You can't possibly know that, Mike.”

“But I do, Julias. I know the Mashona. They are not loners. They prefer to do everything in a group.”

“So, if you're right, how do you think they are going to meet up?”

Mike turned and pointed silently to the faraway giant baobab tree. It stood sentinel on the skyline. It was as starkly obvious to Julias Rothman as a hammer-bashed finger is to a carpenter.

“They're going to RV at that baobab tree?” Julias asked with astonishment.

Mike nodded. His face was still split with a seemingly permanent grin. His white teeth flashed brightly through his blackened lips.

“It’s the only prominent feature either to our left… or to our right, Julias. When they bomb-shelled from here that baobab tree was the only obvious

landscape feature they could see. Muliloh told them to meet him at that tree… And probably at midday. That will give all of them adequate time to get there."

The rugged scout looked at Mike Campbell. He shook his head. The idea was credible. In fact, it sounded more than just possible. Maybe, just maybe, the game warden was right. Everyone said the man was psychic… that he had an uncanny sixth sense… an instinct… when it came to hunting terrorists. Perhaps that was what he was witnessing now… Mike Campbell's incredible clairvoyance!

"You may be right."

"I am right."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"Let's see your maps… That hill is the highest feature to our north-west and it's what… about fifteen miles from here? It should show up like a sore thumb on the map."

"And then?" Julias made no attempt to look at his map. He knew Mike was right. The big hill would stick out of the paper in three dimensions.

"Then you work out the coordinates, Julias and you put them into shackle. And while you're doing that I'll be having a chat with the JOC Commander on your A-60."

"With Brigadier Hubbard?"

"Who else? He's the only one in the JOC who will put the plan I have in my head into action."

Julias Rothman canted his head and lifted his eyebrows.

'It must be great,' he thought 'to have friends in high places.'

If Mike was right it now didn't matter which set of tracks they followed. All five of them would eventually end up at the big baobab tree. All roads would lead to Rome!

They picked one set of tracks at random and followed them, unravelling the twists and the turns the fleeing terrorist had taken to hide his spoor. But Ben and Mbuyotsi were far too good for their evasive quarry. Time and time again they lost the sign. Then, confidently, they picked it up again and continued on the trail. Over recent years they had learnt how to track the elusive magandanga… converting their life-time skills and experience tracking wild animals, to hunting the most dangerous game of all… *man*!

And not just *man.*… but *man armed with a machine-gun*.

Every half-hour Mike called a halt and Julias reported their exact position to the JOC ops room. And each time they stopped, the soldier marked their progress on the map with a heavy pencil ring. One thing soon became apparent. The man they were following, despite his tortuous route, was progressing steadily toward the big hill on which stood the ancient baobab.

And the more they unwound the spoor, the more convinced did Julias Rothman become that Mike Campbell was right. The baobab tree *was* Muliloh's RV.

'If he's right…' Julias thought. 'Michael Campbell is incredible. And it certainly looks as though he is right.'

Everything the scout had heard about the famous and controversial game warden was proving true. Now he understood how Mike Campbell had earned his exceptional reputation. All he needed to achieve success, so it seemed… like a race horse stretching out for the finish line… was to be given his head.

At half-past-eleven the trackers reached the upper cleft of a deep ravine. The ravine fed down from the high plateau they had been traversing. In the gully below, the grass was tall and rank. There were heavy bamboo thickets growing along the ravine's lower levels… and all up the steep sides of the adjacent hills.

The grass and bushes right down the gorge… as far as they could see… were festooned with heavy bunches of golden brown buffalo beans. Just the sight of the ripe, dry, itchy-haired legumes made Mike want to scratch.

The terrorist's spoor led off the rough rocky top of the elevated ground. It seemed to have then followed an old elephant path that wound its way down the re-entrant. That path was the only way down the mountain side.

Mike and Julias looked down the gully and the hairs on their necks began to crawl. Nobody in their right mind could possibly contemplate, with any kind of enjoyment, the prospect of following an armed and determined terrorist into that thick shit below. If there were gooks hiding in that thicket, the whole tracking team would be sitting ducks should they decide to follow the old game trail down.

The incredibly itchy hairs of the buffalo beans, which grew in such profusion in the ravine down below, were yet another deterrent. Only those

who have experienced the terrible pain of those tiny hairs would understand that fact. Yet the terrorist they had been following had seemingly plunged down the gully without a thought for his bodily comfort.

Two hundred feet below, the gorge opened out onto a wide flat plain. There the elephant grass grew tall… well over ten feet tall. Only the canopies of a dozen or so ancient breadfruit trees broke up the otherwise featureless expanse of dry yellow grass.

Mike visualised what that valley must have been like in the bygone days… with elephants resting in the dense shade of the big trees… and buffaloes sprawled across a grassland that they kept short-cropped the year round. But those days were gone… gone forever. The elephants and the buffaloes had been shot out long ago.

The flat bottomland was perhaps three hundred yards wide from the base of the gully, and on the far side the steep gradient of a high granite kopje rose up above the grass. The rounded rock dome loomed even higher than the flat-topped plateau on which the trackers were now crouched in hiding. On the hill's summit they could clearly see the shining, knobby, coppery-grey bark of the leafless old baobab. The tracks of the terrorist they had been following so religiously all morning were heading directly towards it.

"You were right," Julias Rothman said succinctly. "The baobab is their RV. And I've got to admit… all I've heard about you, Katasoro, is true. You're fucking amazing Michael Campbell."

Mike glanced at him obliquely… and he smiled.

"I think we'd better get onto JOC and advise them of our position." Mike was secretly pleased with Julias' praise. He was also very tense with pre-action jitters.

"You thinking the same thing that I'm thinking?" Julias also had the battlefield butterflies.

"What's that, Julias?"

"That we shouldn't walk down into that thick crap below us?"

Mike nodded. "There's no sense in us putting our heads into a bloody noose. Besides that, we don't know what the brig. has done about a reception party at the baobab. And I'd rather avoid those buffalo beans if I can."

"Yaah. I noticed them, too."

"O.K. Let's give the JOC our locstat."[xxvi]

"Call-sign One-One-Charlie. This is Zero. Sunray speaks." It was a

different radio frequency to the one used by the scouts. It was a different *zero*. And it was a different *Sunray*. It was the ops room at JOC Darwin on the air and Brigadier Tom Hubbard was speaking. Things must be hotting up!

"Zero. This is One-One-Charlie. Go. Over."

"Roger your locstat, One-One-Charlie. Please go into ambush at your present position. I repeat. Go into ambush at your present locstat. Do not proceed further. I repeat. Do not proceed further. Be advised… at this time we have your quarry visual. I repeat. We have your quarry visual. At the end of this transmission go to channel eight. I repeat. Go to channel eight. And finally, my friend… Well done. Over."

The lump in Mike's throat nearly choked him. He managed, nevertheless, to reply without emotion.

"Zero… Thank you Sunray. Please confirm you have all five subjects visual. Over."

"One-One-Charlie. That is affirmative. Four have already arrived. Number five is moving towards the RV right at this moment. Our call-signs on the ground have all five terrs visual at this time. Over."

"Roger Zero… Thank you… One-One-Charlie going to channel eight. Over."



"Tina kona yena," Mike beamed at his two trackers. He spoke in their own particular lingua franca "We've got them. The soldiers are in ambush ahead of us. They have the terrorists visual… for sure."

Ben and Mbuyotsi grinned. The four black soldiers of the RAR had understood Mike's part-Bushman part-Chi-Lapalapa message. They too had smiles splitting their sweat-stained faces.

"Zinghaki?" How many? Mbuyotsi enquired.

"FIVE." Mike said happily… holding up his right hand with all four fingers and his thumb extended.

"Ghaaow," the Bushman rejoined. "Today the terrorist Muliloh is going to die… foh shuwah!"

Chapter 57

DANIEL Moyo threaded his way through the fourteen-foot tall elephant grass, moving in the direction of the big baobab tree. The tree, growing on top of a solid and ball-like granite dome, loomed five hundred feet above the valley like a giant avenging angel. It seemed to brood over all the living things beneath it, commanding them to be still. There was no wind, so the flowering heads of the grass high above his head were undisturbed and motionless. Except for the swishing sounds that he made as he forced his body through the heavy grass-canes, everything was quiet and peaceful.

There were the sounds of birds calling in the trees on the hillsides. The monotonous *'quollop'* of a black-headed oriole… the raucous, cackling chatter of red-billed hoopoes… and overhead Daniel recognised the broad sails of a vulture floating on a very high thermal. Everything was still and tranquil in the shimmering heat.

He was exhausted. The sweat poured off his dust-begrimed brown face and his East German battle fatigues were saturated. He did not relish the thought of climbing the high steep hill ahead of him to reach the baobab, and he wondered if any of the others had arrived, or if he would be the first. He had taken his time, meticulously executing his anti-tracking activities, moving slowly and carefully; and there were still thirty minutes before the midday deadline that he had himself prescribed. He had timed his progress well.

He walked through a middle section of the grassland; a section that had collapsed under its own weight during a rainstorm several months before. For a few moments he was, and he felt, exposed.

"Whooeee… Whooeee… Whooeee."

Daniel froze.

"Whooeee… Whooeee… Whooeee."

It was the three-toned whistling signal he and his comrades used to attract each other's attention. High up on the hillside a dark figure emerged from the sparse yellow grass amongst the rocks. The man waved his arms. Then three others stood up. They waved at him also.

'They are all there. They are all safe. They've all made it without being seen by the Rhodesian soldiers – the mabunu enemy'. Daniel smiled. They had used their noggins, too. They had gathered together half way up the slope and directly below the baobab. He was the last to arrive and he was very

pleased that he would not now have to climb the high hill to its summit.

"Whooeee… Whooeee… Whooeee." Daniel returned their whistled signal. A broad smile cut across his face. Everything was going according to plan.

He stopped briefly and waved his arms too. His head and shoulders were the only parts of him that were visible above the half-flattened golden grass stalks. He then resumed ploughing through the forest of lateral grass stems that were festooned, three feet above the ground all around him like thick, dry, stiff spaghetti.

He pushed on, eager now to rejoin his ZANLA comrades.

The eight men of the tracking team were too far away to see or to hear any of this activity. But even if they *had* seen the man they had been tracking so relentlessly since dawn, and if they had seen him make contact with his fellow Zimbabwe freedom fighters, they could not now have reacted. They had new orders. They had been instructed to prepare an ambush and to lie in wait on the man's back trail.

