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Zimbabwean Land and Zimbabwean People: Creative Explorations.

Joshua Caine Anchors

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ZIMBABWEAN LAND AND ZIMBABWEAN PEOPLE:

CREATIVE EXPLORATIONS

By

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B.A. University of Maine, 1998

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in English)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May, 2002

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**ZIMBABWEAN LAND AND ZIMBABWEAN PEOPLE:
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By Joshua Caine Anchors

Thesis Advisor: Professor Constance Hunting

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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The four writings compiled for this project involve explorations into the complex relationship between Zimbabweans and their land. The current struggles in Zimbabwe over land seizure and resettlement make this a particularly timely and noteworthy theme.

The first piece, "Tshaya, Indoda," is a screenplay looking at the dynamic relationship between a white safari operator and black subsistence farmers who live in nearby communal farming lands. The disputes and issues discussed in this piece are very realistic and awareness is raised as to the historical nature and racial dimensions of the current land disputes in Zimbabwe.

"Dubious," the second piece, is in the style of magic realism and explores the impact that safari operators and tourists can have on the natural environment and indigenous populations. This piece provides a rather satirical and fantastical approach to several philosophical and ethical issues concerning land, natural resources, resource consumption, sense of place, and sense of personal fulfillment.

In the third piece, “Ants, Spirits, and Magic: Three Encounters with the Pangolin,” a more anthropological and technical tone is utilized to address the issue of Zimbabwean property and resource-rights, as well as the significance of the pangolin as the ultimate symbol of human attachment to land.

The last piece, entitled “The Bush,” is an account of my personal adventures and discussions with four non-fictional characters who all perceive the same environment through decidedly different lenses. The characters consist of a poacher, a safari operator, an independent wildlife researcher, and a Shona rock sculptor.

The purpose of this compilation of writings is isolate some of the dilemmas and issues occurring in the Zimbabwe land crisis and try to explain the historical and cultural dynamics of these tensions concerning the land.

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Introduction to Portfolio

On May 20th, 2000, the world around me was literally burning and crumbling before my eyes. A group of over seventy Zimbabwean war veterans had invaded the white-owned farm that I lived on as a Peace Corps volunteer, and were beginning their own anarchic process of land redistribution and resettlement. As the only white person in the region with official attachments to the Zimbabwean government, I was given the responsibility of leading a convoy of forty cars filled with the families of commercial farmers out of the rural areas and into the capital city of Harare. This task was fairly challenging to begin with, but it became riskier when they demanded that I carry an AK-47 for purposes of intimidation and a digital camera for purposes of journalism. When I suggested that pacifism and cooperation may be the best way to get out of this situation alive, they shook their heads and exclaimed in gravelly British accents, "Goddamn buggers don't know peace...best to shake guns in their faces. That's the only thing they understand, the butt end of a rifle."

Although I may suffer a premature nervous breakdown a few years from now due to that episode, I'm happy to say that we all made it out alive and without incident. A few weeks later I departed Zimbabwe for Amsterdam, and waved goodbye through an airplane window to my Zimbabwean friends who had looks of inevitable doom in their eyes. The white Zimbabweans had no embassies to run to, no military or police protection, and were being harassed by government officials to leave their land behind and immigrate to Britain or Australia. The black Zimbabwean communal farmers were in an even worse situation, because many depended on the white commercial farms for

work and had no option of leaving the country as it degenerated into a state of economic and political chaos. Tormented by the guilt of leaving behind so many wonderful friends and colleagues in such horrifying conditions, I could not bear to bask in the luxury of the United States without writing down the experiences and histories of some of the characters and communities that I had encountered in Africa.

I began the first piece of this portfolio, “Tshaya, Indoda,” as a way of creating awareness to the historical nature and racial dimensions of the current land disputes in Zimbabwe. Although many contentious issues are raised by the characters, I noticed after writing the piece that the dominant theme was the relationship between Zimbabwean people and Zimbabwean land. As I considered this theme, I realized that all Zimbabweans I came in contact with were passionately attached to their land, regardless of whether it was a small, rocky farming patch or a vast domain of wild animals and savanna. This theme of people and land continued to permeate my other writings of Zimbabwe, and I decided to creatively explore this theme in several more extensive pieces.

The ultimate purpose of this portfolio, as was Doris Lessing’s when she wrote *African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe*, is to provide an overview of Zimbabwe at a certain critical stage in its history. In many parts of the world, issues of property and resource rights are tearing apart communities and nations. The intention of this project was to isolate some of the dilemmas and issues occurring in the Zimbabwe land crisis and try to explain the historical and cultural dynamics of these tensions concerning the land. Although my writings touch upon a variety of issues, the major theme interwoven in all three pieces investigates the relationship between Zimbabwean people and their land. As

the Ndebele would say about their land, *akulandlela ingayi ekhaya*: “there is no path in this land which does not lead to a home.”

Tshaya, Indoda

Characters:

Buck, Sikwatula
Rita: Buck's wife
Sgt. Wesley: Leader of Buck's Anti-Poaching Team
Sibanda: Local Zimbabwean Politician
Deion: Friend of Buck
Penny: Buck's son
Trevor: White Safari Guide
Brad: White Safari Guide
Peter: Development Worker from America
Sipho: Buck's Worker turned Rebel
George: Buck's Worker
Mr. Mathe and Mr. Banda: Policemen
Mapinki, Clement, Janga: Workers
Grace: Housemaid
Lucy & Molly: Wesley's Wife & Daughter
Nduna: Wesley's Friend
Chorus of black Zimbabwean communal farmers
Group of black Zimbabwean farm invaders

Historical Background

When the ambitious visions of Cecil Rhodes had reached their apogee in the late 1890's, and Rhodesia was thriving economically in its abundance of natural resources, the Gwayi-Shangani Communal Lands were forcibly established by the white-Rhodesian government. The communal lands, similar to the Indian Reservations of North America, housed the nation's burden of black inhabitants who were previously occupying fertile farming land which the whites thought they could utilize more effectively, more to the country's advantage. These reserves, typically poor in soil and sometimes far from the inhabitants' original homelands, began popping up all over the country for the following decade, as the white man began cultivating larger and larger plots of land and opening up safari operations on vast acreage.

For over one hundred years the Rhodesian government subjugated the black Shona and Ndebele natives of the country. Half a million whites ruled with an iron fist over five million blacks. After numerous uprisings, the black majority finally gained Independence in 1980, with Robert Mugabe becoming the first black President of the country. Many whites fled the country after Independence, unwilling to be led by a predominantly black government. Although some white farmers had their land seized by the government for resettlement and redistribution to the masses of black subsistence farmers, many of the whites who remained in the country continued to make considerable profits on their large properties.

Few African nations have shown such promise in their post-colonial phase. Mugabe began a campaign to build schools and educate the rural people, the developmental and infrastructural systems were maintained and reorganized, power was redistributed through traditional leaders and modern political structures, and the general morale of the Zimbabwean people was at a pinnacle.

Over the years, as the Zimbabwe people were overwhelmed by a variety of catastrophes such as drought and the onslaught of HIV/AIDS, the Mugabe Regime sank into severe corruption and a tyrannical oppression of political opposition. Zimbabwe had essentially grown into a dictatorship with Mugabe and other Shona politicians strictly limiting the freedom of speech and the involvement of minority peoples (Ndebele, Nambya, Tonga, Lesotho, etc) in national politics. Instead of distributing the vast resources and monies provided by foreign donors, much was pocketed by both local and national politicians.

As the millennium approached, the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) grew tremendously in power and support, threatening to topple over the dominant ZANU-PF party in the upcoming elections. Mugabe responded to this opposition by encouraging war veterans, led by Chenjarai Hunzvi, to invade white-owned farms for black resettlement and a long-awaited distribution of resources. With false promises of food, money, and military support, the government mobilized masses of rural farmers to resettle on white-owned lands. During this unorganized process of rural resettlement, many white farmers and supporters of MDC were killed by government soldiers or fanatic, land-hungry war veterans. Disregarding the vehement criticisms from abroad, Mugabe continued to support this lawlessness, declaring in the end, "The white man is our enemy! It is time for them to leave Africa! It is time for them to go home!"

Buck de Vries, the main character of this drama, owns three hundred thousand acres of prime safari lands and hires black farmers from the nearby Mabale Communal Lands to work for his safari operations. He is known throughout Zimbabwe, and especially with his workers, by the name "Sikwatula": He Who Speaks With His Fists.

Scene One: Outdoor Garage of Buck in Gwayi, Zimbabwe. Sign hanging on fencepost before garage reading: "Homestead of Buck and Rita de Vries, Lion's Den Enterprises, Gwayi, Zimbabwe." Immense concrete posts supporting asbestos roof, twenty feet long, ten feet wide. Floor littered with thousands of nuts and bolts, car parts, old engines, decrepit Land Rover skeletons, spools of barbed wire, tools, tires, an air compressor, wooden and steel blocks, drills, saws, two old beehives, a pile of boards, a pile of bricks, etc. Everything is oily, greasy, filthy. Buck sits in canvas lawn chair, taking apart engine which rests on table. Cigarette hangs from his lip, eyes in perpetual squint. Four black workers linger around him, apparently waiting to be put to work.

Characters: Buck, George, Sipho.

Buck (powerful, stentorian voice, rough and gravelly. Wearing soiled jeans with flannel shirt and elephant skin shoes. Suede safari hat, brim turned down. Back injury, so walks with slight limp...loud beckoning whistle) George!!! Come! Bring the pliers.

George (running, wearing green work suit with tear in shoulder and legs, powerful compact man): Here boss.

(Buck begins taking off bolts in full concentration, struggles with tight lugnut and when he looks up sees the four workers watching him wrestle with the pliers, leaning on car parts and piles of tires, in that classic equatorial laze which drives the whites to near madness)

Buck (furious, yelling): Madoda, Guys, what are you doing? Four guys watching me take off a bolt. Dammit! You think this is school? Pinki, gimme those hands...(grabs a worker's hands, a young boy) soft hands, man, soft, you ain't done nothin here since you started. Ya hide out back all day, takes you a full day just to slash the grass. Bullshit... go now!, out!, hamba! (points to his gate). (Mapinki quickly turns, shoulders slouched with eyes to ground, and walks toward the immense gate surrounding Buck's house like a fortress. Buck watches him stroll away and turns to the other four workers with rage.

Offstage, British voice calls for Buck, "Phone, Pa, Phone")

Sipho (worker, dressed like George, skinnier, clean-cut, good English): Boss, Madam is calling.

Buck: Quiet! (Sipho snickers, rolls eyes...Buck steps towards him)

Sipho: Boss, I am only...

Buck: Out!! (pointing towards his gate again) Nobody laughs at me! Especially a useless kaffir. Go, Now!

Sipho: (defiant, pauses for a long while, glaring into Buck's eyes, turns with a rebellious, hateful smirk on face, turns to go, swaggering) No problem, bossman. (Spits on the engine)

(Buck lunges towards him and smashes him across the face. Sipho crashes to the ground. Buck stands over him...Sipho bleeding into the dust of earth, a hardened hatred flaming in both their eyes, and Buck finally turns away. The other workers stand back, terrified, speechless. Buck lights a cigarette, coolly, no remorse)

Buck: Guys, clean the workshop. Quickly! Now! (Turns and walks towards his house offstage, where the voice came from)

(Outside the guys crowd around Sipho and ask if he's OK)

Sipho (being helped up, bleeding from the lip, quietly enraged, holding it in, quivering): We should have beat him to the ground. (mock punches the air) Tshaya, tshaya, tshaya old man. (Begins walking towards the gate) Stay, guys, earn this shit money, but be careful, the old man knows how to hit.(Exits. The other workers solemnly begin work, bent over organizing bolts and nuts. Begin slow-tempo African work song (*Amajaha qaphela*) full of power and soul... moderate bass percussion. Fade on men working...the eternalized pose of the African male, bent over, working with hands.

Scene Two: Buck's Porch. Eight chairs around a table. Several guns on table, with ammunition, tools, car parts, and various papers. Numerous ornamental plants surrounding the porch, and large collections of old wood carvings are scattered around, along with crocodile skulls and kudu horns. Six people sitting around table, fiddling with guns, drinking tea.

Characters: Buck, Rita, Deion, Peter, Trevor, Penny, Wesley.

Penny: I tell ya Pa, it's only gettin worse, man. The other day I was out huntin elephant with Tony and some clients. Found nine snares. Nine bloody snares in only a hundred meters. One snare on the leg of a buffalo. Lazy bastards...they'd make a hamorse, a goddam wreck of all this land if you gave'em a week .

Peter: (somewhat sympathetically) It's a drought year though, isn't it, they're probably just gettin desperate down there...

Buck: (blows him off) Agghh, they just don't know how to plant, don't know how to maintain a field, too lazy to work for a few days so their kids won't starve.

Rita: (skin wrinkled like elephant from a life of sun and struggles. Hollers) Grace, buza lo tea!

Deion: Yeah, too lazy to grow food, but not too lazy when it's time to go to bed...just keep poppin kids out, like a sausage machine, ya know.

Buck: Hah!

Penny: Down in Mabale last week there were eight funerals...it's all AIDS but nobody down there believes it...they blame it on malaria or TB or cholera or anything else...

Trevor: Deion, weren't you the one tellin me bout how some of those witch doctors try to cure AIDS patients by tellin'em to slit their wrists just a notch enough to draw some good blood and then they supposed to go home and tell every member of their family to slit their own wrists and they all rub their wrists together and exchange blood...it's sposed to purify the blood, they say...also, you've heard about this, how some witch doctors tell men who have AIDS that the only way to cure it is to have sex with the youngest virgin possible...someone heard from the mission doc awhile ago that there was an eighteen month old girl down there who'd gotten gonorrhea twice...

Rita: Ahh, Shame! (Grace arrives obediently bearing tea and biscuits, lays them on the table. Rita gets up and pulls her over to the side and begins reprimanding her).

Peter: Can't be true...

Deion: Sure it is, the most unimaginable insanity possible takes place right here in Africa, stories better'n anything you'll ever find in all the libraries in the world, man.

Peter: But the reason they don't believe it's AIDS is because nobody's explained it to them properly yet...they don't know how it works...all they see is those advertisements for condoms, but the condoms cost money, which they don't have.

Trevor: (dismissive) Bah! Every time I've gone down there I see some new donor organization givin away money to some project or teaching English classes or tryin to tell them people why they should wear condoms....they just don't listen, that's the problem, and whatever money they get for a project, hell, they just steal it.

Peter: Yeah, but none of these donors have a clue what's goin on...they don't know how to speak Zulu, they don't work with the Chief or the Kraal Heads, none of them know how the community works...It's like they're just walking around down there lookin for people to hand money over to...the U.S. spends billions every year just handin out money to these people... (gets cut off by Trevor)

Trevor: (Looks down the drive) Who's this here comin?

(Up the drive walks Sgt Wesley with head down, submissive and humble as always.

Wearing soiled dark green camouflage overalls, rifle leaning on shoulder, small satchel

on back, safari hat on head, old, small, rough looking-- badge on sleeve of shirt says:
Lions Den Anti-Poaching Unit--Sergeant)

Buck: (rough but friendly) Sergeant, what's the news? (Joking) Any politicians out there tryin to steal my wildlife?

Wesley: (Raises head) No, boss....only news is poachers...I found twenty snares around the south border. Many tracks, too much. Serious, I think they have guns now...down the road Mr. Benny's boys found two sable and one rhino shot dead.

Buck: Where's the other guys today?

Wesley: They all out in the bush, come back tomorrow evening.

Buck: They have guns?

Wesley: Yes, boss.

Buck: Okay, well lemme think about what to do. Come up here tomorrow mornin and we'll make a plan. A good plan, Sergeant, that's what we need.

Wesley: Yes, boss.

Buck: Thanks, man.

(Wesley turns to leave in slow walk and exits)

Deion: See, that's the problem, we can't trust them to be out there and stop the poachers. They probably sell their guns to'em and get paid off to walk in the other direction. If anything on a farm's gonna get done right, we're the ones who gotta do it.

Trevor: Yeah, but there's too goddam much to do, we can't do it all...

Buck: (slightly pensive) Well Sergeant's a good guy, at least the best they'll get...I trust him enough to give him a gun. Better than most guides we've got... tracked a wounded lion for eight days once until he shot it right before it crossed the Park boundary line. Didn't sleep, ran with the lion all day and night, ate roots and caterpillars uncooked. Then when he finally came back to camp to tell us where the lion was, this goddam Spanish hunter got pissed off and asked what took so long, "was he a lazy nigger or somethin?"

Rita: Pa, more tea?

Buck: (shakes head ignoring her, speaks sentimentally) Agghh man, back during the war, you remember ma, how they used to set up ambushes for farmers...a man down the road here, Chapman, was killed inside his own house. His wife escaped and ran for two days through the bush until she got to Benny's house 20 km away all torn up with thorns all

through her skin and barely able to talk or walk. Well when they tried that bullshit on me...that old man Joseph came to tell me he'd found hundreds of snares down by the river and wanted me to go down there with him...back in those days poachers was the one thing I couldn't tolerate...you remember, ma, you remember, how I caught that one stupid African with a bag of rhino horns and chained him to the back of my land rover all afternoon while I drove through all the thornscrub I could find...

Rita: (Tired) Pa, must we relive these stories, they were bad enough once.