Mike Campbell and his two Bushman trackers, Julias Rothman, and the four black soldiers of the Rhodesian African Rifles, were all lying down along the southern high-rim of a steep gully. They directed the muzzles of their self-loading FN rifles into the grass-filled depression below. From that position they had full command of the upper ravine.

Mike and Julias lay side by side listening intently to the indistinct crackling voices on their A-60 combat radio. They could feel the excitement in the soldiers' metallic communications. The tension was electric.

"One-Nine. This is Two-Three-Charlie. You'd better start winding her up Sunray. Number five has just reached the base of the hill. He'll have joined up with his muckers in about minutes five. I repeat. He will have joined up with the other gooks in minutes five. Over."

The man who had made the report was well hidden amongst a jumble of high rocks. From that position he had a grand-stand view of the entire valley and of the hillside below the baobab. He now had all five of the ZANLA fighters visual.

"Roger Two-Three-Charlie. We are already airborne. Confirm the targets are still located half way up the hillside and directly below the baobab. Over."

“That is affirmative. One-Nine. That is affirmative. Number five is moving up the hillside towards the others as we speak. You can't miss them. Over.”

“Thank you, Two-Three-Charlie. Keep watching. Hold your position. We're on our way…”

Julias grinned at Mike and nodded his head approvingly. He recognised the voice on the radio. “One-Nine *is the call-sign designation for the fire force commander… today's Battle Sunray,”* he explained excitedly, forgetting that Mike understood the radio jargon. *“That was Captain John Houston. Your friend, the brigadier, must have transferred today's fire-force attack from Village Alpha to the baobab rendezvous.”*

Incongruously, tears of emotion sparkled in the battle-hardened soldier's eyes. *“We've got him,”* Julias laughed to himself quietly. *“We've got that bastard Muliloh… at last.”* He had seen enough of Muliloh’s victims to be under any illusion about the man’s heinous soul.

Daniel Moyo strained as he pulled himself up the steep hillside. He'd missed out on one whole night's sleep and he felt as though he had been walking forever. He was dog tired. He needed a rest.

He stopped on the hillside to catch his breath and turned to look along his back trail. From this higher elevation he could see right across the grassland and up the gully with the heavy bamboo thickets that he had just walked down. Nobody was following him. He smiled to himself. He had clearly outwitted the trackers who, he was quite certain, were still trying to decipher his spoor amongst the many hills that he had been carefully winding his way through, assiduously hiding his tracks, all morning.

There was no hurry now. He thought about the coming afternoon’s trek. From here they could easily reach the Ruya River and cross into the Nehanda sector before nightfall. The river was only three hours away by his reckoning. They could rest up on the Ruya and move over the border into Mozambique after dark. In Mozambique they would be safe. They had at least another twelve hours of forced marching ahead of them, however, before they could truly relax. Nevertheless, he was looking forward to ten or fifteen minutes on his back before they began the next long haul.

While he was standing still… for just those few short moments of time, to catch his breath… breathing deeply… Daniel heard the faint whistle of the helicopter's jet engine perhaps fifteen seconds before the machine came

roaring over the hill-top. Despite his fatigue his reaction was lightning-quick. Those fifteen seconds provided him with just enough time to shrug off his heavy backpack and to stumble headlong down the steep hillside. He tripped… he fell… he rolled. His knees banged painfully onto the jagged rocks in his path. Other rocks thumped cruelly into his back and ribcage.

Bleeding from several head abrasions and smarting from multiple bruised muscles, and skinned knees and elbows, he had just made the edge of the heavy grassland when the first of the camouflage-painted Alouette III helicopters came zooming into view.

The machine banked steeply and swung sideways towards the bleak hillside. The group of four ZANLA fighters scattered, but the sparse grass on the rocky slope provided them with scant cover. They crouched amongst the rocks and bushes trying to hide, but they were in full view of both the pilot and the technician who was manning the helicopter's twin Browning machine-guns. The ZANLA men fired their AK-47s wildly, in panic, at the hovering, shifting, terrifying monstrosity above their heads. Stridently the helicopter's guns began to chatter.

Four more helicopters pounced over the hill top. Suddenly the air was swarming with gunships. They flew immediately to various points on the hillsides around the perimeter of the valley. And there, without even waiting to fully touch down, they each disgorged four rough, fit-looking young soldiers from their bellies.

Then the noisy machines were back overflying the valley… hovering… waiting. Their pilots and technicians mechanically watching the lead helicopter as it methodically took out the four terrorists. And the helicopters drenched the air with the shrill whining roar of their shrieking jet engines; and with the heavy whapping beat of their rotors.

A man screamed high up on the hillside. The first helicopter was firing its guns in short, sharp, intermittent bursts. It flew from one crouching… running… scrambling… terrorist to another. Knocking one man out… moving on to the next.

The four sectorial officers of Daniel's command headquarters hadn't a hope against the superior weaponry of the hovering aircraft. The mabunu attack had caught them in a very exposed position and completely by surprise.

'How the hell did they find us?' Daniel thought but he knew the answer was academic. The fact of the matter was the mabunu soldiers were here.

‘How the hell am I going to get out of this?’ Finding the answer to *that* question was much more important.

Daniel mentally wrote off his four men with the ease of the military pragmatist that he was. It was his own skin he had to save now. He burrowed his way quickly but cautiously, deeper and deeper into the heavy grassland. Maybe if he lay doggo the mabunu would come and go? Maybe, if he just lay quiet and let the battle rage on around him… as he had done at the battle for Village Alpha… the mabunu would not find him? He was sure the helicopter crew had not seen him.

Behind him the firing ceased, and the lead helicopter drew slowly away from the mountainside. Daniel knew then that all his men were dead.

“One-Nine. Two-Three-Charlie. One escaped into the grass below the hill. You just missed seeing him. Over.” The caller, in his O.P., had a clear view of the battle ground.

Both Mike and Julias heard the communication. They frowned at each other. Neither man wanted *any* of the gooks to escape from this important contact. They both knew that Muliloh was one of the five terrorists in this bunch.

“Two-Three-Charlie. One-Nine. Roger that. I can see a dark green pack down there on the hillside. Did he chuck off his backpack? Over.”

“Affirmative. One-Nine. Affirmative. Then he ran straight down the hill into the grass. Over.”

“O.K. Two-Three-Charlie. We've got the picture. We'll go down and see if we can find him. Over.”

The helicopter at first circled Daniel's position fifty feet above the ground. But the grass cover was far too tall and far too thick for the observers to see anything from that height. The aircraft edged slowly backwards towards the hill then descended directly over Daniel's back-pack. And at grass-top level it flew slowly along the route the ZANLA commander had taken in his flight. The down draught of the helicopter's rotors flattened the heavy and brittle-dry grass stalks, exposing everything that was hidden beneath. And as it cruised along, the crew searched for the hiding terrorist.

The pilot looked down to the right-front. The technician at the port hatchway… hanging over his hot machine-guns… looked down to the left.

And Captain John Houston… sitting in the left hand co-pilot's seat next to the pilot… looked directly to the front.

"Damn. They know I'm here," Daniel muttered to himself. And he thought: 'They're looking for me. They must have someone watching. They must have known the baobab was our meeting place.' But that was a decision that Daniel had made on the spur of the moment less than seven hours ago! 'How the hell could they have known that?'

He did not have the luxury of time to fathom the answer to that question. The mabunu were onto him. He had a much more precipitous problem to solve. Daniel lifted himself off his back and crouched low in the tall elephant grass, his AKM at the ready. He prepared himself for fight or flight.

Looking between the heavy grass stalks, he watched the advancing helicopter with great fear and trepidation. Through the perspex of its nose bubble he could see the searching eyes of the pilot and those of the fire-force commander next to him. It would only be a matter of seconds now before they saw him.

At that moment, ZANLA's notorious Sectorial Commander, the infamous Butcher-of-Chaminuka, prepared stoically to face his maker. Daniel was surprised at how calm he felt… although his body trembled and he was dimly aware of the tentacles of fear that were writhing deep down in his bowels, probing and groping as if in search of the very core to his being. There was absolutely no doubt in his mind that death stared him in the face.

'But… dammit,' he thought. 'If the mabunu are going to kill me, I'll damn well go down fighting.'

He turned the selector of his AKM assault rifle onto the forward fully automatic position. And, almost idly, he undid the bamboo toggles that secured the flaps on two of the four magazine pouches on his Chinese chest webbing.

The AKM had one advantage over its famous fore-runner, the AK-47. It had a scooped gas muzzle-brake that held the weapon steady when it was fired on fully automatic. It did not run away with itself like the older model did, and Daniel knew it would hold its point of aim when he held the trigger down.

The helicopter crept on slowly towards him. Above the grey-blue masks that covered both their lower faces, Daniel could see the expressions in the eyes of the two men in the forward seats. Still he waited. The machine came on. It was twenty paces away… fifteen… ten. The yellow tips of the rotors

were almost over his head.

Daniel saw the eyes of the fire-force commander open wide in recognition. The man had seen him. The moment of truth had arrived. He saw the soldier's mask moving as he spoke into its facial microphone. His hand rose, pointing in Daniel's direction.

The ZANLA commander stood up tall in the path of the slowly advancing helicopter. The down draught of the aircraft’s rotors blew the grass hither and thither all around him, but he stood his ground. Even as he rose to his feet Daniel brought his assault rifle to his shoulder and placed the foresight onto the point of the pilot's face-mask. It was point blank range. Just before he squeezed the trigger he saw the look of terror reflected in the white man's eyes.

The stream of bullets penetrated the forward screen, punching a tight pocket of holes through the flimsy perspex. The fractured plastic frosted in a wide arc around the punctures. And as the aircraft lifted sharply into the air, a deluge of crimson blood splashed against the inside of the windshield. Daniel… hugely elated… the adrenaline pumping wildly through his bloodstream… eased his finger off the trigger as the bullet holes began to rake downwards across the rising canopy.

He turned his attention then to the army officer. The man's eyes were huge in his desperate fright. His hands tugged frantically at the dual control column between his knees. But learning how to fly a helicopter, with a dead pilot's feet jammed against the pedals, had not been part of the soldier's training.

The aircraft rose slowly above the grass. It tipped over gently onto its side. As it tumbled Daniel emptied the remaining bullets in the rifle's magazine into the suspended body of Captain John Houston. They stitched a long line of holes across the windscreen as the machine turned over. Every one of them found its mark.

The helicopter roared into the ground a hundred yards from where Daniel was standing. It cart-wheeled away from him… over… and over… and over again. The ruptured metal shrieked. The screaming jet engine raced out of control. And the whirling broken rotors tore the machine apart… gouging out huge holes in the deep black soil… propelling the hapless contraption along through the grassland as though the blades were the levers of some bizarre traction engine.

The shattered aircraft came to a sudden, shuddering halt. The jet engine

died. For a brief few moments there followed an eerie silence. The familiar racket from the other four helicopters nearby was still apparent, but the precipitous cessation of the screaming jet engine, so recently and so closely rampant in Daniel's ears, was striking. And through the immediate locale of sudden quiescence, the pinging sounds of cooling… contracting… shrinking… hot metal seemed strangely out of place.

From out of the hush there came the keening, whimpering calls of a seriously injured man. It was the technician who had fired the machine-guns. Daniel experienced a surge of elation at the sounds of the man's pain and anguish. The technician's approaching death was just retribution for his killing of the four senior freedom fighters of Daniel's command.

Then… suddenly… the stricken machine erupted in a gigantic explosion. The violent detonation sent white sheets of vapourised fuel racing over the surrounding grassland. There was a secondary dull *'boeuff'* as the suspended mist ignited. The blast flattened the grass all around Daniel. It lifted him off his feet and it threw him forcibly backwards just as a shower of tortured metal fragments… some whistling… some whirring… some humming… flew dangerously past his head. And in the midst of that terrible conflagration the flight technician died a horrible and gruesome death.

For several long moments Daniel lay on his back stunned. Miraculously he had survived the stupendous explosion. He shook his head to clear the ringing in his ears. It would not go away. A helicopter flew by over his head. Blankly, he looked up at its ominous dark shape… a shimmering mirage… through a pall of heavy black smoke.

Daniel suddenly realized, with horror, that he was lying completely exposed on top of the blast-flattened golden grass. It was only the screen of dark smoke hanging in the air above him that had saved him from detection. He wriggled quickly under the levelled cover and he lay there watching the searching aircraft. His apprehension grew more and more acute as his concussed senses sluggishly returned to normal.

By some stroke of luck the AKM was still in his hands. He extracted the spent magazine and pulled a fully loaded one from a chest webbing pouch, attaching it to the weapon. With a jerky motion he cocked the mechanism and switched the firing lever to safe.

Despite the sudden loss of their aircraft and its crew, the mabunu helicopters began searching for him again. One machine was hovering directly over the wreckage looking for survivors. The other three were

canvassing the grassland all around. Except for the smoke they would surely have found him earlier. The gloomy shroud in the air above continued to protect him. The ever increasing volumes of smoke at ground level, however, also started to asphyxiate him. His lungs filled up with acrid fumes and he began to cough uncontrollably.

Daniel realised that he would have to move. If he didn't… and didn't move soon… he would be roasted alive. He also knew the moment that he broke cover, eager eyes in the hovering helicopters would quickly spot him. And he felt sure that, in his next confrontation with one of them, he would not be so lucky.

The grassland all around the stricken helicopter was ablaze and the quiet crackling, popping, hissing sounds of the burning, rupturing grass stalks that he had heard before, quickly became a cacophonous roar. The up-draught of heat from the raging flames generated its own gale-force wind. Then, suddenly, the fire took on a life of its own. Like a rabid all-consuming monster its flames fanned out with an horrendous and terrifying fury… and with a thunderous, rumbling roar the hungry blaze began to race across the tall flat grassland with the speed of a galloping horse.

The helicopters all pulled away sideways and upwards from the soaring flames, from the terrible heat, and from the rising billows of brown-and-white smoke.

Daniel had embedded himself in the old grey litter of three years grass growth, and flattened over his face and over his body lay this year's moribund canes. The cover all about him was tinder-dry and highly combustible. And the heat, the wind and the boiling smoke from the approaching flames began to race toward him.

Mike Campbell and Julias Rothman lay in their ambush position glued to their radio. The battle chatter was congested, but they had been able to unravel the frantic communications that had traversed the airwaves. And from their elevated position two hundred feet above the valley, although more than a mile away, they had had a commanding view of the faraway battle.

They had both watched, jubilantly, as the fire force commander's G-car had rapidly, and with an almost casual precision, winkled out and eliminated, one by one, the first four terrorists. The sound of the machine-gun chatter had sent their pulses racing.

They had witnessed, with horror, the crashing of the helicopter and the subsequent explosion. It was the first time Mike had seen a helicopter crash. It sent ice cold shivers running up and down his spine. He and his two Bushmen flew in helicopters every day when they were here in the war zone on tracking duty.

Julias became very quiet. The Selous Scout captain who had been killed in the crash, had been his friend.

The two men lay poignantly silent as they watched the veld fire gather momentum. The unconscious thought that passed through both their minds was the hope that the fifth and last ZANLA terrorist of the group… who just might be the notorious Muliloh … the one who had shot down the cyclone… would perish horribly in the flames. There was not a shred of compassion for him in their hearts.

The grassland became a raging inferno.

"Yellow-Two. This is Two-Three-Alpha. For fuck's sake… we need a hot extraction. I repeat. We need a hot extraction. We're moving up the hill as fast as we can but the bloody fire's gaining on us. Over."

"Roger Two-Three-Alpha. I'm on my way. Over."

"Yellow-Four. This is Two-Three-Delta. You'd better come and pick us up, too. The fire's getting too fucking close for comfort here. Over."

"Two-Three-Delta. Yellow-Four. Roger that. Get to an LZ. I'm coming now. Over."

Although Daniel was not in the main path of the rampaging fire, the flames were spreading sideways from its central core and they would very soon engulf him. He knew he had to move quickly or he'd be roasted alive. But with those helicopters hovering in the skies so close above his head, he also knew he'd be cut down the instant he broke cover.

He had Hobson's choice. But what a choice! Finally, he decided that death by machine-gun fire was preferable to becoming a burnt offering. He steeled his nerves to begin his run.

Then a miracle happened. In a single moment both the helicopters near him turned away. Suddenly, the skies above his head were free of hovering gunships. It was too good to be true. But he did not have time to contemplate his good fortune. The flames were almost upon him and the heat had become

unbearable.

‘It’s now or never…’ Daniel thought.

He erupted from his cocoon and raced back the way he had come… towards the ravine… running through the fiercely burning grassland… smashing his way through the heavy grass canes… running parallel with the nearby flames. The thick pall of blue-white smoke near the ground, and the red-brown cloud that had developed above the fire, hid him completely from the two helicopters that were still searching for him on the far side of the vlei. There were no aircraft in the air directly overhead.

He reached the dry streambed at the base of the gully and plunged over its steep clay sides. He hugged the grey embankment and he began to retch. Over his head the fire leaped the narrow furrow and it raced on up the hill.

The skin of Daniel's face was scorched and burning hot. He had lost his forage cap in the blast, and his normally black hair and eyebrows were singed a bright orange-amber. But his main concern was that he could not breathe. The fierce fire that was now raging all around him had exhausted the ground air of nearly all its oxygen. His chest heaved, his lungs gasped, the air was roasting hot, and he fought desperately to retain his senses. And his body shook violently from the physical strain and from the tension that surged within him.

At that moment the helicopters… Yellow-Two and Yellow-Four… flew back directly over Daniel’s head. They had picked up their panic-stricken fire force soldiers and dropped them in a safe place on the big granite hill. Then they flew back to the central vlei. They did not see their elusive quarry lying below the lip of the narrow stream bank. They took up positions, waiting sentinel, directly over the lake of flames that was burning furiously now all across the grassland. And they began looking in the ashes for a body.

Daniel looked up the gully through the shimmering heat haze. Not fifty yards from where he lay was the edge of the bamboo thicket. The fire was burning slowly amongst the bamboo now… consuming the sparse grass that grew amongst the ultra heavy canes, and burning the trash about the roots. But it was not burning the bamboo itself. The veld all around was black with soot and stubble. The charred remains of what had once been lush green bushes were now black, smouldering, and smoking stalks.

The bamboo would give him shelter… for a while. He knew that when the fire had burnt itself out, the mabunu soldiers would first look for his body

amongst the deep ashes on the vlei. Whilst they were doing that he might find a way to escape them. Or he might find a place to hide amongst the rocks on the hillside behind him, or inside the bamboo itself, and there he would wait for nightfall. He would move out under cover of darkness. There were a number of possibilities. But first he had to reach the bamboo without being seen.

Daniel lifted his head above the rim of the embankment, and he carefully watched the helicopters canvassing the ground behind him. The nearest machine was a hundred yards away and still obscured by heavy smoke. When it turned away from him he lifted himself off the sand and, crouching low, he ran along the stream bed using the low bank as cover.

The fire took off up the hill to his right, urged on by the fierce wind that now drove it from behind. It was slowed down by the heavy bamboo in the gully, but on either side it raced on.

"We'd better move back," Julias demurred, looking at the flames advancing up the gully; and at the huge flames waving in the air as they reached over the hilltop fifty yards away to his left.

"We'll be able to walk through the fire, Julias," Michael said reassuringly. "The grass is short and thin on the gravel soils here on top. It'll lose much of its heat and tempo up here. I think we should hold our position until the very last moment. They still haven't found that fifth gook. And… you never know… the bastard might just be down there in the bamboo. He might also be Muliloh."

"Or he's already a roasted chicken…"

"Maybe… But I say we wait."

Reluctantly the soldier held his tongue. The JOC commander had made it plain that the game warden was in command. So Julias lay quietly in his ambush position, his fearful attention focussed on the advancing flames rather than on searching the gully down below for human shapes and movement.

'Campbell wants us to run through the fire!' Julias kept his thoughts on that idea to himself. 'He's fucking mad in the head.'

The tongues of flame ate quickly round the edges of the bamboo, leaving the thicket intact, like an island, smouldering quietly in its wake; then they caught hold of the tall, dry grasses in the upper ravine. The wind whisked the angry blaze into a ferocious wall of blistering flames that hurtled up the hillside. It was a lake of fire and brimstone; a hellish furnace. Nobody could

possibly survive that heat! Above the fiery conflagration the tracking team waited patiently in their ambush. The heat and the smoke preceded the fire, bringing scorching hot flushes to their faces.

"Come on, Mike. Let's go… The fire is getting too fucking close for comfort."

"Wait… What's that? There's movement down there in the bamboo… behind the flames."