Buck: (excited now) So I look at old Joseph real close and ask if there's a bunch of terrorists down there waitin to kill me when we drive down, "no boss" he says, but he's shakin a little, can't look me in the eyes, worried about somethin, so I say, "ya know Joseph, you're sittin right next to me in the car, so if they're down there, the bullets'll kill us both" But the old man just shook his head "Let's go boss, maybe dem poachers runnin away now" So I called over Wesley and gave him one of those of Belgian rifles...told him to keep an eye out...the three of us got in that old land rover over there, real loud engine, gives the terrorists plenty of time to prepare, load their guns, finish the cigarettes...but we took the old road, that back route which nobody's driven down for the last ten years...and man, I look in the backseat and old Joseph lookin out the window pourin sweat, looked ready to cry...Wesley looked back at Joseph and turned to me 'best get out here boss, walk to river' ...so we get about half kilometer from the river and stop the car behind some thick acacias, tell the guys we'll walk to the river from here...we walk slow, real slow through the bush lookin for any signs...notice that Joseph is trailin behind so Wesley, real quiet, grabs him by the collar and yanks him up front, whispers 'man, you make one noise, one cough, step on one branch and i'll blow your head off'...walk for another twenty minutes, like stalkin a lion, focus on each step, no noise, and just when I'm about to take another step forward Wesley grabs my shoulder real hard and turns me around...'What is it I ask...'I hear something, boss.' "What?"...real serious he says 'boss, not a kudu' keeps listening 'boss, not a buffalo' keeps listening 'boss, not a sable' keeps listening, real serious 'boss, not an eland' went through all the animals out there, real serious, didn't want to make a mistake, everything still, Joseph trembling, sweating with steel of gun barrel on the back of his neck, and Wesley tells us each to pick up a rock, bout the size of a grenade...points to a nearby hillside covered with loose slabs of rock

and whispers 'one two three.....throw' and our rocks go crashing down on the loose slabs with a thunder clap explosion and PA-KAA, we hear people runnin around all in front of us, all scrambled up runnin in all directions thinkin that a huge Rhodesian unit was movin in...so we caught a few of the guys who ran towards us, they didn't even have weapons...shot them right there and made Joseph bury'em...walked forward a bit and found that they had been waiting in ambush not less than 30 meters in front of us, but they were facin the road, expecting us to drive up like all the other farmers had done... well we surprised them terrorists so bad that day that they left behind all their guns, ammo, supplies, and a land rover...so we loaded up that land rover like it was Christmas and when we came home drivin one more vehicle than we left with, well, ma was real happy, right ma? (big smile) Hah!

Peter: What happened to Joseph?

Buck: Put him on garage duty, sorting out the nuts and bolts, just kept him around the house.

Peter: Still alive?

Buck: No, he died some years back, an OK worker, otherwise lazy tho, couldn't trust him out there in the bush during the war

Peter: Why didn't he tell you about the guerillas out there in the first place?

Buck: The damn terrorists probably threatened to go down to the communal lands with their AK-47's and shoot his whole family up--had no choice really...that's why I didn't make him leave

Peter: But you trusted Wesley during the war?

Buck: Ya know, he's the only good one I got, the only one who wants to actually learn, doesn't drink like the rest of'em, doesn't smoke mbanje...

Deion: Yeah, once in a blue moon you find a good kaffir

Penny: You always said that he saved your life, ain't that right, pa?

Buck: (pensive) arrgghh, you never know...man, I'll tell you one thing though, no other farmer around here's got one like Wesley, not a one, hah, Ole Wesley...

Rita: (Bustling)Time we get ready for Church, pa

Trevor: Where's it meeting today?

Rita: Over at the Von Richt's House...they got a new minister for the Dutch Reformed Church last week and he's supposed to be a true Boer down to the last drop...he'll be there today...plenty of food afterwards, you're welcome to come.....

(all people begin to rise from the table chattering lightly in personal conversations...play a hymn in Afrikaans from the Dutch Reformed Church as the light begins to fade and they exit. Focus on the delicate English teaset on the table contrast by the primacy of the huge elongated african faces carved in Ebony decorating the porch. A triumphant hymn as they prepare for church.)

Scene Three: A group of Africans sittin around an indoor fireplace, roasting Chibage and boiling water. Maize hangin from ceiling, men sitting on stools, women on bright bolts of fabric, some are drinkin tea with small biscuits. Very informal, much jokin around, much lounging. Room almost too dark to see faces clearly, light of fire makes faces glow.

Lucy, Wesley, Nduna, and Molly are all talkin...)

Characters: Lucy, Nduna, Sibanda, Wesley.

Opening: All are laughing aloud, curling over with tremendous deep laughter.

Lucy (with infectious laugh, barely able to speak): So you see, during the last elections not everybody knew what to do, some of these old men and women didn't even know what they were voting on...Ma Mpofo thought it was an essay contest like at school, so she walked into the booth, took her ballot, and wrote about how all the politicians are so corrupt...Stop Stealing the Money, she wrote...

Nduna: Ehe, and Baba Ncube, he thought it was a suggestion box for the government so he wrote: Give us more money!...and then old Moyo up the hill, he just doesn't care what he writes cause he's so old, every day says he's going to die tomorrow, and he thought these ballots were going straight to the President, so guess what he wrote? (everybody laughing, asking 'what?'): Mugabe--You Are A Baboon!!! (they all go crazy)

Lucy: (still laughing, sentimentally) Ahh, too much, too much, these old people, ahh, they will all go to heaven (raises arms towards sky)

(As they all wind down from the laughing a clicking knock sounds in the doorway and a pot-bellied old man enters the hut anxiously--Molly rushes up to find him a stool--

Perform greetings in Ndebele, then switch to English)

Baba Sibanda: (Sitting down) Yes Lucy, how are the fields?

Lucy: Ahh, This Family is blessed, Sibanda, our maize is tall this year, and the mites are staying away from the tomatoes. We are strong.

Sibanda: (disregardingly) That's OK, That's OK, but Wesley (holds hands out indicating a poor man), we are a poor village, not everybody is blessed like your family, surely you have some extra to give an old man who can't work his fields anymore. You must.

Wesley: (Sternly) This morning we gave our extra food to the family of Siphos... he was beaten yesterday by Sikwatula and lost his job...he was the only man in the family earning money, now they have nothing...his mother came here crying this morning...they need it badly

Sibanda: So you have nothing to give this old man?

Lucy: Baba, if we give more we will not have enough for ourselves...

Sibanda: At least give me one piece of corn over your fire...this I deserve as sub-Chief. (Lucy beckons to Molly, who fetches the roasted corn from the fire and hands it to Sibanda submissively)

Sibanda: (Departing abruptly, with no thank you) OK OK, so this is all an old man gets, I will soon be as thin as the sunflower stalks...

(Lucy, Wesley, Nduna and Molly look at each other incredulously)

Lucy: (Sharp-pitched reprimanding sounds) Ah, Ah, Ah, that man, what is he thinking, he has three wives, twelve children, sixteen grandchildren, and he comes complaining about food. They are all strong enough to work...look at his belly...did you see it Chief, like a pumpkin, who in our family has a pumpkin for a belly...nobody.

Nduna: He waits, every year, for the men from England to come. When the men drive through the village in their car, Sibanda hides all the food in his house and puts the poorest clothes on everybody in his family. Then he invites the man inside his house for a cup of tea and says (Nduna begins acting it out) "O white man, look how poor my family is, nothing to eat, look at this child, he is dressed in dishrags, O and I am sub-chief, a village leader, and I must live like this. But what little I have, I do not regret sharing with great rich men like you." and the white man begins to look around, rubs his chin, grabs Sibanda's hand and says "You are a true Christian, I will help you however I can" And

the next day the man brings Sibanda a whole carload of food and clothes and toys and gifts from England. Ah, the man does not know how to work.

Wesley: Ehe, and then when he runs out of food from the white man, he comes to ask us...

Lucy: But this year he's in trouble, nobody's coming here now because of all the trouble with the elections...they're scared...no tourists, even the white men from here are running away.

Wesley: What will the old man do now?

Nduna: Hah! He will learn that he needs to plant his fields, that's all he can do.

Lucy: And while he's planting he may even sweat enough to lose his pumpkin belly (laughter). And he didn't even ask about **Sipho**...didn't even want to know the story...

Nduna: And he calls himself a village leader, hah

Wesley: Ahhh, but I am sure that he heard the news from somebody...I am sure he will put this incident to his advantage...he is a politician, after all

Nduna: How could he use what happened to Sipho to his advantage? There is no way.

Wesley: Ahhh, but that is the evil smartness of our politicians...you know that Sibanda has been wanting to take over the property of Sikwatula for a long time, you also know that many of the poor farmers are looking for more land, looking for land to give to their children and...

Lucy: Yes yes yes, baba, and Sikwatula owns too much land, so much, from the river to the valley and beyond almost to Botswana...

Wesley: Yes, he owns too much land...

Nduna: ...land which he stole from us, the Rhodesians stole from us, a long time ago...

Wesley: But we can't steal it back like Sibanda wants to do...he is using these government invasions of farms as an excuse to invade the farm of Sikwatula...if the people invade his farm, I will lose my job, Baba Janga will lose his job, Mai Ncube and Ngwenya will have no work, many people will suffer without his paychecks

Lucy: But if we have his land we won't need his paychecks

Wesley: (thinking) I don't know, I just don't think it's a good idea...but I am sorry for Sipho and his mother

Nduna: Why?

Wesley: Because Sibanda will tell everybody that Sikwatula beats his workers, that he is a foolish evil white man, that he stole from us many years ago and it's time to take back what is ours...

Lucy: But Sikwatula does beat his workers!

Wesley: (anguish) I know, he does, and it is not good...but I still don't think we should invade his farm, it's not the best thing to do, I don't know, I don't know what to do

Lucy: Well we can't keep living like this, like cattle, with plots of land half the sizes that our fathers had...something must be done

Nduna: That is our problem, people always saying "something must be done," but nobody ever does anything, we need to take action

Lucy: (irritated) Then tell me, What can we do, what would you do...if we invade his farm then we lose his jobs and we must clear new land for farming and start all over again...if we don't, then we become too crowded and all of the young people move to the cities...we cannot trust the government, including most of the local leaders, so what are the people supposed to do, tell me

Nduna: I have decided what I will do--I will dress up in smart clothes and go speak with Sikwatula this week, I will tell him our problems...

Lucy: Nduna, you are crazy, going to talk with Sikwatula, serious!

Nduna: Remember, I worked with his son Penny for two years and I know that they do not beat their visitors. We will talk and he will understand, his son always told me I was a good worker and I think Sikwatula may want to solve this problem without violence...the war was enough for him.

Wesley: I don't know, maybe you should wait a while...

(Bells start ringing offstage and Molly bursts up from the floor and looks out the door, "The goats are in the garden" she yells and they all rush out the door to save the veggies--upbeat Oliver Mtukudzi "What shall we do?" begins playing in background and all fades with fire glowing on)

Scene Four: In Buck's Garage. Still working on massive motor with three workers performing various tasks around him. All are covered in oil and grease.

Characters: Buck, George, Policemen Mathe and Banda.

Buck: George, bring the vice-grips.

(George obediently walks over with vice-grips)

Buck: Come, look at this...(begins showing George how to fix certain part of the engine)...see, easy, man, like eatin porridge in the mornin (they all laugh)...George, get that soddering iron over there, I want to show you guys how to use this thing properly so I don't have to babysit all day, show you how to use it properly

(George obediently fetches soddering iron)

George: (Quietly, handing Buck the item) Boss, when will you teach me to drive...please, I want to learn very much

Buck: How long you been workin for me?

George: Five years, boss. I have asked you every year, but we never have time.

Buck: Laquer man, that long! (Joking) You're an old man now, huh? So if I have ole man Wesley there teach you how to drive you promise you won't go run off an try to find another job in the city?

George: (Laughing) No, Boss, my family lives here...it is only my dream to drive a car, not for money

Buck: Hah! I don't know, George, that big city, all the pretty women, shiny cars to drive...bet you could even find a job drivin some big Shona politician around, huh?

George: Ah, Ah, Ah, Boss...(looks towards the gate)

(Up stroll two policemen fully uniformed, looking severely formal, walk to where Buck is sitting with engine, he doesn't stop working, concentrating on job with vice-grips)

Policeman Mathe: Greetings Sir.

Buck: Hah! Mathe! The Police! Where is your gun Captain, you have one, right?

Mathe: (Grinning) Yes sir, here (displays the gun)

Buck: So what can I do for you? Who's this guy, your assistant?

Mathe: This is Mr. Banda, in training.

Banda: Greetings, Sir.

Buck: So you want to be a police officer, catch the criminals, shoot the bad guys, take a little money on the side. Let me tell you one thing though, serious, don't take the government money, they'll try to pay you off to be on their side, and for a while you'll

have a fat pocket of cash, fat, man, I tell you, but later you'll realize that you're their slave. Ain't that right, Mathe?

Mathe: (laughing lightly) I don't know sir, I don't know...

Buck: (still workin) So what is it that you want? Want to borrow the big truck? Need some game meat for the police party? Need some AK-47's?

Mathe: No, sir, we want to talk with you about something which may be trouble...

Buck: What is it?

Mathe: You know old Sibanda, the sub-chief from the Communal Lands down there, well...(pauses)

Buck: What does he want?

Mathe: He wants your land, Sir. He has been organizing people this week, has about fifty so far, plans on invading your farm here sometime next week. The government is helping him...providing three busses, some food, money to start new homesteads...

Buck: Baah, what are they thinking, they know I'm not just gonna hand over this land...if I didn't hand it over during the war then why should I give it away now to a bunch of fools. Mathe, you know that within two years everything on this place would be destroyed, don't you? Everything I've worked with my own hands these last 40 years... Hah! Never will they get an acre of this land...

Mathe: There is a rumour saying that if you try to resist this invasion, a government hit squad will back up Sibanda's people...and they have guns, they have all been trained how to fight.

Buck: I know, I fought against them twenty years ago, 100 of them for every 1 of us, fought for years, eventually they just outnumbered us, so many of'em out there...lost in the end. Shame! So you think they will come?

Mathe: I don't know, all I know is that the government wants this land...eighty thousand acres, four safari lodges, infrastructure in place, big garden by the river...

Buck: But you know what this is all about Mathe, it's not about justice, about taking back land which was once stolen by the white man, it's about politics, it's about making the government look like they care about the people by supporting their invasions of land...pure anarchy, criminal...those other white farmers in Mashonaland who were just thrown out of their farm last week, government hit squad came in and shot the white man

dead, burned the house, escorted the women and children off the farm at gun point, and then a thousand squatters came in and set up home...hear me now, I'm telling you, by next year there won't be a soul left on that farm because it takes too much work for those people to start over again...they're just looting, lookin for quick money...Shame!

Mathe: I don't know why these things are happening, sir, but we just wanted to warn you, we don't want a war going on here, maybe it would be best to give them some land, just to calm them down...until after the elections

Buck: Don't worry, Mathe, we'll make a plan...

Mathe: OK Sir,

Buck: Hey George, get these guys some meat before they leave

(George runs over to fridge and comes back with two big bags of Buffalo meat)

Buck: Buffalo, gentlemen, enjoy, see you later

Mathe & Banda (thanking profusely as they leave): Thank you sir, o thank you, see you later, yes, yes, yes

(Buck works quietly for awhile with George and workers then calls inside)

Buck: Ma! Ma, call up Penny and Deion and tell them to come over...we need to make a plan, serious this time, eh!

(Scene fades with them all working. Light African music with chanting and minor percussion)

Scene Five: On Buck's Porch again with the same men, but this time hunched over thinkin, not carefree shootin' the shit like usual. Rita serving tea to everyone, lookin worried, with quick actions. Many guns on the table, knives, other contraptions. All men talkin seriously. Buck toying with a gun, in extreme concentration, not paying attention to the conversation.

Characters: Buck, Deion, Penny, Peter, Rita, Brad,

Deion: So I don't understand, why'd the police come to warn you about this when they don't really care if your farm gets taken over or not? Doesn't seem logical, you know.

Penny: Ack, it's just politics, man. If they come here and warn us then they seem like they're helpin us, but of course they won't show up on the day when the farm's invaded

cause the Police Chief in the capital will detach them to some hella place deep in the bush where somebody stole a goat or somethin. That's the way it works here, you know...

Deion: So what's the plan? We gonna fight back or what?

(Everybody looks at Buck who stares down at his gun, lost in thought)

Trevor: Well, all I know is we can't let these bloody muntus steal our land...I don't want to be livin all packed in with monkeys for the rest of my life.

Penny: You know what really pisses me off about this whole thing: If they take over this land, land they could have claimed twenty years ago after Independence, within three, maybe two or three years they'll totally destroy it, not a damn tree or animal left

Deion: O yeah, first they come in here and cut all the trees down for firewood, then they start shooting or snarin every animal they see, and after the trees all get cut down and the grass and plants is all eaten from their goddam goats and cows, that's when all the topsoil starts washin away...

Trevor: Then they're so poor they start screwin like monkeys for the hell of it and everybody gets AIDS and dies off gradually...

Deion: Hell, too bad it's gradual

Penny: Yeah, that guy Peter, you know, the development worker who works down there tryin to teach them how to farm properly, he told me that 50% of all the people down there got it

Trevor: Oh I'd bet more than that...

(Buck suddenly looks up and raises his head toward the workshop)

Buck: (Yelling loudly) George, George

George appears: Yes boss

Buck: Go fetch Wesley from the compound, tell him to come, now now, quick quick
(George runs off)

Buck: First thing we gotta take care of is the animals, without them this land ain't worth nothin, not to them or me, no hunting, no tourists, no film crews, no meat, nothin...I'm sure that's why they're poachin so much nowadays...that old politician Sibanda is tellin everybody that this land will soon be theirs so they're startin to get cocky... (Peter, the development worker walks up to the table. Everyone greets him)

Peter: So what's goin on, looks like you guys are gettin ready for war?