"It's a mirage. Everything down there is jumping around in the heat."

"No… It was a man."

"Fuck it, Mike… It's too bloody hot. Let's go."

Mike ignored him. He knew what he had seen. The heat reached up at them fiercely from the advancing, rampaging fire. He tried to ignore that, too. He concentrated his attention on the long open avenue down the centre of the thicket where the old elephant path had cut an open swathe through the bamboo.

'There…' He was rewarded. *'There is a man down there.'* This time he was sure. And in his hand the man carried what was unmistakably an AK rifle. Its long banana-shaped magazine was a dead giveaway. The ghostly figure disappeared just as soon as he had seen it.

"It's the gook!" Mike shouted the statement loudly above the roaring of the fire. "He's got an AK. He's inside the bamboo behind the fire."

"Where?"

Mike did not answer. He was not listening. He had the sights of his FN rifle trained on the gap in the bamboo. Nothing was going to distract him now. Nothing… Not the fire… Not the heat… Not another question from Julias Rothman.

"Where dammit?"

Mike remained silent, frozen in his aim. The distance was fully three hundred yards. The downward angle… forty-five degrees! He took up the first pressure on the trigger.

The man appeared again. His figure was bouncing in the heat waves behind the raging flames. Mike placed the foresight in the middle of the man's chest. He held his breath… and he waited for the heat distortion to subside. There, for a brief moment, the figure stood quite still. Mike squeezed off the last pressure on the trigger.

The shot cracked sharply over the cacophonous roar of the fire. The butt of the rifle kicked mutely against the game warden's shoulder. The breech block

ejected the spent shell and automatically forced another live round into the breech.

Michael Campbell's tracer bullet seemed to wind its way through the flames on its way to the target. The heat made it look as though it was corkscrewing between the tall walls of fire. And the burning red dot got smaller and smaller as it drew ever closer to its target. Then, suddenly, it was extinguished.

The man's figure jerked with the impact of the bullet. The weapon in his hands flew off to one side. And, scrambling frantically to hold his balance, he disappeared in a flailing heap amidst the smouldering bamboo canes.

Mike jumped up and ran back across the short open grassland behind him. The other soldiers needed no encouragement to follow suit. And behind their backs, an avalanche of flames burst over the positions they had been holding.

When the fire reached the plateau's rim its flames and its heat flashed out. It then flowed slowly over the land like melting butter, eating up the short dry grass on the plateau top.

The fire had come and gone, leaving the high rim of the gully black and hot and smoking. Mike had been right. Nobody had had any trouble circumventing the lesser flames on the plateau behind them. Now they were all back at the ambush site, lying once again along the edge of the ravine, looking down into the smoking bamboo thicket.

"Wena tshayileh yena," Mbuyotsi told Mike positively.

"Mbuyotsi's right. You hit him, Mike." Julias had seen the terrorist the instant before Mike had fired. *"I saw him go down, too."*

"Yaah… But is he dead? I still don't relish the idea of going down into that smoking shit if there is a chance there's a wounded gook lurking around."

Julias laughed lightly. "At least the buffalo beans will be well and truly cooked… Anyway, what've we got choppers for?"

"Yellow-Two. This is Call-Sign One-One-Charlie. Confirm you have a new Sunray with you at this time. Over."

"One-One-Charlie, Yellow-Two. That is affirmative. Sunray speaks. Go-Ahead. Over."

"Roger Yellow-Two. I am with the Sparrows. I want to report one terr shot. He's hit and down but we do not have him visual at this time. We would like you to check him out from the air. Over."

“Copied that One-One-Charlie. Wildo! Where are you at this time? Over.”

“Yellow-Two. Just east of your position there is a gully with a bamboo thicket. Over.”

All four helicopters turned in the air below them to face the gully.

“Roger that One-One-Charlie. I have it visual. Over.”

One of the gunships started to move towards the gully.

“Yellow-Two. There is a path leading into the bamboo from the top side. Have a look on the path about fifty yards inside the bamboo from the top edge. We are located on the south-eastern top rim of the gully. Over.”

The helicopter flew directly towards the trackers’ position, locating them first. Then it followed the path down the ravine and hovered over the bamboo at the precise spot where the trackers had last seen the dancing figure of the terrorist.

“One-One-Charlie. I have one dead gook visual on the ground at this time. But I can't get any closer. Too much fire and flames. Its too hot down there. We'll have to drop off a call-sign and get them to carry the body out. Over.”

Chapter 58

THE heat of the day was over and the sun was sliding slowly towards the western skyline. The bodies of four dead terrorists were propped up against the mud wall of a hut in Village Alpha. The soft rays of the afternoon sun lit up their grey and frozen features.

The distorted, punctured and bloody cadavers had all suffered the ravages of the veld fire that had overrun them post mortem. Their skin, their hair, and their grubby civilian clothes had been variously burned or severely singed. Scorched and blackened Chinese webbing was still fastened about their chests. And their charred AK-47s lay across their urine-drenched laps. Death in battle is not a pretty sight.

The locals gathered in the village as they had been instructed to do by Hugh Ritchie's staff. Once again it was to be their gruesome task to identify the bodies.

Everyone agreed that all four of the dead magandangas had participated in the village massacre the night before. And as each man and woman confirmed their recognition of the bodies, they were asked if Muliloh was amongst them. They all shook their heads… fearfully. Fearfully because they knew that if he was not dead they could expect… one day… or one night… another of his horrifying and vengeful returns.

Mike sat to one side, on the ground, with his back to a tree stump. He was detached from the exhibition. And he luxuriated in the euphoria of post battle fatigue… in the release from the terrible tension that had been his constant companion all day long.

He removed a tattered rag from his pack and wiped the black cream from his face. It left his skin whiter but grimy… the pores still spotted black.

This was the second best part of the day… the waiting for a chopper to take him and the trackers back to the JOC. The best part was still to come… when, back at the mess, the first cold beer of the evening was running down his gullet.

Hugh Ritchie sauntered over to where the game warden was resting. “Looks like it was you who clobbered, Muliloh, Mike. The locals say he's not amongst this lot. And your kill is the only body still to come in.”

“He might not have been in the contact at all.”

“He was there all right. And I'm sure it was you who got him, Mike. It’s

too much of a coincidence to expect that he left with four other gooks this morning and that he isn't one of the five we killed today."

"Well we'll know soon enough. I think I detect the happy whistle of a chopper coming in?"

Anna did not leave for Rushinga that morning as she had planned. She had been so unnerved by the thought of Michael tracking down her husband that she had stayed to confirm the outcome of the day's man hunt… for that, she now understood, was precisely what the game warden had done this day. Michael Campbell was now a hunter of men. He had converted his unrivalled big game hunting skills to become a supremely efficient, military man-hunting-machine. And against the degree of expertise that he and his Bushmen possessed, the vakomana of ZANLA had no chance. It was just fortuitous that there were not too many white men in Rhodesia like Michael Campbell… or Bushmen like his two black trackers.

Anna went along with the people who had been summoned to Village Alpha… pretending to be just another woman of the village line. She knew there were four bodies awaiting identification. And she hoped… and she prayed… and she fretted… that none of them would be Daniel.

Anna grasped at the one straw she had. There were only *four* bodies at the village. And Daniel had left that morning with four of his senior officers. There had been five in the party. That meant one of them had escaped. '*It could have been Daniel!'*

'It MUST be Daniel.'

The first person Anna recognised when she entered the village was Michael Campbell. He looked beaten… and tired… but very much alive. Strangely… this time… her mind was neutral about that latter fact. Her thoughts were overwhelmed by her anxieties about Daniel.

Anna switched her mind off to Michael's presence. She *had* to see the bodies. Her heart was hammering as she joined the queue, and it continued to thump away wildly as she shuffled along with the row of people to where the dead vakomana were on display.

Reluctantly… yet strangely eager, too… she peered out from far back in the line. At first, all she could see were the vague shapes of four black bodies. But as she drew closer she began to recognize… one by one… the distorted and burnt features of the cadavers, all grey and waxen now in horrible death. By the time she was standing directly in front of the four dead men she

already knew that Daniel was not one of them.

"Yes," she said to the black detective, pulling her shawl more tightly over her head and face. *"All these men were present at the pungwe last night."* And: *"No… Muliloh is not one of these."* A feeling of exultation lifted her soul. *'Daniel had escaped!'*

An uncontrollable smile broke across her face. The relief she felt was beyond description. Her head began to spin with the exhilaration, and from the sudden release of the suppressed tension that had threatened to explode inside her chest all day long.

Before her lay the dead bodies of Daniel's four sectorial lieutenants… two only recently promoted. A fortnight ago the mabunu soldiers had killed the cream of Chaminuka's sectorial *and* detachment commanders. Today they had taken out the entire senior command structure.

Assuming that Daniel was now safe in Mozambique, she began to think of the task that lay ahead. She and Daniel… and Rex Mbudzi… would have to rebuild a new Chaminuka Sectorial Command literally from scratch.

Anna glanced across briefly at Michael. He was engrossed in conversation with the special branch policeman. She was now dispassionately glad that Michael Campbell was safe. At the same time she realised that her once powerful lust for the man had finally gone. Her emotions were in perspective now. Never again would her heart flutter when she saw him. Michael Campbell was now merely a man in her past… a brief and lustful teenage flirtation… a completely fulfilled experience of her youth that was not to be repeated. Now he was just another one of the mabunu enemy!

The fear for Daniel that she had experienced all day long had gnawed away at her conscience, further eroding the once extraordinary feelings she had had for the white man. She had come to realise that, if Daniel had died today, it would have been Michael Campbell who would have killed him. And she had fretted all day long about not having killed the game warden when she had had the opportunity.

But Daniel had not died. And she had not killed Michael. She and Michael, therefore, now owed each other nothing. Now she could continue with her life unfettered by an illogical, impossible passion that had been kindled in her youth and which had recently flamed up again. The heady and volatile conditions of the war, however, had extinguished it properly once and for all.

Then, remembering again her dangerous indiscretions at Chimoko's

village, she quickly looked away from Michael… before one of the black detectives noticed her inspection.

Anna then left the line of spectators.

Better settled in her mind and in her heart now, Anna wended her way down the path that led out of the village. For the first time that day she felt content. She and Daniel had hit rock bottom today. From now on their situation could only improve. Together, they would rebuild the Chaminuka command and ZANLA would win the war.