Deion: It may be...them bloody kaffirs threatenin to come up here and invade the place sometime next week, take over the land, kick us all out

Peter: Just like what's going on in the rest of the country? Government-sponsored invasions, conveniently before the elections to make Mugabe look good...it's absurd... but they do need land I guess, what else can they do besides this last act of desperation

Buck: (exploding) I'll tell you what else they can do...hell man, the first thing they should do is start usin them condoms, quit poppin out the kids, ridiculous, ten children for one mother...also, they can learn how to take care of their own land...it's farms like mine, with these lodges and wildlife, that earn money for this country, it's people like me who made this country, not them, not those lazy muntus, my family's been here in Zimbabwe for five generations, you know that? I've been on this land, right here, for over forty years, worked it with these hands, started with nothin, poorer than any of those negroes down there and look where it is today...People ask me where I'm from and I tell'em Africa...Zimbabwe, Africa...that's right, I'm an African...got no place else to go, not like you development worker Americans, when times get rough you can just run off to your Embassy and fly you back home where it's all safe and comfortable, but me, my family, we've got no embassy, no home other than here! You understand!

Peter: (flustered) Yes, Buck, I wasn't sayin that you should... (interrupted by approach of Wesley)

Wesley: Afternoon, boss.

Buck: (Yelling Jovially) Yes, Wesley, Time to make a plan.(Wesley still standing up, gun slung over shoulder) You take twenty of these guys here from the compound and walk out to the west border down by Jongwenya where you found all those snares. You remember those leg snares we used during the war, the ones with steel jaws that tshaya! snap up and break your legs...well take all of those, bout 150 in the shed I think, and line'em right up along the whole border all through the bush. Then, after you got them set up, take ten jerry cans of this used oil and crap and splash a few drops every ten steps so the animals will stay away for awhile...be sure to cover those traps with plenty of leaves and junk so nobody will see'em...soon as that's done come back here fast so we can deal with this second problem

Wesley: Yes, boss

Buck: And Wesley, pick good guys for this job, we need it done properly... one time, OK?

Wesley: OK, boss.

Buck: And come back here as soon as you're done.

Wesley: No problem, boss. (Walks away to go fetch other guys)

Buck (gruffly): Thanks, man.

Deion: So what's the plan...you gonna trap'em?

Buck: The way I figure is the same people who's poachin off my land will be mostly the same people who come here to invade the farm next week, if it happens. This way I prevent the poachin and pick off a few guys who may give us trouble next week.

Peter: What are you gonna do with them when you catch'em?

Buck: I ain't plannin on catchin'em...see, the way those traps work, you step on it you ain't goin anywhere...and them steel jaws come up right about to the calf of a man my size and bite into the flesh real deep, and the more you move and squirm around the deeper it goes...if you try to walk you just leave a trail of blood, lions or leopards'll take care of you within a few hours...and if you just stay still, sit real quiet tryin to pry those jaws open with your fingers, then you may last for 24 hours or so, but then, if you ain't bled to death, somethin will get ya...yep, best just to leave'em out there...

Peter: (shocked) That's crazy...just leave'em out there?

Penny: (laughin) You know why people down in the communal lands call Pa "Sikwatula"--"He who talks with his fist"?

Rita (from inside yelling): We don't need to hear these stories again!

Penny (Ignoring Ma, both he and Buck have childish grins on faces): Well, he used to be a little rough on the poachers around this area...after awhile they learned not to come here anymore...poached every land in the area except for Pa's...

Peter: Yeah, I heard that story about draggin that guy on the back of you truck through all the thornscrub...(interrupted)

Penny: O that isn't even the start of it man...I mean, some pretty serious stuff has gone on here, but it's all in the name of prevention...you see that room over there, full of shamboks, those hippo-skin whips bout an inch thick, man those could do the job, tshaya real hard man, after ten lashes that guy's wishin he were dead

(Rita storms out of the house, upset and determined)

Rita: All right, all right boys, enough of these stories, what are we gonna do next week, huh? That's what I want to know! Maybe we should all just go out into the bush and build ourselves some nice mud huts to live in for the rest of our lives. Who knows what'll happen!

Buck: Don't worry, we'll work somethin out Ma.

Deion: Aye Buck, I gotta get goin back to work, got some clients comin tonight. I'll stop by again tomorrow and see what's goin on, all right. (Waves to all goodbye) Cheers.

(Everybody says they gotta get goin so a general exodus, with Rita goin inside to do some paperwork--Buck sittin alone on the porch, contemplative, toyin with gun parts again, staring down thinkin)

(Quietly onto the stage comes Chief, slowly trying not to disturb the space, Buck doesn't see him, he stands nervous for awhile but finally speaks)

Nduna(Quietly): Sir....Sir

Buck (Lurches his head up defensively): Who is it? (lookin around)

Nduna: Me...sir, right here.

Buck: (finally sees him, a little agitated) What do you want, boy?

Nduna: I came to talk, sir.

Buck: To talk, hah!

Nduna: Yes, sir.

Buck: What do you want to talk about....your grinding mill is broken, needs to have repairs...your family is walkin 10 kilometers to the borehole every mornin, need money to install a new one...need food...what is it?

Nduna: No sir, it's about you...

Buck: About me...hah!...all right boy, what's your name?...take a seat right here...sit down and tell me what's going on

Nduna: My name is Nduna

Buck: Nduna...good Ndebele name, OK...

Nduna: I wanted to talk about the land, Sir, about your land...some of the people are wanting it very badly...

Buck: Is that goddam politician Sibanda leading this whole thing?

Did he send you here to talk with me?

Nduna: No, he didn't send me..but yes, him and another guy...Sipho...the one who used to work for you...he's going to everybody's house, telling them bad things

Buck: What's he saying?

Nduna: Ah, ah, ah, it's bad, sir. He is making people angry...

Buck: But what is it that he's saying?

Nduna: I can't say...I have not heard him speak, I know only from others. But people are following him...they want to come here, even if they must fight...

Buck: So what did you come here for...just to be nice, I can't believe it...

Nduna: No no sir, I want something which I am scared to ask for....(long pause) I am asking for you to give these people, not me, some of your land, just enough so they won't try to fight for it...see Wesley is my greatest friend, like a brother, for many years, and the fighting will only hurt him and his family no matter what. I have seen what this fighting can do...look at Mashonaland. If he takes their side, against his will, he loses this good job, but if he takes your side then everybody in the village will hate him, they will surely destroy his family. This will happen to many families, not only Wesley's, and...(Buck holds up his hand commanding Chief to stop speaking, looks pensively at the table)

Buck: (with sincerity and calmness) Nduna, you say? (Nduna nods) Nduna, I respect what you are trying to do...to prevent this madness, this anarchy...you have courage, man, more than any of those cowards who'll come up here next week tryin to get this land for free...tryin to get somethin for nothin...but I can't give away my land, Nduna. When it comes down to it, it's the only thing I have...my family lives on it, four sons, two daughters...since the days of Rhodesia I've poured all of my energy into this land...you know, some people go to church, that's where they feel close to God, well this is the only true church I've got, this is the only place in the entire world I can go where I feel close to God...I'm not like most of the other farmers, I can't run back to Britain or Holland or Australia when the times get rough, my family is an African family, part of the great voertrekkers, one of the families which settled here hundreds of years ago with nothin, man, nothin, and I tell you, we made it into a great land ...and this land, this land we're on now, this land with Rhodesian soil, is the product of my life...(long pause) and I won't sit

back and watch it be devoured and destroyed by a bunch of ignorant criminals. That's my answer, Nduna, man.

(enter Rita, listening intently)

Nduna: Sorry sir, I just wanted to ask before anything bad happens. You know, to prevent, like you said...

Buck: You don't need to apologize, but you do need to go back and tell people down there the truth, tell them that this is criminal, that the government doesn't care what happens to them, that if they lose me and my family they will lose jobs, tell them what I have just said...now, I should get to work, gotta fix all these cars (sweeps his hand in front) in case we need to evacuate everybody next week.....so thanks, Nduna (Nduna stands up to go)...you want some meat to take home with you?

Nduna: (Smiles hard) Ah, Sir, thank you for offering but I cannot accept...my son has killed a goat this morning for the funeral of Mapinki...he was our neighbor so there is plenty of food at my house...he also used to work for you I think...

Buck: Ahh, Pinki, yes...give his family my regards...all right Nduna, go well now, hamba kuhle

Nduna: (exiting) Yes sir, Lisala kuhle

Rita: (after Chief has exited) What was that all about, Pa?

Buck: That boy came to make peace...not a politician...didn't want anything...wasn't tryin to write some newspaper story...that doesn't happen often, ma. A good boy...

Rita: You should have asked if he wanted a job here.

Buck: No, Ma, he's too smart to work a job like this, rakin grass and fixin old tires all day...nope, too smart for all this

Rita: Oh well, (shaking her head, leans down and kisses him on cheek) do what you gotta do, I'm goin to help Grace with dinner...

(Buck remains on porch staring off into distance, still contemplative)

Scene Six: In a small clearing in the bush, many blacks dressed in ragtag clothes dance around a scarecrow doll of what is supposed to be a white farmer...the farmer wears an old safari hat and an MDC t-shirt...the women are ululating wildly, the men are dancing erratically around the pole, holding up axes, hoes, and other tools to the pole-man,

threateningly. Goats enter scene sporadically. A fire burns in the corner of the stage where two great massive mammas stir sadza in enormous cast-iron pots. Siphos is wildest dancer, while Sibanda pulls people away to speak with them, a sort of behind-the-scenes man. Presently, they pull everybody together for a speech. Sibanda and Siphos stand up on a large rock, overlooking the crowd.

Characters: Sibanda, Siphos, a crowd of black Zimbabwean communal farmers.

Sibanda: (speaking grandiloquently, florid) We come here today...to gather, as a people who have been starved by this poor land, neglected and deprived by our rich white neighbors, stolen from by the Rhodesians, treated like animals and beggars by all white men who come to Zimbabwe, and left to die in misery and helplessness all packed together like our cattle in their kraal. This we cannot tolerate any longer! So I ask you, the people of this land, what must we do? Do we take back the land which belonged to our people many years ago, which was stolen from us, or do we keep on living like goats and cattle, down in an overpopulated valley with soil unable to nourish even the most miserable of weeds.

This I ask, to take back the land or leave it be?

Chorus: (wildly) Take back the land!

Sibanda: From who?

Chorus: From the white man!

Sibanda: What are we taking back?

Chorus: LAND!

Sibanda: From the men with what coloured skin?

Chorus: WHITE!

Sibanda: And why are we taking back this land? Did the white man buy the land from us or was it stolen! Bought or Stolen?

Chorus: STOLEN!

Sibanda: And are we willing to fight to get this land?

Chorus: YES!

Sibanda: What will we do to get this land?

Chorus: FIGHT!

Sibanda: And who will support us? Who will give us an army to help fight?

Chorus: MUGABE!

Sibanda: Who?

Chorus: MUGABE!

Sibanda: (raising fist into air) Forward with Mugabe!

Chorus: (raising fists) Forward!

Sibanda: Forward with ZANU-PF!

Chorus: Forward!

Sibanda: Forward with Zimbabwe!

Chorus: FORWARD!!!

(All becomes quiet now as Sibanda steps off rock and Sipho holds up a bundle of dead sticks to the audience)

Sipho: It is time for us to make them leave our country! Forever!

(He walks over to the fire where the woman is cooking and lights the bundle of sticks, then brings it over to the pole and lights the scarecrow-man on fire--as the man burns, Sipho raises his fist in the air and shouts wildly in Zulu, to which the chorus responds--- simultaneously upon response a thunder of drumming and ululating breaks out and men and women begin dancing again and stabbing at the pole-figure---the horrible flames...sudden darkness and silence...)

Scene Seven: Back in the house of Lucy. She sits around a fire, stirring sadza, with Nduna, Molly, and an old man. They are laughing, once again--a house of light-heartedness in the face of despair.

Characters: Lucy, Nduna, Molly, old man, Sipho, Wesley.

Lucy: Ah, ah, ah...Mama Mpofu, I tell you, she was so big she couldn't fit in the door of her hut, I know it, I saw it with my own eyes. But she didn't get angry, O no, she just started laughing, (puts arms out to side mimicking a fat person) a great big laugh like those big deep drums, and she looked at her husband and said "well if I can't fit into the kitchen then I can't cook anymore, you can make dinner tonight..." (laughing contagiously)

Nduna: Ah ah ah, Ma Mpofu...she is too big...too much

Lucy: Ah, Nduna, but I love fat people, the fatter the better...they have the best laughs, and they make me laugh...and me, hah, God has not given me any of the fat which I love so much in others

Nduna: Ah, Lucy, you work too hard, always out in the fields...(a knock on the door interrupts the conversation, in walks Sipho and everybody becomes serious, Partner stands up to leave the room but Lucy beckons her to remain seated, general greetings in Ndebele)

Sipho: Sorry I have interrupted you before lunch, but I have a message from the Chief...

Lucy: Sipho, everybody already knows this message, you gave it to everybody else yesterday...why are you giving us this sad message last?

Sipho: Lucy, I respect your family a great amount, and know that you are one of the best farmers in the area and know that you help people whenever they need help.....but times in this country are changing, it is time to fight again, to...(interrupted)

Lucy: (incredulous) Ah, you said it is time to fight again? Here, in this house of mine, where the spirit of God is surrounding us, you say it is time to fight? Sipho, how old were you during the Liberation War? Ah, twenty years ago you were a child, and now you want to fight....

Sipho: I know what I am fighting for now, fighting to get back stolen land...and just because your husband is loyal to the thief, you are afraid that he will lose his job if we begin to fight....you are afraid Lucy...yes, afraid of what will happen after we win and you are left here to farm on the same old plot while those of us who fought are farming in rich soil with plenty of wood and meat around...

Lucy: Ah, Sipho, I did not know you were so young...do you not realize that many people in our village do not agree with this plan, they have worked for Sikwatula for many years and they make money from him to feed their families, and if Sikwatula leaves who will help us build school buildings and clinics and new grinding mills...there will be nobody....our rich neighbor, who is sometimes cruel, will be chased away forever...

Sipho: (becoming angry) You will never understand...even the government supports what we are doing, Sibanda received a letter from the Minister of Agriculture a few days ago

saying that they would back us up with government soldiers and give us guns if we needed them...

Lucy: Ahhh, Baba Ndlovu (looks at the silent old man in the corner), it's sad isn't it, when the children begin fighting with big guns ...and when they get what they want, they won't know what to do with it...(Baba Ndlovu nods his head in agreement, toothless)

Sipho: (pissed, yelling now) Lucy, don't call me a child! I will be fighting to give land to the people while you work in your own fields, only thinking of you and your family. Well you are all traitors...I came here to offer you a choice, but I knew you would be difficult...and now you are beyond redemption! (storms out of the room)

Lucy: (yelling after him) The only meaningful redemption in my life lies in the gates of heaven. Fight your battle, Sipho, but I know you will soon be coming back to me begging for food again. (yells a few words in Ndebele)

Lucy shakes her head and returns to kitchen stool, sitting down. She commands Molly to fetch some water to boil. Molly rushes up and begins organizing the water.

Lucy: (visibly upset) Ah ah ah, Baba, this is bad...(the old man grunts in agreement, looks down at the ground, stares into the fire)

(Wesley, covered in mud and dirt, enters the room singing a song to himself, not cheerful, not sad...)

Wesley: Hah! (everyone looks up) This is the first time I have entered this kitchen and not heard talking and laughter...I thought nobody was home (begins taking off workclothes and sets down gun)

Lucy: Sipho has just left...he was talking about Sikwatula...

Wesley: What did you tell him?

Lucy: I told him that we are not interested in fighting for more land, we have enough now to support ourselves...

Wesley: Did he get angry?

Lucy: Ah, that man, his temper is like a baboon, he gets angry if a small stone is on his path...he called us traitors, us!, who have lived here for all our lives, given half our food away to these people every year, helped pay school fees, and now they call us traitors

Wesley: So he said they are going to fight, huh?

Lucy: Yes, he is serious, they are all serious....they are burning...

Wesley: There will be trouble...I come from Sikwatula's house now...he has given me tonight to come home but I must spend the next week patrolling around his house with all of the other men...for the last two days we have been setting foot snares all over his property...Sikwatula is also serious, he is ready to fight

Lucy: Ahhh, what will happen? Zimbabwe is no longer a good country...have you heard also that Pinki died the other night?

Wesley (shocked): Pinki! Ah! How did he die?

Lucy: The doctor said that he died from Tuberculosis...but then he said that the real reason Pinki died was because he is always sleeping with many women at the beer garden, the doctor said maybe it was AIDS...but the Tuberculosis killed him.

Wesley: Ah, Shame...now it is just his mother and three girls...

Lucy: Yes, and they asked for food today so I gave them a bag of corn...the next time an elephant is killed on Sikwatula's land you must bring home some meat...we are giving all our food away...

Wesley: ah ah ah, people are suffering Lucy...if we need food I will ask Sikwatula...you remember the drought two years ago when he gave us two big bags of maize...he would never let our stomachs go dry...

Lucy: Because he makes you work too hard and doesn't pay you enough...the least he can do is keep your stomach filled with maize...

Wesley: Ah, Lucy, he is harsh, but he treats me well...not like most other blacks...

Lucy: Could you ever fight against him? Join Sipho and Mashaina to help beat him and then take some of his land? So we would not have to worry about being traitors...