Then, as she walked along, something nudged its way into her quietude… a faint noise. It made her lifting spirits falter. She stopped to listen… straining her ears.

'Was that… in the faraway distance… the soft whine of a helicopter's jet engine?' Anna thought.

She turned to confirm the sound. Inside her breast a dreadful foreboding caused her heart to beat a little faster, and the terrible apprehension she had so recently shrugged off returned with a jolt. Above the sound of the engine she recognised the gentle rhythmic pulse of the aircraft's rotors.

Helicopters had been coming and going all day long… in and out of Village Alpha… for many different reasons. For one thing, the village had again been turned into today's forward refueling base for the helicopters. The one coming in right now, therefore, could have a quite innocuous purpose. But her nagging doubt… her persistent premonition… surged to the surface once again.

Everyone was looking in the same direction now… at the dark blob in the sky… at the fast approaching gunship. As the helicopter drew closer, Anna's heart skipped a beat for beneath the machine's belly hung a heavy nylon net. And inside the net was a *fifth* body. Everybody saw it.

"Muliloh," the people whispered Daniel's Chimurenga name. And the name Nehanda was on everyone's lips, too.

"Chikamba has spoken to Nehanda. She has truly avenged his death," they were all saying.

"Aaaiieeee. Our new midzimu is, indeed, a very powerful spirit to have such influence."

Anna felt the angry, belligerent eyes of the villagers resting upon her; men, women and children. She understood, unequivocally, that if that fifth body was indeed that of her beloved husband, she would not last long at the hands

of the local villagers. It was only Muliloh's living presence… the dreadful threat that he posed… that had kept the local village people at bay. This was what she had always known… had always feared… about ZANLA's infamous Plan-B.

But the people's hostility was not what concerned her the most at that moment. It was another frightening feeling that weighed heavily upon her heart. Intuitively she *knew* that the body in the net was that of her husband, and her whole being began to quake with a desolate, desperate anxiety.

She turned and, with fear and great trepidation snatching at her gut, she forced her way through the crowd and hurried back into the village compound.

The helicopter hovered over the open space where the bodies of the old headman and his five sons had lain that morning. It descended until the net was mere inches from the ground. The technician yanked on a rope and the whole contraption fell away cleanly from the aircraft's belly.

The helicopter's final task that day was to pick up the trackers and to return them to the JOC. But first the pilot and the tech wanted to see the body of the dreaded Muliloh for themselves.

The pilot set the aircraft down on the nearby open field, and whilst it was landing Mike helped Hugh Ritchie to unfold the crumpled net. In a matter of seconds they had the ends of the net extended and the body lay exposed, face down in the dirt. There was a single bullet exit wound in the centre of the man's back.

"Good shot," The SB man said laconically.

They turned the body over. Hugh, superficially, wiped the dead man's face clean of dust with his bare hand. The eyelids were half open exposing the static and dust laden eyeballs beneath.

The crowd was hushed as they looked down on that feared and hated face.

Someone said: *"Muliloh."* And that heady pronouncement was followed by a hub-bub of subdued discussion. Suddenly, there was an aura of excitement in the crowd… an electric feeling of triumph.

"IT'S MULILOH… MULILOH IS DEAD," someone shouted the message to the many people who were standing watching the proceedings from some distance away. They, in turn, shouted the information to others beyond. And they… jubilantly… relayed the happy news to those still further afield.

All along the village line people came out of their huts to discuss the unbelievable event. Then they left whatever it was they had been doing, and they began to hurry back towards Village Alpha. Those on the paths who had been outward bound turned around and retraced their steps. And as the villagers converged on the scene, the walking trickle became a running human avalanche.

"There seems to be no doubt about his identity," Hugh chuckled happily. "Seems like you get first prize, Mike. As I thought… it was you who killed Muliloh."

But the game warden hardly heard him. He was staring down into the face of the man who was known to everyone as the notorious Comrade Muliloh… the infamous Sectorial Commander of ZANLA's Chaminuka Sector… alias *the Butcher-of-Chaminuka*. But Muliloh was not the name that Mike Campbell knew him by.

"Daniel…?" The utterance was soft… caressing… like a sigh.

"What's that?"

Mike's body shuddered. He suddenly felt very cold. And his skin began to crawl.

"You all right, Mike?" Hugh asked anxiously. "You're as white as a sheet."

"I know this man," Mike said quietly. He did not take his eyes off the ZANLA commander's dead face. Gently he closed the dead man's eyelids with his fingertips. Daniel's face was icy cold against his hand.

"You know him? You know Muliloh?" The SB man was stunned.

Mike drew a handkerchief from his breast pocket and knelt down at the side of his one-time friend. Almost with reverence, he straightened Daniel's head and he carefully wiped away the remaining ash and dust from his face.

A single tear ran down the game warden's cheek. Then, suddenly, an inexplicable shock of vertigo hit him. His breathing became very shallow. His head began to spin. And he was forced to place the flat of one hand on the dead man's chest to steady himself.

"Mike. …? What's the matter with you?"

Mike felt a solicitous hand on his shoulder. He shrugged it off roughly… too roughly.

"Nothing," he said regaining his composure. His sudden nausea evaporated just as quickly as it had come. *"Nothing… I'm all right."*

Mike rose slowly to his feet. He used the grimy handkerchief to wipe away the tear. Then he blew his watery nose. His eyes never left Daniel's face.

Hugh Ritchie was clearly worried. But his concern slowly subsided as he saw the colour return to the game warden's face.

“You gave me quite a turn there, Mike. Are you sure you're O.K.?”

Mike swallowed hard. “Yahp… I'm fine now. I just got a bit of a shock that's all.”

“You say you know… knew… Muliloh?”

“His real name is Daniel Moyo,” Mike answered resolutely. “He comes from Marandellas… the Soswe TTL. He and I were friends… bosom buddies… when we were kids. For years… We grew up together. He taught me how to hunt and how to speak Chi-Zezuru. I taught him how to shoot and how to speak English.”

“Shit! You knew him very well, then… Are you quite sure it’s him?”

Mike leant his weight on his FN rifle and he looked down at the ZANLA commander's face. He looked at Daniel's eyes, now closed in death. The pallor of his skin was a pinky grey-brown. It had once been dark brown. His singed hair and eyebrows were ginger. They had once been jet black. But his facial features had not changed.

“Absolutely,” Mike said unequivocally. “It’s him all right. Comrade Sectorial Commander Muliloh's real name is Daniel Moyo. His father's name was Joseph…”

“Just a sec, Mike. I want to get my notebook from my pack… Must record all this. I'll be back in jiffy.”

Hugh Ritchie walked over to where his pack was standing against a nearby hut wall. His Israeli Uzi sub-machine-gun swung casually under his arm-pit from its leather sling.

Mike Campbell looked down at the now grey and blank face of his old friend. *‘So Comrade Muliloh… the Butcher-of-Chaminuka… is Daniel Moyo!’*

Mike remembered Daniel's bitterness at the time he had left school. He recalled how deeply Daniel had resented the racial discrimination he had encountered when seeking his first post-school job… simply because he was not white. Mike had experienced a spontaneous empathy with Daniel then. He had exactly the same feelings for the dead man now. Daniel Moyo had not received a fair deal in those far gone days. And during the twenty intervening

years, Mike realised, the position had not really improved at all for his Shona friend.

Mike was suddenly not surprised to find that the dreaded Muliloh was the once disillusioned, and highly resentful, Daniel Moyo. And strangely, suddenly, he did not blame him for becoming a terrorist. He realised that if he himself had been born a Shona he, too, would probably have joined ZANLA. He, too, would probably have become a freedom fighter. And Mike felt a great sadness then that it was he who had killed him.

Mbuyotsi was standing not far from Muliloh's body, the muzzle of his FN rifle balanced casually on the rubber toe of one canvas boot. He had been watching the game warden and sensed that something was very strangely awry. He recognised the extraordinary look of desolation in the game warden's eyes. He had last seen Katasoro like this when Richard Poole had been killed. But Mbuyotsi had not understood the white men's conversation, so he did not know the reason why.

“Kanjani?” What's up? The Bushman inquired.

Mike looked at his tracker sadly and he sighed: “Kudalah loh muntu loh… Muliloh… yena shamwari kakhulu kah meena, Mbuyotsi.” A long time ago this man… Muliloh… was my very good friend, Mbuyotsi.

“Ghhaaww.”

Anna looked on in horror… transfixed… at the body of her husband. Unconsciously she watched the solicitous manner in which Michael had closed Daniel’s eyelids for the last time, and how he had wiped clean Daniel's stiff and pallid face. Shocked though she was, she absorbed rather than heard the facts of the white men's conversation. She knew, therefore, two things for sure: that Michael recognised his one-time friend; and that it was Michael who had killed him.

If Michael Campbell had been stunned by the shock revelation of Muliloh's real identity, Anna Moyo was devastated by his death. And for a prolonged moment her mind was paralysed by the sight of her husband's body.

Slowly, however, she became more and more conscious of the icy cold sweat that bathed her skin, and of the deep heat that burned fiercely in her labouring lungs. And she slowly became aware, too, of the fact that her body was shaking quite out of control. Then everything around her, except the sight of Michael Campbell, became lost in an amorphous blur.

She did not see the elated villagers staring at her with open hatred in their

eyes. She was not conscious of their pointing fingers and of their open utterances of her Chimurenga name. For, indeed, the name *Motoh* was on all their lips… and they were trying to attract the white policeman's attention to their identifying gestures. She did not see Hugh Ritchie rummaging about in his bag nearby for his notebook; nor did she see the handful of black detectives and soldiers who were standing in a wide circle looking down triumphantly at Daniel's body. She was not even aware of Mbuyotsi standing talking to his game warden boss.

All Anna was conscious of as she reached under her blouse to retrieve the Togarev, was the figure of Michael Campbell standing before her. He seemed to be suspended at the end of a short bright tunnel. She had the feeling she was peering through a long narrow culvert and seeing him standing at the other end. Only the culvert was not made of concrete. It was made of a strange translucent material, for its walls radiated a brilliant white light. She could see Michael very clearly… very clearly indeed… for he was no more than five yards away and the lighting was superb.

Anna withdrew the pistol and thumbed off the safety catch. The villagers saw her belligerent action and, immediately fearful, they radiated away from her in a dispersing rush. Anna was not conscious of that fact either.

She lifted the weapon in both her hands and pointed the muzzle down the bright diaphanous tunnel. Michael had earlier removed his webbing, so his chest was fully exposed and she aimed the weapon directly at his beating heart.