Wesley: Lucy, ah, I thought you understood...I have been with Sikwatula for 28 years, our history together is long, I will not fight against him...I will help him because he has helped me, and will always help me

Lucy: All right, that's the way it will be...(begins stirring sadza pot)

Wesley: Yes, it will be... (both stare gloomily into the fire and slow mbira [traditional instrument] begins playing with low African singing in background)

Scene Eight: Buck's Porch. Attended by Buck, Trevor, Penny, Deion, and several other rough-looking white men, all carrying guns, knives, most in safari khakis with safari hats,

smokin cigarettes or spittin chew, polishing guns or chatting amongst selves. Rita, Grace, and several other women weave their way in and out of the men, packing various items into cars. The radio and TV blare in background. A scene of chaos.

Characters: Buck, Trevor, Penny, Deion, Rita, Wesley.

General voices: All right, everybody, listen, listen, shhhhh....shhhhh...

TV & Radio: (urgent voice) "Good evening ladies and gentlemen, this is BBC reporting live from Harare, Zimbabwe. For the last two months Zimbabwe has been spiralling downwards into an abyss of political violence and economic devastation. White-owned farm invasions and intimidation of rural black voters is being covertly supported by the Mugabe Regime, and the situation is only expected to worsen. The invasion of farms has a perilous effect upon the national economy, destroying the two major sources of revenue: tourism and agriculture. Also, as the invasion of farms becomes more violent and less organized, Zimbabwe finds itself losing most of its white community, who have decided to flee for Britain or Australia, leaving behind their properties and livelihoods. The fundamental question now lies in whether Zimbabwe can emerge successfully from this political upheaval in the face of elections, as Ghana did only months ago, or will they retain their downward spiral towards anarchy. The clouds are darkening over this country....Now we switch to Peter Holbrook in Sierra Leone, the other dark front on the African horizon..." (radio switched off)

Buck: Hah! "the clouds are darkening over the country..." hah! And they only talked about two of the problems---didn't even mention the fuel crisis, the Cyclone destruction, inflation, what else...?

Deion: All crops destroyed this year by heavy rains...everybody's dying of AIDS...

Rita: AIDS orphans, thousands of'em...runnin all over the place with nobody to look after them

Trevor: Trees...getting cut down like money...bad soil, erosion, gulleys, poachin

Buck: Not to mention the plague of Africa: Corruption...and probably the goddam Muslims will take over the country in the next few years...no god no angels no heaven no hope...I wouldn't say this country is darkening, I'd say it's black, deep black-black

Rita: All right, Pa, we're ready to leave...

Buck: OK, so you're drivin straight through to Bulawayo...you got all the women and children, a six car convoy and Hendrick'll be leading in front with some guns...all cars filled up with petrol?

Rita: Yes, Pa..

Buck: All right, go well. Gimme a call right when you get there...

Rita: Right, stay well now, you hear, don't do anything crazy Pa (grabs his ear and pulls lovingly, leans to kiss him)

(general good-byes as all women and children and maids exit stage and cars begin to leave)

Buck: (contemplatively, as the men turn their attention back to the matter at hand) The AK-47, men, I bet that's what they'll have today...you know what it stands for: African King or African Killer, man, someday I'll write a book about that gun--How the AK-47 Destroyed Africa---Down in the communal lands down there, you remember Penny, how that 13 year old boy came into the village with one of those guns during the revolution and went to the Chief's house--made that Chief, old Dingaani, a good Chief, get down on his knees and beg for life, but the boy said he wanted him to dance, so here's this old Chief, dancin around his house, and then the boy made him run laps around the house until the Chief dropped down to the ground--the boy kicked him a few times then went into the hut...raped his wife and daughter....ah, that gun, and not only here, everywhere in Africa....

Penny: Pa, bout time we start makin a plan, gotta get outa here before tonight...

Buck: Right!

Deion: I was thinking about driving all them old armored Land Rovers out to the border of the Communal Lands there and just waitin for them to cross over before we open fire...that way we catch'em off guard right after they leave their homes...

Buck: No, don't want to use cars for this, loud engines...anyways, it's too far from home here

Trevor: Couldn't we just wait here and...

Buck: No no no, I don't want my house gettin all shot up, besides, that would just be a shootout...we gotta get'em in the Bush, where we know the land and where they're already scared of all the animals...

(they all dwell over the issue for a minute, finally Buck speaks)

Buck: Listen! This is what we'll do: send old Wesley out to scout out where they are...I know they'll be comin in on that Jongwena path cause that's the only one that could get them through the bush, and it passes by that place where they say the old white crocodile lives...ya know that big deep pit...so Wesley comes and tells us how far up they are and we send out all the anti-poaching boys to line up on one side of the path...we'll have one of them boys kill an impala or kudu or somethin back here and carry it out to the path, leave it right dead square in the middle of the path, make it look like a lion kill or somethin, real recent...have Wesley take that lion's paw to make fake prints, pour blood all around, the whole works man...those guys comin up the path will think they've walked dead into heaven when they see the kill...but we'll be hidin behind those big boulders and soon's they start cookin up the meat, PA-KA!...it'll come from two sides, with us in front, and the boys on the side...see, that way we can walk there in only an hour or two, don't have to use no cars or nothin fancy...simple, easy as eatin porridge...

Deion: You think Wesley can do that...scope out where they are?

Buck: He's the best I got...if he can track a leopard then sure as hell he can track a bunch of ignorant farm invaders....(begins shouting out towards the compound) Aye, Wesley, buya lapha, Wesley...(whistles loudly)

Trevor: I sure as hell hope he ain't no traitor or then we're in trouble...they'll all be waitin for us in ambush somewhere

Buck: Never!...he's been with me for ages, all the way through the war...nothin to worry about...all right, here he comes...(stands up and walks out into the driveway to talk with him in private--Wesley dressed same as usual, with gun slung over shoulder and green overalls on--greet each other in Ndebele)

Wesley: Afternoon, Boss.

Buck: (friendly) Wesley! Feelin strong?

Wesley: Yes, boss.

Buck: Good...now here's what we need to do...(starts talkin privately to Wesley, hands him an army bag full of supplies and slips him some cash, both nodding heads...while they're talking, the Rhodie men jump into action, loading guns, doing stuff in the garage,

and a simple upbeat Simon Chimbetu tune plays for a minute---music fades as Buck finishes talking with Wesley) So you understand?

Wesley: Yes, boss.

Buck: Sure? One hundred percent?

Wesley: One hundred.

Buck: OK Wesley, take this and go well (hands him a colored map--Wesley looks puzzled, holds it up and looks at it)...when we make it through this, man, you're gonna own 300 acres of good farmin land, look, right here (outlines the property on the map with his finger)--bout time you got some good land of your own, you know. OK, go well now

Wesley: (with confused grin) Serious boss? 300 acres?

Buck: Serious, man. You deserve it after all this time.

Wesley: (excited) Ah, ah, ah, boss! Thank you, thank you...(begins laughing) ah, Lucy will dance all night long when she hears this!

Buck: OK, let's do it now. Right, Wesley, One Hundred percent!

Wesley: One hundred percent, Boss. No problem...(walks toward gate, a happier man)

Buck: (lookin after Wesley) Hah! Ole Wesley! (switches attention to men) Guys! what's goin on now, we ready to get outa here? Let's go!

(They all prepare to walk out of Buck's gate, guns slung over shoulders, old army fatigues, knives hangin from belts in leather sheathes, smokin butts. Simon Chimbetu begins playing again as the men disappear into the bush. Right before the reaching the bush, Buck turns back towards his house, takes a long drag from his cigarette, stomps it out, and vanishes behind a Mopane tree.)

Scene Nine: African Bush Scene. Dense shrubbery of prickles and thorns. Dominated by a tangle of acacia trees. Two large golden granite boulders are at one side of scene and the rest in dense bush, with two Rhodesian Teaks towering on the other side of the stage. In the middle of the stage lies a dead kudu, its blood saturating the sands. Bait. At the foot of the gigantic boulders are many lesser rocks and boulders. Sun blaring down upon Kalahari Sands. Absolute quiet, stillness, except for occasional melodic call of lilac-

breasted roller. Buck and three other men are resting behind first large boulder, talking in whispers, guns rested in laps, relatively casual. Deion keeps lookout from other boulder. Characters: Buck, Trevor, Penny, Brad, Deion, Wesley, Sipho, black Zimbabwean farmer.

Trevor: Jesus, guys, I'd do about anything for a cigarette now...

Penny: Hell, man, that's the last thing...you remember that time, pa, in the war when we were searching for those guerillas up in the Zambezi Valley...been chasin'em for about three days with no luck, only some tracks and clues from villagers, but then we came to the river, walkin all quiet, crouched down, searched the whole bank and found nothin, no signs, nothin...but just when we were about to leave that old British boy stopped in his tracks and said "it's a fag"...so we all started sniffin the air...three minutes later we caught that whole band of guerillas off guard while they were smokin and playin cards....ah, man, I tell you, that's the worst thing you can do in a war's smoke them fags

Buck: (loud whisper to Deion) How's it look up there?

Deion: Not a thing, man... (Buck nods approval)

Brad: So what's this Jongwena place anyways...never heard of it.

Buck: O man, this is the place! An old Ndebele sacred site...back in the old days they used to throw a virgin from the village off those cliffs and into the pit of water. Did it before the rain season for good luck. In that big hole, a hundred years ago, hundred and twenty, lived some great huge white croc without a tail...used to eat up the virgin while everybody cheered. Course nobody does that anymore, but some of them old men come down here every once in a while, you know, just to remember the good ole days. But the crazy thing is...ya know that man Hunter who came to write a book called Sacred Places of Rhodesia, well he came here not five years ago and told me he saw a crocodile down there, and it didn't have a tail. Now that's a white man tellin me this...had to believe him. But hell, unbelievable!

Brad: So why you think they'll pass by here today?

Buck: It's the only straight path from the communal lands to my house...it's still twenty miles but, hell, these guys are more scared of this bush than an English churchgirl...all those lions and snakes and buffalo and elephants. Man, these guys get scared... they have

all these myths about baboons stealing children and lions eating entire villages, just nonsense, but they still believe it down deep(Deion suddenly tenses up...all men raise their rifles and quiet)

Deion: (turns to the men with a nod) Wesley.

(Wesley jogs onto stage with gun slung over shoulder and hides behind boulder with men)

Buck: Wesley! What's happening?

Wesley: (slightly out of breath) Boss, they walkin slow, but I think they will be here in fifteen-twenty minutes.

Buck: How many?

Wesley: Ten only...I think some of them were caught in the snares we set...others became scared...

Buck: Guns?

Wesley: Five have guns...the rest have knives and clubs.

Buck: Who's there?

Wesley: Sipho is leading...the other men are just villagers, farmers, I do not think you know them boss.

Buck: Sibanda's not there?

Wesley: No boss.

Buck: Hah! Man, I'd kill him with my own hands today. He's probably sitting at home now drinkin tea, just waiting for the spoils...thinkin a great army is marchin in on me.

Hah!....OK, Wesley, here's what we do: You run up the side over there and try to make it behind them, tell all those other anti-poaching guys to line up on this side over here and wait for our shots, then they open up fire...I'm waiting to fire until they get to that bait up there, when they're all bending over wondering if they should cook it up for dinner or not. You stand strong on the path and if anybody tries to escape you shoot'em down. Can't let anybody escape. All right? Got it?

Wesley: Yes, boss.(gives Buck great smile) Soon I will be plowing my new land... (Buck nods, Wesley scurries off into the bush)

(they all lean back on rock, Buck looking out from behind the rock with binoculars to see when the invaders will get near--all is silent)

Trevor: (whispering to Buck while crawling over to other side of boulder) Buck, I'm goin over to this side to check things out (Buck motions to proceed---silence--sound of Roller...waiting)

(sudden aggressive voices offstage speaking in Ndebele, everybody speaking at once-- suddenly a large group moves on stage surrounding something--they yell and jab at whatever is in the middle, throw clothes out of the circle)

(men behind rock all in concentration)

Deion: What's goin on Buck?

Buck: I don't know...it's them....but they've got something...

(now the men start punchin at a naked man in the middle of their group, he falls to the ground and they begin to violently kick him all over)

Brad: (standing up, still behind rock, alarmed) It's Wesley! (all the men stand up, ready to fight--a simple rhythm begins playing, hand percussion,

[*/X/*/*X/*X/X/*X/*/*X/X/X/X] gradually builds in tempo and intensity as scene progresses)

Trevor: Should we fire?

Buck: No...not close enough from here...wait...

(meanwhile, in the circle they begin to kick Wesley as he moans, his blood like the kudu blood, drenching the sands)

Trevor: If we don't go in now it may be too late for Wesley!

Buck: We've gotta wait...we'd have to run out to shoot and then we'd be in the open....just wait, they'll get closer...

Sipho (from the group of men, one man hands him an axe which he holds to the side, yelling): You traitor! Siding with the white man! While you lay dead we will be celebrating over our new land! Die a traitors death! (the rest of men cheer him on, a few more kicks to Wesley)

Trevor (urgency): They're gonna kill him Buck!

Buck (intense, ready to fire, sweating profusely, shaking): Hell, he's just one of them anyways...a kaffir, a bloody nigger, we can't all sacrifice our lives just to save some bloody muntu...

Trevor: Buck, last chance...

Buck: Wait...they won't do it, they don't have the guts...they're just kids for Christ's sakes

(as the group cheers, Sipho raises the axe above his head, spits on Wesley and says some final sneering words in Ndebele, then brings the axe down)

(Buck jolts up from behind the rock and begins a rage of firing, while the other men all jump out behind him and fire away---they all run forward a few steps firing all the while--few shots are fired back, Deion is hit in the leg and screams---firing also begins on the left side and many of the invaders fall dead, several run off into the bush--Sipho dies dramatically, trying to crawl back into the bush, finally collapsing.)

Buck: (Yelling to Trevor and Penny and pointing in the direction of the runaways) Go after'em. If you find'em just kill'em. (they disappear into bush)

(firing stops, tempo slows, and Buck stands alone with the dead bodies. Deion is sprawled on the rock crying for help, yelling "Buck, over here, Buck!" But Buck only seems interested in the dead black bodies in front of him. He drops his gun on the ground when he comes to them and goes over to where Wesley lies. He gets down on one knee in front of Wesley and puts his hands over his face, shaking his head.

Buck: (almost in tears) O shit! Wesley, how did this happen? (reaches down to the body and draws up a hand of blood, holds it up to his face and begins weeping, stares at ground and wipes the bloody hand across his khaki shirt---after a few minutes Penny emerges from the bush with a captive—gun to his head)

Penny: Aye, Pa. Got one...I was gonna shoot him but he said he wants you to kill him.

Buck: Eh? Me to kill him? Wants to die in the famous hands of Sikwatula, is it? Die by my hands, eh? These hands are filth now, man, not even worth killin... no, take him up there to Jongwena and throw him in that pit, see if that croc's still in there

Penny: Yes, Pa... (walks away as captive, who looked bold at first, now looks terrified, yells in Ndebele "ah Sikwatula, ngifuna wuyangibulala!")

Buck: No, boy...this is a sacrifice...for the man you killed...cause I wouldn't be here today if he hadn't saved my life twenty years ago... (as Penny leads the captive away the terrified yelling in Ndebele continues, fades into the bush "Sikwatula, angifuni..." a horrible scene.

(as they leave the stage, Buck walks over to Wesley's green overalls which had been thrown off and searches through them--takes out the map given earlier and holds it up)

Buck: (as he stuffs map in his pocket) ah, Lucy...she'll never forgive me (kneels down at Wesley's body one more time and says a prayer) Shame, a damn shame, ole Wesley... (wipes hand over face, shakes head to side in genuine regret...walks off stage in daze, glazed over, in cold stupor—music of Simon Chimbetu erupts over the scene as Buck walks over to help Deion, slow fade)

Scene Ten: On Buck's Porch. Still littered with engine parts and guns and papers.

Nobody else with him. He sits somberly, toying with a ball-bearing and motor parts.)

Characters: Buck, Nduna, George.

(After a few seconds focussing on Buck, Nduna walks up the driveway)

Buck: Nduna, you're back! What this time...

Nduna: Mr. Sikwatula, How are you? I came only because I want to keep you informed...like a friend...I do not want something like that, what happened in the bush last week, to happen again.

Buck: So what's the news? What are people saying?

Nduna: Mr. Sikwatula, people are saying bad things...you know there was one man who escaped, he has been telling people that you used Wesley as bait, and as soon as he was dead you began shooting everybody...

Buck: (bellowing) NO! I will not have some stupid ignorant negro come up to my house and tell me I used my best man as bait! Bullshit, Absolute Bullshit!

Nduna: (trying to maintain peace) No, no, no, I am only telling you what some of the people are saying, remember that my mouth did not start these rumours.

Buck: (calming down) Yeah man, so what else do they say now?

Nduna: Please forgive me, remember these are not my words, but some say you were a coward, not to save Wesley's life before he was killed. They say you are weak now...no morals...

Buck: (furious) Unbelievable! (grasps head in hands) Unbelievable! What other cock are people speaking down there?

Nduna: This one...I believe, unfortunately, is true...they say that because of the killings here the government will send troops very soon...it would be best if you leave this farm, I think

Buck: (mocking) You think? Eh? (a cell phone rings which Buck picks up promptly) Hello.

Rita: Hi, Pa...listen, emergency...we just got a call from Chuck Dowdy, you know, president of the Commercial Farmers Union, he said that according to their sources, tomorrow morning a busload of heavily armed CIO men will invade the farm...this one isn't a joke, Pa...

Buck: Hah! A busload, you say? OK...

Rita: So Pa, you must leave now-now for Bulawayo...take whatever you want but get out of there by this afternoon...

Buck: (after a substantial silence over the phone): OK, Ma, I'll leave this afternoon, might stop by at Deion's house on the way... you need anything from up here...