She began to chunter with her inner tension… her lips and her jaw aquiver. Then… at last… she spat out the word that she had been trying so desperately to eject: *"MICHAEL!"*

The game warden turned at the sound of his name. And he looked death in the eye as Anna took up the first pressure on the trigger.

"Anna…" Mike said softly, recognising her instantly. There was no mistaking those beautiful almond-shaped eyes, the high cheekbones and the paler than normal brown African skin… all features of the Chinese genes in her blood.

'Anna and Daniel!' Michael thought. The connection was obvious.

"Comrade Motoh?" Mike's question was a statement. *"You are Motoh!!!"* He made the pronouncement flatly.

"You killed Daniel, Michael." Her voice was strident. A jarring falsetto. It quavered strangely with the emotions that clogged her throat.

Mike's FN rifle was trailing in his right hand. He made no move to protect himself. That was peculiar because his reaction to danger was normally instinctive… as swift as greased lightning. Had Anna been a charging lion she would have been dead the instant she exposed herself with a bullet through the brain. But she was not a charging lion. She was Anna Mashonganyika… Anna Moyo. And her sudden reappearance in his life, together with his killing of his old teenage friend Daniel, had Michael Campbell utterly confused.

Mike's left hand went out… palm spread… to caution Mbuyotsi at his side. He knew his tracker's reactions were just as slick and innate as his own. Subconsciously, Mike knew one thing: *'He did not want Anna dead.'*

All the while flashes of stunning recollections raced through his whirling brain. They came and went in the instant of their conception: of a young girl standing proud and naked in the shallow waters of a faraway river, her pubescent breasts thrust forward provocatively; of that same enchanting body… a little older… a great deal bigger… glistening with the oily suds of cheap Lifebuoy soap; of dark, beguiling eyes challenging him… flirting… always flirting… from beneath arched and coquettish eyebrows; and of her handsome face beneath him… so very, very close… as he lay on top of her, propped on his elbows, that last September day. It was so very, very long ago. And he remembered how he had marvelled at the magical joining of their impassioned naked bodies.

He remembered, too, Anna's sensuous voice in those halcyon days. It had always been laughing, warm and filled with so much promise.

That last year… when they had finally become lovers… was a wondrous year. He remembered thinking that he had been a fool to have repulsed her for so many school holidays before.

He absorbed the reality of her presence now… in the single moment that he recognised her. She had not changed much at all. She was older… a little thicker in the face… in the arms… and across the beam. And her breasts were, if anything, even more voluptuous than before. She was a mature woman now. Before she had been but a nymph! And the allure of her beautiful but now deranged eyes was just as it had always been.

The sweat was pouring from Anna's face. And the gun in her hands was shaking with a violent inner rage. She knew in that moment that her furious passion was very real. It was not the impotent force it had been earlier that morning. She knew she was now capable of killing Michael

Campbell.

Today the game warden had killed her Daniel. Today he himself would die. She gave no thought at all to her own fate thereafter.

Her finger maintained its pressure on the trigger. The weapon remained trained on Michael Campbell's heart. All it needed to resolve the seething, grating conflict that boiled unconsciously within her mind… within her soul… and within her heart… was one small tug of a muscle spasm. And the firing pin would strike.

"DAMN YOU MICHAEL CAMPBELL," Anna screamed. *"DAMN YOU TO HELL."* It was her final condemnation. The muscles on her finger tightened. A paleness grew about her knuckles.

'Now you die, Michael Campbell.' The words sang in her heart and they came from somewhere deep down in her soul. *'Now you die'*.

Everyone had stood watching the brief confrontation… mesmerized… frozen. But Anna's sudden outburst galvanised them into action. Suddenly there was movement all around.

Hugh Ritchie swung his little Uzi off his shoulder and clasped it in his hands. A black detective went for his holstered pistol.

And out of the corner of his eye, Mike saw the stumpy muzzle of Mbuyotsi's military FN rifle lift from the rubber toe-cap of his tracker's boot. The barrel of the Bushman's rifle rose upwards and forwards in one fluid action. There was the metallic snapping sound of the safety catch flicking off.

On his other side Mike was aware of Hugh's sub-machine-gun swinging towards Anna.

"NO! NO!" he screamed.

Mike's mind was in a whirl. He moved swiftly to counter the Bushman's reflexive action. He was too late.

But it was Anna who pulled the trigger first.

Mike grunted as the small steel slug thumped heavily into his chest. It knocked him off balance. He stumbled backwards… dropping his rifle. His breathing stopped abruptly in the same instant of time. And as he began to crumple Mike sensed… rather than heard… the two detonations as Mbuyotsi double-tapped the trigger of his weapon. And somewhere in the void of his fading, bewildered, subconscious, he was cognizant of two short, sharp, stutters from Hugh Ritchie's Uzi.

The Bushman's two high-powered bullets caught Anna high in the

stomach. They punched her backwards… viciously. As she tumbled to the ground the people all around scrambled even further away from her. They were desperate to remove themselves from the lethal lines of fire. As she hit the ground, Hugh Ritchie's Uzi slugs pummelled into Anna's ribs.

She writhed in the dust… briefly… her legs kicking… and she gargled blood. Her mouth worked reflexively. One hand came up to her lips and the gore gushed through her fingers. Her eyes blinked madly… rapidly… but they faded quickly. Then her bloodied hand fell from her face. And her eyes stared vacantly at the immaculate blue sky over her head.

This time Anna Moyo, the infamous *Sectorial Commissar of Chaminuka*, was really dead.

The game warden hit the ground heavily. He lay in the dust dazed and shocked. The whole of his chest felt numb. He panicked when he realised he could not breathe. He rolled onto his side, scrabbling to get up… but his muscles would not coordinate.

He became dimly aware that Mbuyotsi was kneeling by his side. The Bushman had a hand on his shoulder. He was saying something to him. Mike could see the tracker's mouth moving but he could not hear the words. There was a shrill ringing in his ears.

Then… with a shuddering convulsion… his breath returned… painfully… with a rush. Within seconds his throat and his mouth filled with a strange and thickly hot fluid. He coughed roughly… hoarsely. The muck in his mouth tasted of salt. It began to smother him. Then a flood of frothy pink blood surged out from between his lips.

He felt… rather than heard… horrible, gurgling, bubbling sounds. It was his breath escaping through the jagged, bloody exit hole that the bullet had gouged out beneath his shoulder blades.

‘Fuck it… I've been lung shot.’ Mike understood. He knew the score.

Mike had himself pumped far too many bullets through the breathing apparatuses of big game animals to not recognise the terrifying symptoms. A bullet through the lungs was deadly on a buffalo, or an elephant. It was no less fatal than a good heart shot, or a bullet through the brain. It just took a little longer to bring death.

The sudden realisation of the grave seriousness of his injury, and the frailty of his mortality, intensified the foreboding dread that had already swamped his wind-milling thoughts. And the crazed look of hysteria, of panic, in his

wild eyes reflected the rampaging terror that had taken possession of his pounding heart and whirling brain.

He began to flail his arms and legs without being conscious of the fact… and without any apparent purpose… in the hopelessness of his raving frenzy.

Then, out of the misty haze, there were other people around him. Vaguely he recognised the face of Hugh Ritchie. There were others that he did not know… the helicopter pilot… the flight technician… without their bone-dome helmets.

The oval white orbs of their faces began to spin round and round in his vision. The whole world seemed to be flying about him at great speed. He felt nauseous. And there was the constant numbness… a hidden hot pain. And all the time he was coughing and spewing out burbling, pink, frothy blood from his shattered lung.

They were speaking to him and issuing instructions to each other. His level of consciousness ebbed and flowed. And in his bemused state of fear and panic, Mike did not register what it was they were saying. The ringing in his ears persisted… drowning out all other sounds.

The pain in his chest became red hot. His throat felt thick and paralysed. He tried, but he could not speak. Yet he could feel what the men were doing.

They cut away his shirt and taped on a thick and heavy field dressing to the ragged exit wound in his back. A plaster sufficed for the small puncture in his chest. Someone gave him an injection.

'Morphine.' He was *compos mentis* enough to understand that an injection meant they had given him morphine.

All the while he fought against the growing heat of the pain… the fire in his chest. And he fought to counteract the paralysing muscle spasms that threatened to bring to a complete halt his already laboured breathing. And he sensed all the while, with a growing alarm, the continuing bubbling, burbling, sounds that issued from his back. It was those *sounds*… those incredible sensations… more than the pain that now frightened him the most, for they were a constant reminder of the terrifying seriousness of his wound. And the gurgling noises continued with each stertorous breath that he exhaled, despite the attempted wound-sealing placement of the dressing.

They were putting him on a stretcher.

"Turn him onto his right side," the young air force tech was telling someone.

At last he could hear them speaking… faintly… faraway in the distance.

The morphine was beginning to calm him now. And with the increasing peace the narcotic brought, he became ever more perceptive of his surroundings.

“But that's the side he took the bullet.”

Mike could hear the voices more clearly with each passing moment but he could no longer see the faces. Neither was he interested. He felt icy cold… and numb all over… as the shock set in. His body was now shaking uncontrollably.

“We've got to put the injured lung at the bottom,” the young airman explained the medical reality patiently. “That way the good lung won't fill up with blood.”

‘That sounded logical enough’ Mike thought on hearing those words.

He felt himself being turned onto his side. And he heard… and he felt… the grinding crepitus of a bullet-shattered rib. But he felt no pain. Straps were placed over his body and drawn down tight. He could not move. They gently lifted his head and placed a pillow beneath it.

And all the while he coughed and he spat out the fluffy pink froth that surged up through his parched and aching throat.

The pain in his chest grew dull. It pounded mercilessly with each beat of his heart.

They pushed a needle into the crook of his arm.

‘They've got me on a drip.’ Michael understood all that was happening to him.

The helicopters all carried extensive medical kits. And the pilots and the flight technicians had all been trained to provide first aid to gun-shot victims.

“Ben… You hold the bag up… Like that.”

‘They've press-ganged Ben into helping.’ Mike thought.

He tried to find Ben's face in the mêlée that thronged about him. But the images were too heavily blurred.

“O.K. Let’s go.”

Mike felt the stretcher lifting. He was conscious of the jostling shuffle as they carried him towards the helicopter.