Rita: Just make sure you throw all those old photo albums in the truck...take some of those ebony carvings also...(long pause--starts crying)...I just can't believe this is happening, Pa, I mean, how can they do this?

Buck: It's OK...as long as we're all safe and we still got some money to get by...

Rita: Yeah, I guess you're right...well, take care, Pa.

Buck: You too...make sure Hendrick keeps watch at night, OK.

Rita: OK...see you tonight.

Buck: See you. (hangs up--long pause, staring at ground, suddenly springs head up and looks at Nduna) Sorry, Nduna, gotta ask you to leave, gotta start packin my bags...thanks for comin over...need any meat? any corn meal? won't be usin much around here anymore--don't want them soldiers to get it when they take over the place, you know man?

Nduna: No, sir, I don't need anything....just wanted to talk, deliver the messages, you know...

Buck: OK, Thanks...see ya then, go well now, ya hear.

Nduna: Thank you sir, have a good trip. Lihamba kuhle.

Buck: (as Nduna walks away) Wait, Nduna, give this to Lucy...(takes out the map of land) tell her that if everything works out, you know, this land is hers, she's got my word on it

Nduna: Thanks, Sikwatula, I'll give it to her...

Buck: All right, see ya then...(watches as Chief walks away...soon as he's out of sight, Buck walks around the table a few times, then he lifts up his head with a slight smile, picks up the telephone and calls Trevor) Trevor, man...come on over, tomorrow we've got a real war on our hands...no way I'm lettin' them scare me off and steal this land...I'll die for it, Trevor, just like Wesley did...tell all the rest of'em to come over also, now-now. All right. (hangs up the phone. walks around the table a few more times...stops, picks up his gun, walks out into the yard cocking the gun, yells) George, George, buya lapha indoda (releases great beckoning whistle)

(George comes running up a few seconds later in his work uniform with an axe in his hand)

George: Yes, boss?

Buck: What you doin' now?

George: Choppin wood, boss.

Buck: All right, man, put that axe down and get in that car over there. Get in the driver's seat.

George: What needs fixin', boss?

Buck: Nothin...today you're gonna learn how to drive. Right, man?

George: (brimming with joy) Yes, boss, OK!

Buck: Best get outa here while you can...they'll kill you if they come...loyal to the white man, that's what they'll say...let's go!

Buck gets into passenger seat and they close doors--car lurches and swerves around Buck's driveway almost comically...Buck sits calmly giving George instruction while Mtukudzi drowns out all other sounds and thoughts and hardships with "Adzoka Dande." Final close-up of Buck's face through car window, staring out at his land, knowing he can't hold on.

Fade

Dubious

Uzaqoqwa yikuhlwa
“you will be gathered by the darkness”

Leaving behind, in dangerously idle states, one maid for washing clothes and dishes, one full-time cook, two gardeners, one gatekeeper, two nannies, and one general maintenance man, the Chathams set out joyously for their first family vacation. Regardless of the habitual anxiety of Mrs. Greta Chatham, who, as they drove onwards, periodically announced household items which could not be trusted in the devious hands of her black staff, the car seemed an enlightened vessel, with an exotic sense of adventurousness gutted in each of the five family members, a sensation they had never felt before. At the wheel, finally unleashed from the Harare banking cubicles where he allows his time to be devoured, Mr. Glenn Chatham steers with great intensity. Unbeknownst to his family, Mr. Chatham is intoxicated with the freedom of the open road, and is pretending that his is the lead car in a vast, high-paced road race across Zimbabwe. In the backseat dwell the children, who are ultimately irrelevant to this story, for they have been raised by the television and other mechanical entertainment devices, and are essentially babbling, loveless prototypes of each other, impervious to enlightenment. Presently, with handheld contraptions, they eradicate horrid monsters from labyrinthine fortresses, oblivious to the black humanity churning around them outside, going about business while machines howl and roar through their earthtone landscape. Naturally, Greta observes the outside scenery with disgust, for nothing about this picture is comfortably domestic: the plants and trees all possess a terrible abundance of thorns and snarls; goats, cows, chickens, and emaciated dogs wander boundlessly in search of nourishment; the black men linger, lounge, laze in front of tattered rag-tag shops, staring vacantly, perhaps venomously, at anything moving, anything fresh; and these African women of whom Greta tires, with jugs or wood or food balanced on their heads, wrapped in bright clashing bolts of fabric, when will we say enough of that, enough

of this romanticism, carry your burden like the rest of us carry it, she thinks, without tryin' to look so goddam majestic.

"Watch out for those cows in the road up there, Glenn...You hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am," replies the liberated Glenn, slowing down, "Cows ahead, no problem."

"Why do they let these cows cross the road in the middle of the day anyway?"

"When else would they cross?"

"Night-time."

"Could be dangerous at night, honey."

"Well, then maybe past midnight when there's no cars."

"Then when do these people sleep?"

"I don't know, during the day or something, they can figure that out."

"Might be tough, you know, lots to do out here."

"Well, why in the world do they all live way out here?"

"They'd probably rather live in Amsterdam or Santa Cruz, honey, but I don't think they could afford the ticket anytime soon."

At this point one of the robots from the backseat, in a brief interlude from eradicating the animated evils of the world, leans forward and whimpers that he's tired of being in the car.

"Don't worry, not much further, only a hundred kilometers maybe. Put down those games for awhile and start lookin out the window for elephants or lions...they live somewhere in the bush out there."

"Where's the lion, dad...did you see a lion...where is it?" yell the other two backseat robots as they abort their games.

"No, no, no, I didn't see one, I just said you guys should look out the window and try to spot one for yourselves...they're hard to see, you know."

"Will we see lions at the safari lodge, Dad?"

"I'd make a bet on it."

"I want to see a lion-kill, with vultures flying around and everything"

"I wanna see a lion fight a rhinoceros...who do you think would win, Dad?"

"Can't say."

"I wanna see all the toughest animals fight one another at the same time, like a cage match."

"Dad, will we be able to hunt anything?"

"Nope"

"Why not? I wanna shoot an elephant like that guy we saw on the TV show last week-- bang! right between the eyes."

"Why don't you boys just look out the window for now," Greta with her maternal presence feels compelled to chime in, "and forget about all this killing and fighting. This is a peaceful vacation, for heaven's sake, Harare is enough of a madhouse...the last thing we need is to bring home some stinking elephant carcass."

*

The bard who travels in all lands simultaneously and projects his simple wisdom through all strata of time, from the beginning to now, has assisted in the modest enlightenment of many peoples, many cultures, who learn to look backwards at time, to look at the patterns, the cycles, the vicissitudes of humanity. After a superficial examination of historical patterns within humanity, one may draw parallels to the fall of Rome and the inevitable fall of the United States, declaring blandly "An Empire cannot last forever." However, an incisive scholar of such patterns excavates through the grandeurs of human development and expansion, and settles upon the basics of the human condition, preferring to analyze the movements and dialogues of a poor Jewish fisherman's family than those of Caesar Augustus himself. The fisherman and his family represent the soul and the land of the masses, while Caesar merely controls these masses, and as we know through the basic patterns, he will soon wither away, unlike the masses. One Scripture from the book of our

nameless bard, based on patterns of human thought, settlement, and personal fulfillment, suggests that if you don't know *where* you are then you don't know *who* you are.

Applying this maxim to our current story, it is necessary to ask: Do the Chathams know where they are? Sure they do, and with the help of a Zimbabwe road map Glenn is about to turn left onto the dust road leading seventeen kilometers south to 'Touch of the Wild Safaris,' where his family anticipates four days of game viewing and poolside relaxation. But in the more profound, penetrating sense, *where* are the Chathams, where do they feel sensually, historically, viscerally, at home? For Glenn this vacation is escape from home, from Harare, where he is enslaved. He despises enslavement, for the slave is supposed to be African, black African, but he continues to live where he is a slave. In the car, his foremost concern is not to allow the grey Mercedes directly behind him to pass or else he will lose the imaginative racing contest he has created for himself. Greta, quite simply, is oblivious to any questions of where or who. Like many white Africans, her paramount concern is with creating an artificial world, a luxurious Westernized microcosm of sorts, to avoid the reality of the continent on which she was born and now guiltily, bitterly, dwells. And the children of Greta are also oblivious, but theirs is not a conscious oblivion. Like many folks of their destructive generation they will never read a poem, nor will they ever participate in a profound, sincere conversation, and they will remain relatively content, never moving beyond the facade, never quite knowing that someday, in the end, every person dies.

Glenn now struggles at the wheel as his city tires fishtail in deep Kalahari sands. He curses the sand. Almost at the end of the journey, so close to paradise, and he must slow to a pitiful speed...he curses again. Seven days from now, when he finally sits at his huge mahogany banking desk, enslaved, he will regret cursing the sands, for at least the sands, each grain unto itself, knows where it belongs in this universe, unlike himself.

"Dad, I thought you said there would be animals out here!"

"Sometimes it's hard to see 'em through the bush...it's so thick, you know, and when the animals hear our motor they just hide."

“Oh, Glenn, there’s the lodge...see it! Oh, it looks so cute.”

“Yeah, and it overlooks that whole valley floor, see...I bet that’s where we’ll see all the animals.”

“I wonder why there’s nothin out there now?”

“I don’t know, maybe cause it’s the middle of the day or somethin.”

“Well, I’ll tell you one thing, the animals can wait, all I want now is a cold coke.”

“Me too, me too, me too,” demand the robots.

“Don’t worry, boys, there’ll be plenty to drink.....Oh look at those adorable little chalets, are we staying in one of those?”

“We can stay wherever we want,” announced Glenn as he rolled in to the guest parking.

“We’re the only guests for the next few days.”

“Look at all the staff waiting to greet us.”

“Looks more like a goddam war party.”

“I thought you said the guides here were all white.”

Parting the black leopard-skin-laden bodies, four barrel-chested white men stride up wearing the shortest shorts possible, as do all Zimbabwean safari guides, exposing the entirety of their tan muscular rugby-playing legs. Aside from rugby, they looked like they all enjoyed a few good mugs of beer and some tall tales when they weren’t out wrestling crocodiles or stalking lions.

And thus the Chathams commenced their unpredictable vacation at ‘Touch of the Wild Safaris,’ with cold cokes, adorable chalets, and warring natives on their minds.

Towards evening, after unpacking, drinking some cokes, and chatting with the robust, virile guides for awhile, the Chathams congregated by the game viewing platform overlooking the watering hole where elephants, rhinos, giraffes, and a variety of antelope and bird species came to quench their thirst nightly. Unlike the animals, the thirst of the Chathams was quenched by a perpetually smiling and obedient assembly of black servants,

so quick on their feet that Greta, a vodka-tonic type of woman, was tipsy almost as soon as she sat down.

Patting one of the restless robots on the head, the lead guide known as Buck said, "Sometimes, when we're lucky we get to see a lion or leopard stalking an impala or kudu from that high grass over there"

"Have you ever seen them make a kill?"

"Many times, sonny...but you gotta be patient, it doesn't happen every day."

"Do you think we'll see one tonight?"

"Can't say...nothin out there to stalk now, unusual for this time of day."

"Yeah," said Glenn, "I thought for sure this whole valley would be full of animals when we got here today, but we haven't seen a thing yet...not even a bird."

"Folks, I'll tell ya, this business is a game of luck...last night this valley was full of every creature imaginable, like you said, but tonight it's blank. Sometimes ya just gotta sit back, order some more drinks, enjoy the scenery, and wait."

So the Chathams waited. They waited intensely, glaring at the open valley. They waited threateningly, hurling insults at these elusive, cowardly animals, probably hiding in their lairs until black of night. They waited miserably...and although the sunset poured a thick pink honey on all treetops, and the shimmering savanna grasses undulated like a million golden serpents, and a sky formed above their sorry family, booming, billowing, upheaving like great mountains, tasting of vermilion and magenta wines, smelling of answered prayers, a heavenly rhythm gliding and metamorphosing with no great intention...still, they waited miserably, for it was animals they had come to see.

Not even five minutes after sunset the robots were heading back to the chalet to pick up their video games, Greta was struck numb with drunkenness and had to be carried back to the chalet by one of the hefty guides, while Glenn was furious, suspecting a sham, and marched off to bed as the guide guaranteed him they'd see plenty on their game drive tomorrow. If Ernest Hemingway had been there, in all his African pomp and sophistication,

he would have turned to one of the guides and laughed, "This is why a continent ages so quickly once we come to it!"

*

The morning light shone through a chink in the thatch door, a golden sliver of radiance, and the Chathams slowly awakened. In Harare, the Chathams awake every morn amidst a cacophony of birdsong. Though they are rarely conscious of these songs, as Glenn awakes this morning at the expensive safari lodge he is severely conscious that this morn lacks birdsong. In retrospect, Glenn wonders why he didn't ask one of the guides about the birds, or one of the black servants for that matter, for they have lived here forever and should know these kind of things.

A hugely magnificent drumbeat erupts from the front lawn with ancient shuddering percussive pounds, as if a deep dark god were pounding celestial cowskin at the core of the earth, summoning guests to breakfast. And thus the Chathams arise and enter the aromatic morning. Fresh squeezed orange juice, raspberry Danishes, ham and cheese omelets, among a plethora of other fine European foods, await our guests, along with the usual entourage of smiling and submissive black waiters. The four enormous guides, who seem to be growing in size every hour, join the Chathams at breakfast talking excitedly about the extensive game drive through Hwange National Park planned for today.

"Last week we went on one of these drives and saw a pack of them Painted Hunting Dogs chasing a young male kudu. That kudu, a smart little guy, ran out into the middle of one of those watering holes so you could only see his head above the water, too deep for those dogs to come get him. But then those dogs, determined little things, well, they didn't care, they just surrounded that watering hole and went to sleep, knowing the kudu would have to leave sooner or later..."

Unable to stand the anticipation, one of the robots asked, "Did the dogs finally kill it?"

“Don’t know for sure, sonny, cause we had to drive on, but we saw ’em later in the evening and their bellies were so full they all looked pregnant, so I bet they did.”

“All right, cool, awesome,” exclaim the robots.

The shorter and stouter of the guides, Lionel, stands up suddenly and begins admonishing one of the black waiters, “What are you thinking! You’re not thinking, that’s what! A simple breakfast, that’s all we want...no orange marmalade, no chocolate chip muffins, no guava juice! Now get with it, man, you hear me?”

“Yes, boss.”

Seemingly unaware that the absence of orange marmalade did not warrant a crisis reaction in the present situation, the guide plopped back into his seat with a harrumph, “I’ll tell ya, these people just never learn. If they’re not forgetting to do this or that, then they’re back there stealing everything they can fit into their pockets. That’s why we have ’em wear those leopard skins most of the time, cause there’s no pockets in ’em.”

Greta, also being an expert on the theme of black theft, added fervently, “I bet by the time I get back to my house we won’t even have a pot to pee in, and when I go up to ask my maids what happened to all the dishes and china, they’ll just say ‘O madam, serious, we don’t know, serious, we only wash and dry dishes, not steal them.’ I get so sick of it...twelve million people and still no good help in this entire country.”

All the guides grunted approval, and then, noticeable only to the discerning eye, their already extensive physiques each grew another four millimeters upwards.

The robots were getting restless. Glenn was staring out at the vacant valley floor. Greta was bubbling with scorn for the black race which stubbornly inhabited her country.

“Shall we meet at the safari truck in fifteen minutes? It’s best to get an early start so’s the sun’s not beatin down on us all day. Today’s gonna be a great day, folks, all kinds of animals out there...be sure to bring your cameras.”

Within an hour they were in the middle of the valley, crushing enormous piles of elephant dung under their rubber tires, feeling gallantly adventurous as the truck wove

through thorny acacia trees and mysterious bleached skeletons. The guides were busy pointing out different types of shrubs typically eaten by grazing antelopes, or trying to explain to the Chathams how pregnant African women eat the mud from termite mounds for calcium. Despite the incessant explanations of natural history and native novelty, the guides were beginning to worry, for they had yet to see any game.

“Dad, we haven’t seen anything yet, I thought you said we would see lions and elephants and all kinds of stuff...this is boring, just looking at the trees.”

“Trust me,” he huffs at the guides, “I thought we’d be seeing a lot more as well, so far this hasn’t quite met my expectations.”

“This is truly unusual, folks, I honestly cannot explain what’s going on. Last week, by this time in the drive, we’d seen warthogs, sable antelope, kudu, impala, wildebeest, zebra, an eland, and a family of white rhinos. Not to mention a whole load of bird species, and of course, baboons.”

“Well we sure aren’t seeing any of those things today.”

“Trust me, Mr. Chatham, we’re just as frustrated as you...it’s like all the animals mysteriously disappeared or something. Lionel, let’s drive over to that watering hole where we saw that elephant herd a few weeks ago...there’s always something there.”

If Charles Darwin was correct when he wrote, “No country abounds in a greater degree with dangerous beasts than southern Africa,” why is it that the Chathams, in prime terrain, have spotted neither dangerous nor innocuous beasts? Are the animals tired of being observed while they partake in the necessities of a subsistence lifestyle? Have they retired, migrating to some secretive wilderness enclave? Perhaps the Chatham family repels wildlife? Or perhaps the problem is one of perception, one of illusion, one of blindness and sensual dullness...but whatever the case, it is clear that in this particular sphere of the world, the animals are not abounding.

Six pairs of binoculars desperately scoping the vast horizons. A common field sparrow would bring elation to our sorry bunch, who feel utterly alone in these grand

landscapes, as if a great deluge had swiped its dismal hand of eradication across the earth, leaving only a carload of survivors in southern Africa to roam the bleak desolate lands.

“Look! Look! Look...” exclaims Buck, “it must be Kudu horns. Look!” But alas, hope dies a bitter death, and they soon see their promising kudu horns as a dead mopane tree teetering in the wind.

The robots, sipping on cokes, begin to whine for their games. Greta, once again, is careening quickly towards drunkenness with vodka-tonics from the makeshift bar, although the vodka supply is reaching a dangerous low. Glenn, who expressed a great deal of frustration and anger on the morning drive, has calmed , and has involved himself in another imaginary game wherein he is a great explorer like Livingston, among the first Europeans to trek over this magnificent land, wondering how he will describe it in his memoirs. It will strike Glenn, some weeks later, when he reads in a magazine article that when Livingston died in Africa, his organs were eaten by two savages in order to inherit his strength and bravery. Romanticism, like hope, may die a bitter death.

The guides have not spoken for a great while, for they are essentially plugged up, dumbfounded, verbally dammed by this unheard of phenomenon. At this point we must envision the absurdity of such a scene: four majestic African safari guides, growing by the hour, shirts unbuttoned halfway down muscular chests to show jungles of hair, sitting in complete silence, at a loss for words, almost in tears as if their wives had left them all simultaneously, running away on a moonless night. Their anguish may also be attributed to the fact that they feel cramped, as if their burly foundations were slowly expanding.

“Well, folks, I hate to say it, but maybe we should head back...I don’t know what’s going on out here, but I sure am sorry...at least tonight we can sit out by the watering hole after dinner and see if anything comes.”

“Do you think there may be some type of scientific explanation for this?” poses a contemplative Glenn.

“To be honest, Mr. Chatham, I’ve never heard of anything like this before, I mean, like you said earlier, we haven’t even seen a bird or grasshopper yet...”

“We’ll make some phone calls tonight to other safari lodges and see what’s going on.

Also our workers back at the lodge should know, they’ve been living here, doing the same old things, since the world began...if they don’t know what’s up then I don’t know who can tell us.”

“Gentlemen, let’s talk while we drive...I’m outa’ vodka back here!”

The late afternoons of Zimbabwe, as if a languorous balm has settled down foggily upon the entire country: the blazing tide of the sun is ebbing; a carefree coolness descends; worries diminish, however briefly; workers punch clocks, take buses, go home to wives roasting maize; the corrupt politicians may finally hide, alone in their mansions, counting loot; safari guides settle down with their clients, drinks in hand, watching the silhouettes of giraffe in sunset; even the Chathams, on the evening of this rather unusual day, seem to be possessed with a certain placidity, each like small ponds, rippleless.

Naturally, since it is already implied that late afternoons in Zimbabwe deliver a pervasive insouciance to the entire population, it is unnecessary to mention the following: in the late-afternoon Lucy Ncube, along with five or six million other rural farmers, must begin walking to her fields, hoe or basket over shoulder, preparing to work for another 4-5 hours in the coolness of the day; Misheck Sibanda, in late afternoon, watches his wife die a miserable choleric death, while next door Lucky Mpofu begins a succession of malaria nightmares which make the evening shadows look diabolic and sinister; Mai Zinzombe sadly watches her husband tramp off to the beer garden in the late-afternoon, where he spends money and, she knows, will one day come home with this terrible new disease; six or seven hundred people prepare to die, every late-afternoon, from this terrible new disease which the government refuses to acknowledge. Such are some of the other scenes of a languorous late afternoon in Zimbabwe.

The lodge is beckoning in the distance, tiki-torches lining the paths, reflecting pools of shimmering light upon the vacant watering hole. Without words, they arrive. Dinner must be eaten, vodka must be drunk, video games must be conquered, stuff must be done.

“So let’s meet for dinner in about fifteen minutes, sound good? Give ya enough time to freshen up and wipe the dust off your faces. I’ll be sure to tell one of the boys to bring you a vodka-tonic right away, Mrs. Chatham.”

“Sounds good to us,” mumble the Chathams as they emerge from their late afternoon daze and stumble off to the chalet.

Waiting for them to get out of range, Buck explodes. “What the hell’s going on here, Lionel? Where are these stupid kaffirs? Always, soon as the vehicle pulls up, they’re supposed be out here in those goddam leopard skins to greet the clients with juice and snacks and all that crap. Where the hell are they...especially after a drive like today, the last thing we need is all the staff to be asleep back in the storage room. Go find’em and tell’em they’d better get their asses movin!”

Fifteen minutes is enough time for tidal waves to kill 138,000 people living on India’s coastline, or for President Clinton to sign a paper granting endangered status to innumerable species, but it was not enough time for the tremendous guides of Touch of the Wild Safaris to determine the new geographical positioning of their otherwise faithful and reliant black staff.

“Where’s that vodka-tonic, I thought you said someone would bring it to our room?”

“Apologies, Mrs. Chatham, but our staff is a little behind schedule now for dinner preparations. I go get it for you right away.”

“So when will we be eating?...it doesn’t look like the tables are even set yet.”

“We’re terribly sorry about this, but it looks like you’ll have to give us half an hour to get it all ready. In the meantime you can sit by the watering hole and we’ll bring you some drinks and appetizers.”

“Dad, can we go back to the room and watch TV while they cook dinner?...there’s nothin to look at over there.”

“Sure, maybe I’ll even come and join you,” he says as the robots run off to the room. “So Buck, have you had a chance to ask any of your staff why there aren’t any animals out there.”

“Well, in fact right now we’re having a difficult time rounding up our staff...they seem to have gone back to the sleeping compound or somewhere during the day, but don’t worry, we’ll find’em soon enough and have dinner whipped up in no time. I don’t know what they’re thinkin, takin off like this...Oooo, what a day, eh?”

“That’s for sure...so we’ll see you in half an hour. Please just make sure someone brings my wife her vodka-tonic, you know how she is.”

So the Chathams, huddled on the beds of their chalet, unknowingly celebrated the pinnacle of their vacation as they intensively watched the American television show Unsolved Mysteries. Tonight’s episode recreated the trail of a serial killer from Arizona, who crucified the bodies of teenage girls upon Saguaro Cacti. “Good thing stuff like that doesn’t happen around here,” pronounces Glenn, “or we’d be packed up and ready to go in a heartbeat. All kinds of crazy stuff goin on over there in America.” Meanwhile the continent beneath him shudders...the Congo howls...Somalia whimpers...Sierra Leone wails...Angola moans...Kenya bellows...but alas, our political commentary is cut short, for Lionel is out pitifully tipping and tapping the drums, trying to emulate the native drummer in calling the Chathams to dinner.

The expansive growth of the guides is now undeniable, as they tower like pink-granite monoliths over the table, attempting to entertain their guests with stories of prowess and stealth.

“...so after Buck had been waitin there for fourteen hours, without as much as twitchin a muscle, that lion began to circle back around through the high grass. Now, when lion hunting, the first thing you gotta remember is that the lion is always smarter than you, it

always knows where you are, no matter what. So Buck got that lion centered in on his scope, all ready to fire...but he couldn't cause the lion kept weaving in and out of the high grasses...one bad shot means a charge...do you know how hard it is to hit a charging lion? Yeah, well, I'll tell ya, it ain't no easy thing..."

"Hey Lionel," interrupts Buck from the kitchen, "we're gonna start serving now. Food's done."

A few minutes later the Chathams had before them steaming dishes of sadza, a stiff maize porridge eaten by the indigenous peoples. When Lionel brought out the slimy green derere and nyimo beans to go with the sadza, more indigenous delicacies, Greta jumped back as if a black mamba had risen in her path. Lionel caught her as she fell back in a near fainting spell. "What are you guys trying to do," she blasted, "indiginize us or something? Why the hell would we want to eat this food? This is for those people" as she waves her hand out towards the bush, "not for us. Next thing I know you're gonna bring out some caterpillars for dessert or something."

"We're sorry Mrs. Chatham...we're havin kind of a rough time tonight...you see, not only have the animals mysteriously disappeared, but it seems that our staff has also become a part of this phenomenon. We can't find them anywhere...trust me, we've looked everywhere and no signs."

"Where the heck would they go?...I mean, it's not like they have cars or anything."

"Probably just walked home or something like that."

"Do you think they're going on strike?"

"No, I wouldn't think so, it's the only job they can get around these parts, and they've never complained before."

"So will you go to their homes tomorrow and try to find'em?"

"Well, that's another problem, we're not too sure where they live...when they come here askin for a job it's just like they're poppin' outa the bush. But we'll go down to the village

tomorrow and ask if anybody's seen'em. In the meantime, unfortunately, we'll be cookin the meals and takin care of all the details."

"So will every meal be like this?"

"No maam, we had to whip this together on rather short notice, you know?"

"You guides must eat well out here, seems like you're growing every minute."

"That's true," seconded Glenn, "you guys must have gotten a half a meter taller and thirty kilos heavier since we've been here."

Standing up to clear the tables, well over seven feet tall and somewhere around 400 pounds, Buck says, "Yeah, we all felt a little strange today, like we were growin from the inside out. Maybe we all just need to get some sleep and see what tomorrow brings."

*

The bodily expansion of the four guides, scientifically, is indeed a phenomenon. Symbolically, however, it is precise. A Zulu proverb admonishes those who take more than they can chew: Do not eat four cobs of maize if your stomach is the size of two. The guides have devoured fifty of these cobs, never giving thought to matters of digestion or health, and quite certainly they have not considered whose mouths they could be sharing with. They prefer to devour, voraciously, without consideration, hungry white goblins that they are. From the perspective of resource consumption, nine or ten black Africans fit into the body of every white African, so in a sense, we can pretend that the missing black staff from Touch of the Wild Safaris have been devoured by the guides. Transfer this scenario to the American landscape and it becomes embarrassing, with thirty or forty black Africans equaling the consumption of one singular American. If perdition were the punishment for excess, first-world peoples would dominate hell.

These thoughts have been rumbling through Glenn's mind as he drifts off to sleep, and struck with a profound guilt, he considers the hundreds of people walking along the roadside on the drive here, probably walking 10, 20, 40 kilometers in a day. So he makes a vow to himself that he will walk the mere kilometer to work from now on instead of taking

one of his gas-guzzling vehicles, thereby absolving himself of the sins of excess. Done! Finished! Can sleep well now. Easy as that!

Arising in their chalet as if to a new reality, the Chathams are silent, contemplative, testing the day. A sensation is bearing down upon them, emanating from their morning movements. Unaware that many people in the world live through their entire lives, some by choice, some by fate, with this sensation, the Chathams have never experienced the phenomenon of unpredictability. All they know is that today, in light of yesterday, will probably not be predictable. Glenn notices, out of a corner of the mirror, that when his wife wakes up she gives herself a quick pinch on the forearm. She winces; she is still there.

Breakfast is scarce. Cups of black tea, burnt toast with butter, baked beans from a can, and several hard-boiled eggs. While eating, the four colossal guides inform them of news from the outside:

“Just got off the phone with Lion’s Den Safaris up in the Zambezi Valley...didn’t have much good news...said they haven’t seen any wildlife in several days and all their blacks been missin since yesterday afternoon...they had twenty five clients who all cancelled when they found out what was going on.”

“Yeah, seems like the same story everywhere...this mornin I called ole Hendrick over at Duma Safaris and he said the same thing: no animals, no blacks. He also said that he’s grown about two feet in the last few days and put on over 60 pounds, he said all the whites in the area are gettin bigger. They’re starting a search this mornin, gonna have some people drive down to the villages to look for the blacks and others are gonna do some transects through the bush to look for recent tracks and spoor of any animals.”

“Hell, Ntundla Safaris said they’ve got a car from Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation headin out this mornin to do interviews and stuff. Soon this’ll be all over the news, no way in hell we’ll get clients then.”

“Ole Thys from Ivory Lodge says he was out huntin the other day and saw a nice bull elephant heading east. Said he went to look at the spoor a few hours later and there was nothin, no tracks, not even a trampled piece of grass.”

“This is ridiculous...no explanations. Lionel, why don’t you go hook up that radio we got and just listen to the news all day...tell us what’s goin on every few hours.”

“Sounds like a good idea.”

“I don’t understand how all the black people in the country can just disappear, you know, there’s like millions of ’em,” reasons Greta. “Who knows, maybe they went on vacation somewhere.”

“I never heard of any blacks around here who went on vacation...don’t have enough money...besides, where would they go?”

“I doubt that all these blacks decided simultaneously to go on vacation...I mean, they work at the places where people take vacations.”

“Who knows, maybe they got some traditional ceremony type thing this week...”

“A few years ago I heard about this tribe up near the Zambezi River who could make people vanish...they could also turn themselves into leopards and honey badgers.”

“Hah, I always knew you believed in that witch-doctor stuff, Buck, but if they were out there turnin themselves into animals then there’d be thousands of animals everywhere...”

“Could be some type of epidemic...”

“Maybe some big Chief’s wedding somewhere far out in the bush...all kinds of free food and beer so they all decided to go.”

“They coulda just taken off and decided to leave the country in our hands...finally.”

“...back to the good ole days of Rhodesia.”

“You never know, maybe that’s why all the whites are growing. Slowly expanding as all the blacks vanish...filling in the gap...a land of a hundred thousand giants instead of a land of twelve million skin and bones.”

“But that wouldn’t explain why the animals disappeared...we don’t have anything to do with them...they was here long before the first black or white man.”

“Aaaarghh...unbelievable...what a mystery...this can’t be!” they all echo.

*

A white Zimbabwean intellectual once had the idea of researching the more than one hundred novels written by black Zimbabweans which have never been translated into English. Whites hardly play a role in these novels, and the rare references to whites typically portray them as benevolent or heroic figures. In a conversation with novelist Doris Lessing, this researcher said, “They are not interested in us. We assume they are fascinated by us, the way we are by them. But we are simply noises off, that is, down there in the villages.” To which Lessing responded: “Then that means that if the whites left this country entirely most of the blacks wouldn’t even notice? Perhaps it would become like those countries up north which are rapidly going back to old Africa, as if the whites had never been there, everything is collapsing, nothing working, transport, telephones, roads, railways, the civil service, hotels—nothing works.” But what would happen if the blacks left the country entirely? Surely the whites would notice, for who would serve tourists drinks while they sat by the watering hole on late-afternoon, who would take care of the robots, who would cook glorious meals and wash dishes for less than a dollar, how would Greta fill that void of bitterness without the blacks...there would be no excuses, no one to blame for everything that goes wrong in life.

“Well, gentlemen,” sighs Glenn, “we might as well head back to Harare, maybe things back there are under control, you know. Greta and the kids are starting to get a little restless, you know.” Wife and robots nod in agreement. Robots, cheered at the thought of going back to the technological comforts of home, whip out their pocket video games and begin pushing buttons with zeal.

Within twenty minutes they have paid a significantly discounted bill, wished the guides well, and are on the road. Within another twenty minutes they are walking back to the lodge, disheveled, sensing doom.

“Damn sand,” exclaims Glenn, “didn’t even make it a kilometer before we swerved off the road and busted into one of those Baobab trees.”

“Now how are we gonna get outa here?” whines Greta, “trapped at a safari lodge with no animals, no service, not even clean sheets, Jesus, what a story! At least one of you gentlemen could go fetch my poor boys and I some cold cokes since we’ve been walkin forever in this awful dust.”

“We’re terribly sorry about the car, what a shame. We’ll go look at it in a few minutes and see how long it will take to repair...Lionel here can repair just about anything so you’re in luck. You folks might even be outa here in a few hours. Why don’t you just make yourselves comfortable by the swimmin pool until we know what’s happening with your car.”

Rarely does one observe an entire family sulking on the edges of a swimming pool when the temperature is 110 degrees and the day is free. Despite Glenn’s attempt to cheer up the family by cannonballing into the water, they are lost and confused in the great tangled labyrinth of unpredictability. So we have the pasty white Chathams drinking bubbling black cokes next to the crystal blue pool waters under the earthy green shade of Zimbabwean teaks in a country colored bright blood red on world maps. Glenn, considering the difficulty he had in walking back to the safari lodge from his wrecked car in the heat of the day, decides to renounce his vow from the night before. Walking to work is trouble, he figures, best just to buy one of those ab-masters or walking machines and do the job at home.

“Well, folks, we just got back from checkin’ out your car and it looks like it’s in pretty bad shape. Lionel says it may take him a day or two to fix it. We’re gonna tow it back here this afternoon so he can start workin on it.”

“So do we have to stay here for another day, dad?” cries a robot.

“It looks that way.”

“In that case bring me a vodka-tonic,” demands Greta, “hell, we might as well make the best of it while we’re here.”

So Greta settles down in her lawn chair with vodka and cigarettes, the boys bust out handheld video games, and Glenn dangles his feet in the swimming pool, dreaming of another life. And thus the day passes.

By evening, news from the outside was only getting worse. Now, not only had all of the workers and rural farmers disappeared from the country, but the black politicians and businessmen were missing as well. To summarize the radio broadcast heard by one of the guides: Zimbabwe is now devoid of all black-skinned people, while, in contrast to the disappearing blacks, many of the 40,000 white people in the country are beginning to expand, to grow inexplicably into enormous proportions. Animals have also disappeared, vanished from the landscape leaving the tourism industry in frantic turmoil....though domestic animals seem to be unaffected by the phenomenon.

At dinner that night silence reigned. The car was a day away from being fixed, Lionel said. Tomorrow they could choose to go on a drive through the bush, just to look at trees and shrubs, Buck said, or they could hang out at the pool all day. “It’s up to you,” he muttered, “doesn’t matter what we do...things aren’t gonna get any better.”