Michael Campbell felt very sick. Then the pain and the anguish faded right away. He felt himself falling… and spinning… and tumbling… into the abyss of a huge grey space that seemed to have no end. Finally the light faded and he was lost in dark oblivion.

The helicopter lifted off in a cloud of dust. It turned and headed southward, gathering height and speed with each passing second. Salisbury General Hospital was its destination… a full one hour's flying time away.

"The trackers want to know if their boss-man, Katasoro, will live?"

Hugh Ritchie drew his eyes down from the fast retreating G-Car. His mind was occupied with very personal thoughts… friendly thoughts… worried thoughts… about the seriously wounded man in the helicopter. Tears swamped his eyes. He had not heard the question. He looked blankly at his black detective.

"Sorry Thomas… What was that?" He asked, unashamedly wiping away his tears with his hands.

"The trackers want to know if Katasoro will live, Sir?"

The SB inspector looked sadly at the two Bushmen. They looked so lost and so forlorn now without Michael Campbell at their sides. Their scrawny, stick-thin bodies appeared so terribly frail and pathetic in their bulky camouflaged army shirts. And the heavy military FN rifles looked incongruous in their skinny hands. His heart went out to them.

'What better friends could any man have than these?' was the thought that ran through the policeman's mind. The tears came again. This time he wiped them from his eyes and face with a handkerchief, and without shame or embarrassment.

Hugh Ritchie had always wondered at the importance that Michael Campbell attached to the special friendship he shared with these two strange men. Now he understood. Another huge lump of emotion caught in his throat. He had to swallow hard to dislodge it… and to push it down under control.

Dolefully he shook his head, his eyes still weepy. He shrugged. "Tell them I don't know, Thomas… Tell them I just don't know. It's in the lap of the Gods. But they know Katasoro is a strong man. He will fight hard to live."

The black detective explained all this to the trackers… slowly… in the simple Chi-Lapalapa language that he and they shared.

The trackers persisted. They asked the black detective yet more questions.

"They wish to know, Sir, if you will give them a little time before you call their taxi." The detective paused briefly then… and he smiled knowingly at the quaint idea of what a helicopter meant to these straight-forward but simple men.

‘Taxi?’ The Special Branch Officer did not understand. But he did not interrupt. Clearly there was more to follow. “They want you to ask the people here, on their behalf, to get their new village midzimu… Peter Chikamba… the man who was murdered here last night… to intercede with the great mhondoro spirit, Nehanda. They want Nehanda to help their Nkosi Katasoro to get well.”

Hugh Ritchie looked at the two Bushmen in total amazement. He could see they were deadly serious. “But these men are not of the Mashona people, Thomas. They are Bushmen from the Kalahari Desert. What do they know of Nehanda?”

“They believe that Nehanda can save their Nkosi, Sir.”

The SB officer sighed. Slowly he nodded his head with understanding.

“Very well Thomas. You'd better go along with them as they ask. They'll need you to interpret for them. But be back here by 18h00. We must leave here by 18h00 at the latest. By the time we get to Rushinga we’ll be well into the curfew… and it’s already gook ambush time. We'll have to take the trackers along with us tonight. I'll arrange army wheels to take them into Darwin in the morning.”

The black detective explained this arrangement to the trackers.

“No, Sir,” Thomas smiled with sudden mirth. “They insist that you call up a taxi for them. They want to go to the JOC in Darwin tonight.”

“A ‘taxi’, Thomas?”

“Yes, Sir. They want a helicopter to uplift them from here.”

‘So THAT was their taxi… a helicopter.’ Hugh Ritchie smiled hugely at their arrogant demand. Then he laughed. ‘If you don't ask… you don't get!’ He shook his head at their ignorant temerity. ‘If only they understood what it cost to fly a bloody helicopter!’

“What the hell, Thomas.” Hugh Ritchie made up his mind swiftly. “Tell them I'll get them their damn taxi… even if it means me speaking to the brigadier himself. They've both done a damn fine job today. They bloody well deserve it.”

Just after five o'clock that evening a helicopter landed on the open field alongside Village Alpha. It took off immediately thereafter. Its passengers were two MaSili Bushmen. The pilot flew them directly to Mount Darwin where Brigadier Tom Hubbard met them personally on arrival. And that night… in the officers' mess… after a huge and hearty meal… the JOC

Commander and his senior staff got them both thoroughly drunk.

The next day Ben and Mbuyotsi flew in a fixed-wing aircraft of the Police Reserve Air Wing… 600 miles… to the tiny airstrip at Chipinda Pools in the Gonarezhou National Park. They never again returned to the Hurricane Operational Area.

Michael Campbell was still alive when, just after dark, the helicopter landed on the helipad in the car park of Salisbury's General Hospital. He was whisked into the operating theatre and underwent immediate emergency surgery. After the operation none of the surgeons was prepared to comment on his chances of recovery. When he was wheeled into the Intensive Care Unit that night his chances of survival were balanced on a knife edge.

And somewhere in the limitless and ephemeral ether a brand new midzimu, Peter Chikamba, sought audience with a mhondoro spirit called Nehanda. And in her hands he placed the supplication that he had received that very day from two Bushmen trackers whose ancestral home was in the faraway Kalahari.

Michael Campbell's fate that night was, therefore, placed firmly in the hands of the greatest of the Mashona mhondoro spirits… Nyamhita-Ne-Handa. Whether he lived or died was now at the pleasure of this strange and immortal goddess.

GLOSSARY

CALL-SIGN A number assigned to, and used by, a military unit for identification in the field (most frequently used to identify themselves and/or their machines in radio communications).
CHANGAMIREH Originally the title of a Mashona “mambo king”. Now used to signify a person who held in high esteem by rural Mashona people.
CHOPPER Helicopter (slang).
CHILAPALAPA (also ‘fanikaloh’) Lingua franca has many forms.
CYCLONE Helicopter (military jargon).
BADZA African Hoe (an agricultural tool).
DASSIE A rock hyrax. The ‘Coney’ of the bible. An animal the size of a big hare.
DOEK Head scarf.
DWALA Large, bald, granite dome (Can rise up to 1000 feet in height).
G-CAR Alouette helicopter gunship armed with twin .303 machine-guns.
GOOK Terrorist/freedom fighter (SF slang).
INT Intelligence information.
JESSE Dense Zambesi valley thicket vegetation.
JOC-HQ Joint Operational Command Headquarters.
K-CAR Alouette helicopter gunship armed with a single 20mm Aden Cannon.
KOPJE (Kopjie) A hill or small mountain (normally covered in granite boulders).
LOCSTAT Six figure map reference – within 50 metres of being 100% correct.
MABUNU White man (Mashona slang – derogatory).
MDALA (Madala) Old Man.
MAGANDANGA Terrorist/Freedom-Fighter (Slang).
MANYATELAS Home-made sandles made from old motorcar tyres.
MAHEWU A nutritious, unfermented brew made from maize meal.
MARUNGU White man (Mashona slang – derogatory).
MATEPE Two metre-long wooden pole; 2 inches in diameter. Used for various purposes in agriculture and for building native housing structures.
MAKIWA White man (Mashona slang – derogatory).
MIDZIMU A Mashona ancestral spirit that looks after the interests of the

people at the village level. Lowest ranking spirit of the Mashona ancestor worshipping cult.
MONDHORO A senior (or lion) Mashona ancestral spirit that looks after the interests of the people at the national (or tribal) level. Highest ranking spirit of the Mashona ancestor worshipping cult.
MUJIBA A village "boy scout" used by the vakomana of ZANLA for a host of tasks in the interests of the freedom fighters' war effort.
MUTI Medicine.
NGANGA (also NYANGA). Witchdoctor.
NKOSI Native title for a chief (Ndebele) or adult white man.
HOMBERA A polite and ritualistic Mashona greeting when people meet – by means of the soft clapping of hands together (as if in prayer).
O.P. Observation Post.
POLE & DAGGA Pole-and-mud.
POVO Slang Mashona word describing "the peasantry" (normally derogatory).
PUNGWE An intimidating political meeting, conducted at night, and used by ZANLA to discipline rural villagers who have been disloyal to ZANLA's cause. Often ends in the execution or mutilation of 'guilty' villagers.
RAR Rhodesian African Rifles – an all black, well disciplined and highly competent regiment, with white senior officers.
RLI The Rhodesian Light Infantry. An all white Rhodesian Regiment.
RV Rendezvous.
LZ Landing Zone (for helicopters).
SABOOKU An African village headman. (A sub-chief).
SAS Special Air Service. An elite Rhodesian 'special forces' unit.
SB Special Branch (Policemen) (Members of the Rhodesian SF).
SCOTCH CART Two wheeled cart pulled by donkeys or oxen.
SF. Security Forces (Rhodesian). Collective name for all units of the Rhodesian army, air force and police.
SITREP Situation Report.
SITUPA Native work-record certificate (used as an I.D. document).
SKU'ZAPO Native name for the Rhodesian Selous Scouts Regiment. This was a totally non-racial military unit, including many 'turned' ex-ZANLA combatants. This unit was respected and greatly feared by ZANLA.
SPARROWS Military code name for 'trackers'.

SUNRAY Officer Commanding (an SF unit – big and small).
TERRS Terrorists (SF slang).
TOTOTO (Skokiaan) 100% distilled ‘moonshine’.
TSENDZE Mashona name for a cane rat.
TSIBINDI Liver. People with good ‘tsibidi’ (liver) had good courage.
TSINDI Squirrel.
VAKOMANA The soldiers of ZANLA (a.k.a. Freedom Fighters).
ZANU African Nationalist political party – The Zimbabwe African National Union representing the Mashona people.
ZAPU African Nationalist political party. The Zimbabwe African People’s Union, representing the Ndebele people (of Zulu origin).
ZANLA The Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (The military wing of ZANU). Trained by the Communist People’s Republic of China.
ZIPRA The Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (The military wing of ZAPU). Trained by Soviet Russia.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE RHODESIAN BUSH WAR

December 1972 saw the start of the last phase of what the *rebel* white Rhodesians called *'the Rhodesian Bush War'*; and what Zimbabwe's Mashona people call their *'Second Chimurenga War'* or their *'War of Liberation'*.

Readers will call this war by whatever name best suits their personal sympathies. In this regard they may encounter some difficulties, however, because during their reading of the story their empathies will continually oscillate, from one side to the other, like the pendulum of a clock.

The war came to an end in 1980 when white-ruled Rhodesia passed into history and the new state of Zimbabwe was born. Thereafter the country has been ruled by an autocratic president through a single-party black-majority government.