The following day the Chathams slept till noon, ignoring the curved sliver of sunlight radiating through the thatch. Greta pinched herself several times, and after realizing that she was awake, not dreaming or still asleep, she turned on the TV. Although nothing interesting was on, Greta, along with her family, sat and watched the tube for four hours. During a commercial break, Glenn, our only marginally contemplative character, considers how convenient a contraption the TV is to our modern world. His goal was to make it through the day, and the TV has allowed him to do that, without thinking, without making a mess of his thoughts. He whispers a quick prayer to the TV, to whom he is a humble, benumbed servant.

At five o'clock, as the sun weakens and a breeze cools the valley, the Chathams emerge from their Chalet like scavenger crustaceans peeping onto the ocean floor from behind their shadowy crag. They see Buck with the two other guides drinking from a whiskey bottle in the bar. Lionel is underneath their car, cursing and sweating. Glenn heads over to the bar where Buck hands him the whiskey bottle and tells him to drink, forget his troubles, numb himself to the day. Glenn, unaccustomed to hard liquor (the TV of alcoholic beverages), takes a swig and asks Buck how the car is doing.

"Ahh hell, man, Lionel don't have all the parts in store here so he's gotta rig up some home-made parts, you know. Said it could take another day or two before she'll be runnin good again."

"This is insanity!" hollers Glenn, who has no idea how to appreciate insanity. Some folks thrive in chaos, insanity, madness, others wither. Glenn is withering.

"Absolute insanity," agrees Buck.

"Anything new on the radio today?"

"Not really, just biologists confirming that there ain't no animals out there and sociologists confirming the same for the blacks. They got all these theories, you know, but I think they're all bullshit, man. Just a buncha cock.... But man, let's forget about these theories now and figure out what to eat for dinner, you folks haven't eaten all day."

As darkness fell upon the roads of the world, a dense fog also rose from the valley floor, and the Chathams gathered in the dining area, suspicious of the misty eve. The robots are huddling next to Glenn, nervously eyeing the mist swirling around their knees, longing for the total control they have over the world of video games. Greta is smashed, oblivious once again, eating olives and painting her fingernails as if someone cared. Glenn is alert, keen to his environs, as if preparing for a werewolf attack. The guides have reached almost appalling proportions. Still garrulous and jocular, they loom above the Chathams, like shaggy hillocks, changing the contours of the country with their physical presence.

As they ate their meager dinner of boiled corn and peanut butter crackers, the radio blazed in the background. The mist swirled in from the valley, churning and twirling. The radio blazed onwards, piercing the forest of fog, reporting to the small crowd gathered at 'Touch of the Wild Safaris' news more disastrous and terrifying than their worst nightmares could behold: "We have just received confirmation here at BBC Headquarters that the devastating news from Zimbabwe is, in fact, true: Victoria Falls and the Zambezi River no longer exist. Both of these natural wonders vanished into thin air at some point last night. The last people to witness the grandeur of the Falls was a group of tourists from Germany, who left the gates several minutes after closing. Incoming reports also indicate that the Chimanimani mountain range and Great Zimbabwe ruins have also disappeared. These reports are not yet confirmed. We will return to this topic later for in-depth coverage and analyses..."

"Impossible!" bellowed Buck, tearing out his hair in anguish.

The other guides were throwing plates, wailing like children, mourning the day they were born. Glenn rushed to the radio and smashed it to the ground. "This must be a nightmare! Victoria Falls can't just disappear! Insane!"

"It's as if the heart of Africa has vanished!" cries Buck.

And so they mourned into the night. Nine souls possessing unsurpassable torment sat with arms around each other and allowed the salt to pass from their eyes. They thrashed and moaned and pounded the table. Even the robots became infected with sorrow and began to sob uncontrollably. Lionel got on his knees to pray, Buck downed a half gallon of whiskey, Glenn squirmed and contorted snakelike upon the outdoor tiling, Greta tried to find a sharp object to jab in her neck. Nobody thought to look up at the moon for a sign, or to stroll out through the mist onto the valley floor. They were broken. Tears fell to the ground for Zimbabwe, for themselves, for their futures, fated to live in a barren land, void of natural wonders, erased of every historical or cultural vestige. Never before has a country and its people faced such an extreme crisis of identity. The questions of where and who

and why? For different reasons they writhe in despair, until at last, the mist rolls around and they are englobed in dreamless sleep around the table.

*

The sun strikes Glenn on the side of the face, a burning mid-day sun. He is awake but doesn't care to open his eyes, is thinking a world of thoughts in his dark skull. He envisages himself walking through the doomed Zimbabwe landscape, utterly alone and lost. He walks north, towards Victoria Falls, where he proposed to Greta ten years ago, but instead of rainforest and cascading water he sees the Sahara. The dunes are crashing like waves, devouring. Sand churns and boils in the air, tearing through fleshy leaves and mango skin. Sun bakes the dunes lava-hot and the sand glows flamelike. Glenn looks out over the pounding, oncoming dunes and sees a skeletal Africa. An Africa laid bare; the vast continental frame of Africa where the world began, now a desert, malignant in growth. The organic soul of Africa shat out in choleric fatigue, the malarial nightmares come true, the rivers overtaken by sand like the infected blood in a million veins. A sandwave thunders at Glenn's feet and he goes under, gasping for breath in the sand, biting grit, swallowed in the dune.

*

A tap on the shoulder, "Mista', Mista'..." He cracks his tear-encrusted eyes...a white rhino runs along the valley floor, glistening in the viscosity of early morning mud. The valley basks in the orange-red mallow of morning sun. He widens his eyes, turns his head...the table is set for a feast: fresh orange juice, muffins, omelets, cereals, ham, bacon, even orange marmalade. A black man in a leopard skin uniform smiles at him. Glenn smiles back at the servant. "Everything has returned," he thinks, "back to normal." He looks at the others, sprawled out on the lawn with smashed glasses and broken plates, a demolished radio, a vodka bottle still in his wife's hand, and he knows it all really happened.

He knows that however normal things may seem to be from now on, however normal the rest of his life may be, a seed has been planted. The seed of uneasy

contemplation, of doubt. The great tangled loom of doubt. All the white Africans will say, "Hell, what a dream that was, worse than malaria," but in the back of their minds doubts will grow. Doubts about reality, matter, meaning, normalcy. Doubts about Africa. Doubts driving them crazy..."Uzaqoqwa yikuhlwa," as the Ndebele say..."you will be gathered by the darkness," meaning that only trouble or misfortune will bring some people to their senses. In a flash of revelation, Glenn considers the words of our nameless bard who told us that you don't know *who* you are if you don't know *where* you are. Glenn's entire idea of *where* has been shattered. When he started this vacation he knew exactly *where* he was; now he hasn't a clue. As Greta did this morning, he pinches himself, confirming existence.

But enough of this philosophizing, for now Glenn is hungry and the servants must be called to bring him some hot coffee and warm toast; time to get on with the day.....chop chop.

Ants, Spirits, and Magic: Three Encounters with the Pangolin (*Pholidota*)

“If you call this a pangolin,” a Zen master might ask, “then you deny it of its eternal life, but if you don’t call it a pangolin then you deny it of its present state. What do you propose to call it?”

Although a surprisingly applicable question to the life of a pangolin, such philosophical investigations didn’t seem to capture the mind of the 6’ 5” anti-poaching officer from Parks and Wildlife who led me through the tangled Zimbabwean bush with his semi-automatic rifle. A Shona proverb rolled off his thick African lips like a mantra: “*inoerwa nevanhu vese...inoerwa nevanhu vese...*it is respected and avoided by all people...” He stalked onwards while I timidly followed, wondering how that ugly little anteater-creature that I had seen several hours earlier could be respected and avoided by all people, and why we were spending hours trampling through the bush to find it? Unfortunately, my friend with the big gun wouldn’t speak to me, and since I had only been living in Dande for a few weeks, I had no idea what kind of trouble I had gotten myself into. According to Zinzombe, the local spirit medium (*midzimu*)¹ to whom I would later speak about the incident, I was lucky that I didn’t rot from the inside, excrete my innards, and die a miserable choleric death.

My pangolin sighting had occurred early that morning as I began the forty-kilometer bike ride from Mushumbi Pools to the village of Gurupira. As the sun rose over the oceanic dimensions of the Zambezi Valley, I ate my morning roll and considered the gully problems plaguing the people of Gurupira. After successive years of severe drought, the rain this year was overwhelming. Small streams gushed through farmers’ fields, fences collapsed, roads became impassable, topsoil was swept into the bush, and several huge

churning gulleys were making their way towards the village borehole. If the borehole collapsed, or became contaminated, the village would face catastrophe--possible cholera outbreaks, malnutrition, and no drinking water. With thoughts of impending catastrophe on my mind, the black mamba caught me off guard. Unwavering, it stood six feet tall, one of the most poisonous snakes in sub-Saharan Africa. Obviously displeased that I had stopped to eat breakfast on its turf, it gauged my potential harm, glaring me in the eyes. Behind those eyes, I knew, were cavities of venom that would kill me in less than 30 minutes. The black mamba strikes high on its victims, near the heart, where blood flow is arrested the quickest. Even adult elephants have died from black mamba bites. Anti-venom, if it existed, would have to be shipped up from Johannesburg, roughly forty hours away by bus. But seconds later, in a mad bolt, the mamba was back in the bush. I stood in the road, trembling, faintly crying, and that's when the pangolin, typically a nocturnal creature, crossed the path ten meters ahead of me.

Twenty minutes later I was back in Mushumbi Pools hollering to Chadrick Janga, one of my colleagues, that I had just seen a pangolin, which I knew was revered throughout Dande for its symbolic association with rain. Instead of the celebration I thought this sighting would bring, Janga grabbed me by the arm and dragged me into his hut. The women quickly left, and he began questioning me.

"Are you sure it was a pangolin?"

"Yes."

"Did it look up at you?"

"Yes."

"Did you make eye contact?"

"Yes."

"Did it roll into a ball afterwards?"

"No."

"Did you approach it?"

“No.”

“And you saw a snake before, right?”

“Uhhh, right.”

“A black mamba, or something different?”

“A black mamba.”

“Aiii! trouble trouble trouble...”

*

In Dande, things happen differently than they do in the rest of the world. A popular Shona song by Oliver Mtukudzi shows the singer yearning to go back to Dande, where his mother lives, where the roots of his childhood are planted, where anything can happen. Spiritual mediums (*midzimu*) still retain a degree of power over the masses; cholera comes from the wind; red can be a deadly color; old men sometimes turn into lions at night, and pangolins are creatures defined by a distinct dichotomy, upon which everything else is contingent.

The pangolin lives far from people, far from villages, far from anything human. If a human finds a pangolin, deep out in the bush, the pangolin won't run away like a true wild animal. Instead, it will roll into a ball and wait. Some say it waits to be left alone; others say it waits to be taken to the *midzimu* in whose spiritual province it was found. If it is eaten by anyone without the consent and blessings of the *midzimu*, it is said that they will go mad and die. If it is taken out of the spiritual province in which it was found, plague and drought will ravage the land. If you see a pangolin and don't take it to the *midzimu*, then, like me, you're in big trouble.

The *midzimu* isn't a cruel man determined to punish those who disrespect his favorite creature, nor is he much concerned with animal rights or the protection of endangered species. He simply wants his wife back. His wife was sent, many years ago, to roam the wilds by ancestral chiefs who now watch over the land they once ruled. This is

why the pangolin does not run away like other wild animals, because, as many Shona say, a part of it wants to get captured so it can meet its husband.

When the pangolin is taken to the *midzimu*, the person who found it may not say a word until it has been handed over and paid for, typically with a small gift of money. This practice echoes the newly wed wife arriving at her husband's village. But unlike a real wife, with whom the *midzimu* would consecrate the marriage on the first night, the pangolin is regarded as a ritual wife (*mukaranga*), and is cooked immediately by the *midzimu's* assistant (*mutapi*) to share with everyone in that spiritual realm.

Three potential problems crossed Janga's mind when I told him I had seen a pangolin. First, I had neglected to capture the pangolin and carry it to the *midzimu*. Essentially, in the eyes of the villagers, I had left his wife to live all alone the middle of the bush. Second, since I didn't know if I saw the pangolin in Zinzombe's or Chitsunga's spiritual province, and had brought it to neither, then my actions were likely to offend them both. Thirdly, and of greatest concern to Zinzombe, was the fact that the pangolin had made eye contact with a white man. Not since the Independence War, over twenty years ago (1980), had the pangolins of Dande crossed paths with white men. And the white men that they did meet, I was told, were mostly Rhodesian "special force" soldiers, who knew the symbolic power of the pangolin and were thus ruthless to it. Villagers claimed that pangolins did not return to Dande until 1995, fifteen years after the war, years in which Dande and the entire Zambezi Valley experienced the worst droughts in recent memory. Janga worried that the pangolin, after seeing my white skin and blonde hair, might flee the area once again. "What we must do first," exclaimed Janga, "is make sure the pangolin does not want to leave. We must assure it that everything is OK, that you are nothing to worry about."

So an hour later I was walking through the bush with the anti-poaching officer, on the lookout for pangolin spoor and demolished anthills. If we didn't find the pangolin, I had no idea what would happen, but I didn't like the fact that my silent companion had a gun

containing over fifty bullets per cartridge. Most Shona are known for their affability, but this man seemed designated as executioner. I prayed for a pangolin sighting.

After two hours of walking, the man suddenly stopped and angrily waved for me to back up. As I hid behind a large musasa trunk, he crawled forward on his hands and knees through dense acacia thornscrub. Many times in Africa did I wait for something or other, busses, food, meetings, but today I had waited twice for death: black mamba and man with gun. Both were related to animals, and both were related to territorial patterns or spiritual beliefs which I did not understand. At times like this, when death seems immanent but the rationale behind death is illogical, everything takes on a certain clarity, as if a thousand bodily senses were suddenly accessed in the final minutes of life. The trees grew beautifully into the cerulean sky, large white acacia thorns clustered together in exquisite tangled designs, and I suddenly didn't mind the prospect of becoming a corpse in this landscape. But twenty minutes later, in the midst of my sensual awakening, the executioner emerged from the thorns, dragged me out from my hiding place, and gave me a great hug. "Zvakanaka!" he proclaimed, "everything OK!"

As I followed the man back to the main path, gun now casually slung over his shoulder, I wondered why he didn't capture the pangolin himself. That would be the easy solution to all of the other problems that awaited us back at the village. Once again, however, I was underestimating the great accretion of myth surrounding the pangolin, as well as the intelligence and wisdom of the pangolin itself. The pangolin had disclosed herself to me, and therefore I was the only one who had the right to capture it. The ancestral spirits don't approve of people going into the bush specifically to find pangolins, and because sightings are so rare, many villagers believe that the pangolin chooses one person whom it wants to be captured by. In other words, it is taboo to capture a pangolin if your sighting is anything other than chance.

Later I would learn that most people in Dande thought the pangolin had chosen me to capture it because I had no roots in the Dandean landscape or anywhere in Zimbabwe,

and, in a sense, I was to be pitied for my extreme homelessness. Cultural and social transience are well known themes to the inhabitants of Dande, since many of them ended up here either as exiles from their former homes or migrants from an overcrowded and agriculturally devastated communal land. Whoever lived in Dande through the Independence War in 1980 was thought to be at home, to be extensions of the ancestral lineage, but many families and groups moved to Dande after the war, thereby creating an identity crisis based on a family's "sense of place." In the mid-80's, rumor has it that over 1,000 prostitutes were rounded up from urban areas by government authorities and shipped to Dande in an effort to clean up the city streets and promote tourism. Mozambicans fled their bleeding country in the late-80's and started small settlements in Dande. The Dombe tribal group, experienced only in hunting and gathering, took flight into Dande from the Zambian hillsides in the early-90's, with government troops firing over their heads. Numerous Zimbabwean families also descended the Zambezi escarpment into Dande after the great drought of 1992, when there became no option but to plant cash crops like cotton on large tracts of land. And in 1998, armed with a luxuriously romantic sense of self-exile as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer, I descended the jagged Zambezi escarpment as well, and began a life in Dande amongst my fellow exiles.

Like most African cultures, the Shona place great emphasis on family and homeland. Many of the new inhabitants of Dande had brought their immediate families with them, but in the act of moving had estranged themselves from their vast extended families and clan members. Many also knew they would never again be able to live in their homelands and felt disconnected from the land in Dande, as if some parts of their soul and spirit didn't truly belong. Many of the migratory farmers complained that they couldn't work the soil with their hands because their hands were created only to work the soil of their homeland. The Dombe tried to persist in hunting and gathering for several years, determined to maintain traditional practices, but after half their population died from starvation during a drought, they reluctantly adopted agriculture.

For the estranged inhabitants of Dande, one of the most powerful agents of integration is, of course, the pangolin. After the pangolin is cooked into a stew by the *midzimu*'s assistant, as was mentioned earlier, small portions are shared with everyone in that spiritual province. The sharing of this common substance helps unite members of many different lineages and clans, and self-identification in terms of individual lineage history is suppressed. The conversion of wild fruits of the earth from individual property or clan property to a source of collective benefit and fulfillment creates a consciousness of solidarity amongst all those who live in a particular spiritual provinceⁱ. Ultimately, this is a ritual of belonging, of crossing a spiritual border and accepting a new homeland as your own.