The war was, altogether, a 16-year long, chronic and bitter guerrilla struggle in which 27 000 people died. Many more people were wounded. Far too many were crippled for life. Most of the casualties were black civilians.

The war left a legacy of acrimony that persists to the present time. When one looks back on all that has transpired you can't help wondering if it was really worth all the trouble. The old white Rhodesia nation has been destroyed and the black people's aspirations have come to nought – except they got their so-called *'freedom'* for which they fought. The average black man-in-the-street in Zimbabwe today, however, is materially much worse off under Robert Mugabe than he ever was under the white Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith.

Throughout the 1960s Rhodesia was a modern, progressive, thriving, and financially stable sovereign state. It was called *the bread-basket of Africa*. Zimbabwe now lies in ruins and, after 30 years of Robert Mugabe's pernicious rule, the country is submerging annually ever more deeply into that savage quagmire which the civilised world once referred to as *The Dark Continent*.

This book is a novel. The human story-line is, therefore, pure fiction. It is, nevertheless, based upon the real life experiences of the people of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe both black and white. The background to this tale, therefore,

is a true reflection of life, on both sides of the fence, in war-torn Rhodesia during the mid-1970s. One might, therefore, call this book ‘faction’ not ‘fiction’.

Were the black people of Rhodesia oppressed by the country’s white minority? In retrospect the answer to that question must be *“YES” – but this fact must not be judged other than in terms of the country’s historical circumstances at that time.*

Were the black people of Zimbabwe justified in trying to wrest power from the country’s hopelessly small white minority? In retrospect the answer must, again, be a probable *“YES”*. *“YES”*, however, only because the black and white political leaders of the time were unable to reach agreement on a voting franchise that would allow both black and white Rhodesians to move forward into the future on the basis of equality under the leadership of a responsible government. Enigmatically, however, the answer is also *“NO”* because all the black political leaders of the day really wanted was personal power. Had this not been the case, the outcome of the franchise discussions would have been very different.

In 1970, Rhodesia’s population comprised some six million black people of various tribal groups, 250 000 whites and a very small number of Indians and people of mixed blood.

In 1960 a political agreement *was* reached. The negotiating participants were the Rhodesian government of the day, the British government (who claimed colonial responsibility for Rhodesian political affairs), and the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU). ZAPU was a black political party that functioned under the presidency of the Ndebele statesman Joshua Nkomo. The agreement reached was one that would have seen Rhodesia move gradually forwards, peacefully, from being ruled by a wholly but responsible white-minority government, to being ruled by an equally responsible black-majority government. It was based on a qualified franchise that would have been applied to all races equally. It was calculated that the transition from white-minority to black-majority government would have occurred round about 1975.

The only thing that held back the signing of the agreement was Joshua Nkomo’s insistence that it be ratified by his ZAPU caucus.

The agreement was immediately rejected by ZAPU because Ndabaningi Sithole and and Robert Mugabe, both senior members of ZAPU’s caucus at

that time, demanded abrupt white abdication and an immediate handover of power to the then still largely illiterate black majority. Mugabe, particularly, would consider no other action. And Robert Mugabe was the man who scotched all other possibilities for an enduring and amicable agreement from then onwards. He never wavered from his demands. And after the world eventually handed the country over to Robert Mugabe in 1980, when Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, the historical facts of his rule have vindicated the white Rhodesians' resistance to his demands.

Following ZAPU's rejection of a qualified franchise, Ndabaningi Sithole and Robert Mugabe broke away from ZAPU and they formed another African nationalist party called the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). ZAPU and ZANU, thereafter, became separated on tribal lines. ZAPU supporters were of Ndebele (Zulu) origin and ZANU represented the Mashona people.

ZAPU developed a military wing which it called ZIPRA (The Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army). ZIPRA was trained by the Russians. ZANU developed a military wing, too, which it called ZANLA (The Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army). ZANLA was trained by the People's Republic of China. All this happened during the COLD WAR period when Russia, China and America were constantly at loggerheads and they were all seeking a foothold in Africa where the bulk of the world's strategic mineral resources are to be found.

The ostensible purpose of both African nationalist armies was to liberate Rhodesia's majority black people from a white regime which they perceived to be oppressive. Had not the big powers of the world intervened, however, there would have been no war and the people of Rhodesia, black and white, would have found a passage through the quagmire of their politics over time.

Were the white people of Rhodesia justified in opposing Mugabe's demands for their abdication? And were the white Rhodesians justified in fighting Mugabe's guerrilla freedom fighters (called *'terrorists'* by the Rhodesians) from wresting power through force of arms? History has shown that they mostly certainly were.

The white Rhodesians' greatest fear for their country was that it should be subjected to the ravages of an irresponsible government… by people who had no capacity at that time to govern a modern and sophisticated sovereign state. The white Rhodesians knew what would happen if they abdicated. They knew what would happen if they handed the country over to a largely

illiterate black majority that could be easily manipulated by a power-crazy despot like Robert Mugabe.

This is the background to the conflict. This is the background to the fictional story. But this story is not about politics. It is about people. It is about people on both sides of the fence, black and white, who all had fervent desires for their country and who fought to attain what they, respectively, believed was right. The conflict of their interests, and of their beliefs, is the ambience within which the intertwined human stories unfold.

ZIPRA was resoundingly defeated by the Rhodesians during the three year period 1966, 1967 and 1968. After that ZIPRA was essentially a spent force.

ZANLA began its offensive in 1972 after first cleverly manipulating primitive rural Mashona villagers through the spirit mediums of their strong ancestor-worshipping cult. ZANLA leaders persuaded the principal spirit medium in northern Mashonaland to come *on sides* with ZANLA and the old crone pledged the support of the people's most revered ancestral spirit, NEHANDA. This induced the rural people of northern Mashonaland to do anything and everything they were told to do by ZANLA… *until the old seer died*. ZANLA was then forced to use *other means* to retain the essential support of the people… for without the people's support their war effort would never have prevailed. Readers will learn, as they progress through the story, just what these *other means* were.

The National Parks Volunteer Tracker Combat Unit (NPVTCU) was a small but elite group of white game wardens and white game rangers, and their African trackers, who turned their combined big game tracking and hunting skills to the advantage of the Rhodesian security forces. The author was a leader of one of these units from 1964 to 1980.

These combat tracker teams became true *hunters of men* and their story, as it is told here, is as near to the truth as it is probably ever possible to get in any chronicle of military action. The NPVTCU accounted for many thousands of ZANLA fighters both directly and indirectly – killed and captured. Its trackers were always at *the point* of security force *follow up* operations. They always had their noses to the ground following the guerilla's tracks. This meant they were the first to walk into any ambush that the ZANLA fighters laid on their back trails. It is no wonder, therefore, that the NPVTCU suffered more casualties, *pro-rata*, than any other Rhodesian security force unit during the entire 16 years of the war.

Rex Mbudzi is the *nom de guerre (war name)* of a fictitious ZANLA freedom fighter. His character, however, is modeled on a real ZANLA guerrilla who masqueraded under a different name. In real life, he accounted himself well during the armed struggle and is credited with being responsible for convincing Mbuya Nehanda, the most powerful spirit medium in the country, to support ZANLA. It is said that it was he who initiated hostilities by attacking the first homesteads of white farmers in 1972. His activities in this story, however, although probably close to the truth, are a figment of the author's imagination. Nevertheless, they are all well within the scope of what others, better informed than the author, credit him with doing. Except for the Bushman trackers, none of the other characters mentioned in this story are modelled in any way on any person living or dead.

The Bushman trackers, Ben and Mbuyotsi (pronounced *Umjoyce*) were real people who worked with the author over a period of 24 years when he was a game warden in the Rhodesian Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. They were also his principal trackers in the NPVTCU during the war. As this tale is pure fiction, however, their various exploits in the story are fabrications made to fit the plot. The actual terror incidents recorded in the story, nevertheless, are drawn from the author’s and these trackers' real life experiences.

And Nehanda? Well… she certainly was, and remains, the principal ancestral spirit of the northern Mashona people. Throughout the story she is also a very real and enigmatic personality who had a huge influence on the events of the war. The author leaves it to you, the reader, to judge just how real she truly is.

End Notes

[i]i The Mashona are the numerical and politically dominant native tribe of Zimbabwe.

[ii]ii Mzezuru is a Mashona language dialect.

[iii]iii ZANLA.

[iv] Mabunu: a derogatory term used by ZANLA freedom fighters to describe white Rhodesian soldiers.

[v] R.A.R.

[vi] Sunray: the field code name for a military unit-commander in the Rhodesian Security Forces.

[vii] Gooks: the name given to guerrilla fighters by government armed forces the world over. The name was generated during the Vietnam War by American soldiers.

[viii] Gunships: Rhodesian military jargon for Alouette III helicopters armed either with twin .303 machine-guns or with a single 20mm cannon. Those armed with machine-guns were called G-Cars; those with a 20mm cannon were called K-Cars.

[ix] O.P. Observation Post: normally located, and hidden away, on a very high granite hill.

[x] Cyclone: Rhodesian military jargon for a helicopter.

[xi] The Zimbabwe African National Union.

[xii] Literarily translated 'Nkosi' means 'Big Chief'. It was a title given to those who held the Bushmen's respect.

[xiii] ZIPRA: The Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army – the Russian-trained military wing of the Ndebele-dominated political party ZAPU (The Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union).

[xiv] The mopani (Colophospermum mopane) is one of the most common trees that grow in the low-lying and arid areas of south central Africa. It is the most common construction component of all native villages.

[xv] *'Tototo'* is a home-made moonshine that the Mashona make from the fermented fruit of the Mahacha tree. It is nearly 100 percent proof and liable to render one unconscious if you take too much.

[xvi] Chi-Lapalapa (otherwise known as fanikaloh) is the local lingua franca of the country. All the tribes understood Chi-Lapalapa… after a fashion. It was the simple language Mike used to speak with his Bushmen most of the time (although he did understand some of his trackers' Bushman language).

[xvii] Bad people.

[xviii] Three pennies.

[xix] Simple work certificates which recorded an individual black man's work record: who signed him on for work, and when, and the date he was signed off.

[xx] Obervation Post.

[xxi] Landing Zone.

[xxii] Helicopter.

[xxiii] 1974.

[xxiv] Intelligence.

[xxv] Sitrep: Situation Report

[xxvi] Locstat: Location on the map. A six figure map reference that is within 50 metres of being 100% correct.