As it turns out, during my six-month stint in Dande I never ate the highly recommended pangolin stew, and therefore remained an exile along with the other new inhabitants of the Zinzombe spiritual province. But my sense of displacement was incomparable to the real exile of starving families with no land to plow or homeless prostitutes dropped off along a dusty road four hundred kilometers from home. I felt more like a Henry Miller or Ernest Hemingway who both, in a sense, detached themselves from American society to be alone for a while with their language and ideas. The luxury of this sort of artistic self-detachment is, of course, that you are welcome to return home, unlike the suffering exiles of Dande to whom the issue of the pangolin was oftentimes a matter of life or death. So, not surprisingly, when I abruptly had to leave Dande for an assignment on the other side of the country, many unanswered questions still buzzed around in my head, questions that seem crucial in retrospect but didn't seem appropriate at the time. For instance, how did Janga know that I had seen a black mamba before the pangolin crossed my path? Ultimately, did anything bad happen in Zinzombe's province as a result of my not picking up the pangolin? What had the anti-poaching officer truly seen while I was hiding behind a tree trunk awaiting certain death? I didn't bring up the subject of the pangolin after the anti-poaching officer and I returned from the bush that day, nor did people seem like

they wanted to talk about it. All I know is that three months after I left Dande, the region went through a stage of unprecedented fecundity: cotton plants grew to the size of small trees, stalks of maize reached towards the sky, and bloated papayas hung languorously in seductive clusters. Perhaps the pangolin was glad to see me gone after all.

*

Despite the pangolin's great symbolic power in Dande, I can't help but feel the same type of sorrow and sympathy for the pangolin that I feel for Sisyphus as he pushes his great boulder up the endless mountain. The cycle of reincarnation experienced by the pangolin, from *midzimu's* wife to wild creature to symbol in stew pot, seems, from a human perspective, a rather joyless, futile, and tiresome existence. As a wife, the pangolin spirit experiences severe subjugation and burdening demands from her locally revered husband. After death, the spirit of this wife becomes a nocturnal creature, destined to crawl through the thornscrub under heavy moons and subsist entirely upon ants. Then it is spotted one day by hunters, or allows itself to be spotted, and rolls into a scaly ball like an impenetrable artichoke. A few hours later it is stretched out on a great wooden table at the *midzimu's* house, a dull knife carving its flesh into miniscule chunks. After hours of boiling, the villagers partake in an act similar to transubstantiation, whereby ingestion of the flesh symbolizes acceptance of the spirit. Now, like the Catholics with their bread wafers and wine, the villagers feel a spirit within, they feel the ancestral heritage coursing through their blood, they hear the old stories of the land, they are, for an instant, all members of the pangolin clan.

As the pangolin's final transcendent step, this martyrdom also signifies the closure of physical suffering; now the pangolin is purely spirit. Nietzsche writes that, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*." The pangolin-Sisyphus analogy breaks apart on this question of *why* to live. It is possible that the pangolin, unlike Sisyphus, knows that after interminable nights of friendless ant eating it will provide a symbol of spiritual

unity for hundreds of people. Like Christ, the suffering of the pangolin is a means to an end.

*

It is interesting to envision a certain point at night, in the midst of midnight ramblings, when the pangolin stops under the stars, looks up at the moon, and contemplates the harsh meaning of life. At these moments of introspection, as the physical wrestles with the spirit and the pangolin perhaps sees a glimpse of the why behind life, suffering ceases to be suffering and meaning prevails. Just as prisoners of concentration camps often intensified their inner lives to find refuge from desolation or meaninglessness of life, so the pangolin escapes inside himself, inside his armored shell, to explore the *why's* and *how's* of its own life. Whether the pangolin finds meaning or not during these midnight pontifications, the poet Marianne Moore apparently found great metaphorical meaning in the life a pangolin.

In her well-known poem, "The Pangolin," Moore celebrates the romantic qualities and exemplary virtues of the creature. Like an artist, the pangolin is "another armored animal," bearing a thick shell which allows it to go into the world. But resembling a monk enclosed in his cell, who uses enclosure to avoid the world, the hermetic quality of armor also allows the pangolin room for solitude, introspection, and isolation. Such is the life of an artist, going into the world gathering grist and collecting materials, then entrenching herself in a cocoon of toil, not to be heard from again until a hefty manuscript can rest aside the exhausted typewriter. The isolationist and nomadic tendencies of many artists compels Moore to draw a comparison wherein the pangolin

endures

exhausting solitary

trips through unfamiliar ground at night

returning before sunrise; stepping

in the moonlight, on the moonlight

peculiarly, that the out-

side edges of his

hands may bear the weight and save the claws

for digging...

The people of Dande would agree with Moore, I believe, in calling a pangolin the artist of their landscape. Humans' struggle through life is also a game of subtle economies, of conserving the claws for digging, of rolling into a ball and crying, thinking, creating. In Dande, the pangolin is not seen often; it is out "enduring," "stepping on the moonlight," "toiling in the night." But then, after a year or two, it allows itself to be spotted, and to the human world it brings the fruits of great labor, of tremendous suffering and lonely transience. This is why, perhaps, it does not fight back. Ultimately, the true artist always wants to be discovered.

*

As I settled into a new village on the other side of the country, over 800 kilometers from Dande, I also settled into a new conceptual framework, with an altogether more contemporary cosmology. In fact, the villagers of Babali shared almost nothing in common with the inhabitants of Dande: they spoke an exotic Zulu dialect called Ndebele; most of the villagers were rooted to the Babalian land through four or five generations; ancestral spirits were relatively insignificant; and the pangolin, Dande's symbol of martyrdom and solidarity, was replaced in Babali by the proselytizing martyr of the Western world, Jesus Christ.

Although Babalians practiced an arcane form of voodoo (what they called "remote control"), which could be used to inflict pain or injury upon an enemy, the villagers of

Babali liked to think of themselves as progressive. Many would never bow to the altar of animism like the citizens of Dande, nor did they live in abstract spiritual provinces overseen by spirit mediums. These semi-progressive yearnings and anti-traditional attitudes derived from one treacherous fact: Babali was a poaching village.

The communal farming settlement called Babali lies directly between the largest National Wildlife Park (Hwange) in Zimbabwe and a 400,000 acre private wildlife conservancy. In such a location, some of the villagers joke, all you have to do is shoot an arrow out your front door and an antelope will fall. But instead of using arrows, these days the poachers use semi-automatic rifles, sub-automatic machine guns, and state-of-the-art snaring devices. So when I asked the chief of Babali district whether or not poachers bothered with capturing pangolins since there was so much other wildlife around, he fished a small plastic bag out of his pocket filled with a finely- ground beige powder, glanced a lascivious look towards his wife who was husking maize a few meters away, and proclaimed, "This here...this is pangolin!"

Although the pangolin plays no role in the Babalian spiritual world, villagers revere the pangolin for its crucial contributions to traditional medicine. Although a semi-modern clinic is situated in the middle of Babali, most villagers still visit traditional medicine doctors on a regular basis for various products which the clinic doesn't carry.¹ For instance, the pangolin powder, which is ground from its hard, overlapping scales, predominantly serves as a sort of organic Viagra (taken only by men), but is also commonly used by poachers to enhance their invisibility and strength in the bush. Other parts of the pangolin are used for hearing problems or earaches (the pangolin can hear up to five miles away), gastrointestinal discomfort, headaches, numbness, and other more abstract problems like trying to make up to a lover after you have committed infidelity. Needless to say, since the pangolin is sought after as a valuable commodity in Babali, especially by poachers who spend a lot of time in

the bush, pangolin sightings are exceedingly rare. Perhaps this is why, when I saw my second pangolin on a dirt road on the outskirts of the communal farming lands, instead of riding my bike back to the village with excitement, I slowly pedaled home against the late-afternoon sun with an eerie feeling in my gut.

The villagers already thought I was crazy for riding my bike through the bush to get exercise. Previously, while biking, I had seen several lions, a few herds of elephants, dozens of kudu, warthogs, baboons, spitting cobras, but for some reason I was never quite as scared as I should've been. If the villagers of Babali had an equivalent proverb for "Ignorance is Bliss," they would surely have used it on me. But after my pangolin sighting that day, after actually touching the creature with my own fingers as it lay like an impenetrable golden orb, I fully realized the unpredictability of the bush. Most villagers had never seen a pangolin, no other Peace Corps volunteers had seen one, and even several of the anti-poaching officers, who spent weeks at a time in the bush, had never seen one. Already I had seen two. Even leopards are more abundant than pangolins in this part of the country, and with my luck, it wouldn't be long before I ran into one of them, or, more accurately, one of them ran into me.

After 20 months in Zimbabwe, I had learned that certain things are best left in silence, so I told a few close friends about my second encounter with the pangolin, and left it at that. For the next few months I continued with my work in the communal farming settlements but began to slack off in my biking adventures through the bush. Then one evening, at the end of a long, hot day of fixing grinding mills, I found myself fifteen kilometers from home with two flat tires, no patch kit, and darkness fast approaching. Seeing my discomfort with the thought of walking home at that time of day, Misheck Mpofu, a good friend, offered me a place on the floor of his hut and I graciously accepted.

Misheck's wife had recently polished the floors of the hut with a mixture of cow dung and papaya leaves, so he was excited to have a visitor like me, who had never before slept on such aromatic surfaces. To make the situation even more unusual, I learned after

dinner that I was to sleep on the floor between Misheck and his wife so that I would be “protected from any spirits in his house” that weren’t used to me. So after a hilarious conversation about flying goats and dancing baboons, the three of us settled down on the odiferous floor, rested our heads on reed mats, and fell asleep to the tune of cowbells clanking in distant fields.

My third encounter with a pangolin occurred during the course of this rather unusual night. Sandwiched between two good-hearted Zimbabweans, I dreamt that I was an ant tunneling through a labyrinthine network of caves and crevasses. Suddenly, a huge wet cylinder shot through a tunnel and lifted me up against the grit of its surface with a mucousy adhesive. Before I knew it, I was face to face with a hungry pangolin. The pangolin held me out two feet from its snout and looked at me through narrow, beadlike eyes. For a creature able to consume over 30,000 ants in a single day, how could this pangolin find time to pause? Perhaps I had arrived at the moral crux of this pangolin’s existence, or perhaps I just looked so fat and juicy in my subconscious ant skeleton that I was being scoped out like a tender delicacy. But before questions could be answered, the roosters began crowing to the glory of God and my sleeping companions rustled me awake with hot tea and porridge. The intention of my dream-pangolin would have to remain enigmatic.

Two weeks later the U.S. Embassy declared Zimbabwe a state of emergency and demanded all government employees to immediately evacuate rural locations. The next morning a BBC news helicopter landed in the outskirts of Babali to pick me up and, ironically, take me to Harare, the Capitol City where most of the fighting was taking place. As the chopper pulsed through the air, I waved good-byes to hundreds of villagers and leaned out the window to see the earthtone tapestry of cornfields, huts, and dusty paths fade from view. Although I had every intention of returning to Babali to complete various projects, say proper farewells to friends, and get one last smell of caterpillar stew, a week later an embassy diplomat was shoving me on a flight headed back to America.

Upon returning, I found myself tangled up in a thousand loose ends, and kept consulting my Zimbabwean calendar to see what I would've been doing in Babali on that day. Monday I was supposed to meet with Ellie Sibanda about her ground nut project. Tuesday would be spent at an agricultural extension officers meeting. Wednesday involved meeting with government officials to discuss policies regarding allocation of cultural tourism funds. And then I came to Thursday, the only day in Babali when villagers could meet with a *midzimu* for help or to ask questions. After telling Misheck about the pangolin I had seen in my dream, he told me that I must meet with the local *midzimu* to see if there was any meaning behind the dream, for "pangolins can be strong medicine in dreams," he said. So, in a small, cold Maine room I read my African plans for the day: "Meet with *Midzimu* Indlela about pangolin dream--see if I have strong medicine."

*

One cannot walk away from a pangolin encounter without searching for meaning in the encounter. For me, the pangolin always seemed to stimulate a deeper, more profound probing of the issue of meaning. To the inhabitants of Dande, the pangolin represents what Joseph Campbell would call a "life-supporting illusion."ⁱⁱⁱ Perceived as a spiritual figure, the pangolin supports a crucial symbolic link between the people and their land. If this symbol becomes dispelled, many people in Dande would find themselves grasping for something secure to hold on to, for something to confirm their attachment to the land and their meaning within a traditional framework of heritage and mythology.

Although the relationship Babalian villagers share with the pangolin is less spiritual, it serves as a powerful symbol for desired virtues like strength, virility, elusiveness, and health. Ironically, however, only by killing the pangolin may villagers in both Dande and Babali reap its rewards. In this regard, the meaning of the pangolin is to fulfill the yearnings, desires, and needs of others. So when a student of the Zen master takes a second look at the pangolin, he sees that eternal life and present state cannot be differentiated. The dichotomy

becomes unified, rolls into a ball, and relaxes under the African sky, content with its own meaning.

The Bush

“All things considered there are only two kinds of men in the world: those that stay at home and those that do not.”

-Rudyard Kipling

I passed the Maine Guide test the day before I left for Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1998. For the previous eight years I had guided almost full-time in seven different states and had substantial experience in nearly every facet of outdoor recreation. I had dealt with plenty of black bears during my summers working as a beekeeper in northern Maine, and while raft guiding on the Colorado River I learned how to fend my groups from insidious scorpions and poisonous snakes. All in all, I was quite confident in my ability to survive in the outdoors. In fact, as my plane gradually began to decline over the outskirts of Harare, I looked out the window at the level plains laden with granite kopjes and thought, "Hell, what were all those African explorers complaining about anyway?"

Despite my earlier confidence, four months later I found myself lying on the side of a dirt road smearing elephant dung all over my body, praying that the lion would leave me alone. It was 5:30 in the morning and my daily run through the bush terminated quickly when I saw the female lion out of the corner of my eye. She crouched behind a gnarled *isihaga* stump, barely discernible, but I could feel myself being hunted; I could almost feel the muscular tension in the lioness's legs as she debated whether or not to pounce. I dropped to the ground, but then realized that I had no idea what to do. Should I stand up and start running? Crawl away on my hands and knees? Or just sit still? I looked around to see what I had to work with...no rifles or sharp knives lying around, only sand and elephant dung. But then, in my state of panic and horror, a thoroughly irrational

thought came into my head: why not camouflage myself so the lion can't smell me? A second later I was picking up huge mounds of elephant dung and splitting them over my head, allowing myself to become fully engulfed in the essence of the bush. The pungent scent of moldy grass began to invade my nostrils and dung beetles crawled over my nose in search of fecal cavities. I lay on the road in absolute stillness for at least twenty minutes. No noises; no sign of the lion. I began crawling forward on my elbows, and finally, forty or so yards back down the road, I stood up and started running towards home. Holding back my tears of fright made running nearly impossible, but when I saw Buck's compound in the distance I knew the lion was far behind.

Buck is known throughout Zimbabwe as one of the great hunters and animal trackers of his generation, so I wasn't surprised that he barreled over with laughter when he saw me coming through his gate covered in elephant dung and sand. "O man, quite a guide you are," he joked, "someday maybe you can guide me through the bush and show me how it's done properly." Before I knew it, everyone from his compound was crowded around me laughing at the story, laughing at the naive American who thought he could journey into the bush without a gun. That morning I quickly realized that here, in Africa, my Maine Guide license was about as worthless as a big pile of elephant dung, and no matter how many black bears I'd chased off in the north woods up near Fort Kent, I knew I should prepare for a humbling relationship with the African bush.

The more time I spent in Zimbabwe, the more astounded I was at how little I knew about the environment and all of its subtle interactions. So far, the lion incident manifested the height of my ignorance, but it seemed like every day I would be confronted with a bizarre situation that my Maine Guide training couldn't possibly have

prepared me for. One day a Mozambiquan Spitting Cobra found its way into my kitchen. Another day I was asked to wade into a crocodile-infested swamp to help dislodge a fishing boat from a greasy sandbar. The next day a Zimbabwean might ask me which ground cover crop I recommended to plant under a certain variety of organic cotton. After coming to terms with my lack of knowledge (and as soon as the community stopped joking about my lion escapade), I began a rigorous campaign to learn everything I could about the Zimbabwean environment, even if it meant never spending another night in the comfort of my bed.

I began keeping a comprehensive “natural history journal” which documented everything I saw throughout the day and any information I could pick up from my numerous field guides. Buck took me on a number of his expeditions and entertained me with conversation about canning baboon meat and eating live impala flesh. Although he always pushed me into rather dangerous situations, the adrenaline and unpredictability had grasped my soul, and I kept jumping at the chance to join him in the bush. The local anti-poaching officers also allowed me to join them on several occasions, but because they would typically disappear into the bush for weeks at a time, I could only join them on shorter patrols. I have never had access to such an alive and vibrant landscape as the one these anti-poaching officers led me through: everything had a meaning; every plant was somehow edible; every track demanded attention.

I was amazed at how my perception of the Zimbabwean landscape changed once I began to learn more about it. Every shadow began to buzz with life, and for better or worse, my curiosity demanded that I investigate every shadow. Although I read plenty of plant identification and animal behavior books, and became a regular at the Natural

History Museum in Bulawayo, the bulk of my learning came from various characters who spent their days in the bush and occasionally allowed me to accompany them. Some of these characters included well-armed anti-poaching officers, extremely well-armed poachers, a safari operator, a well-funded National Geographic animal research team, a poorly-funded independent animal researcher, a Shona rock carver, countless farmers and small land-owners, as well as tourists, Peace Corps volunteers, and international development workers. Each individual offered a unique perspective of the Zimbabwean environment, and by the time I left Zimbabwe, I felt that I had a uniquely well-rounded perception of the land.

The following sketches are products of my “educational” explorations in the bush with four characters who provided valuable and extremely varied interpretations of their environs. This diversity of perspectives allows for departure from the traditional natural history essay and offers challenging new ideas of what the natural environment means to others. While many articles can be found in *Newsweek* or *Sierra Club* denouncing poachers, I have never seen an article written by a poacher or from the viewpoint of a poacher. In order to understand the complex dynamics of resource and property rights which often cause political and social turmoil in many southern African countries, it is crucial to juxtapose the perspective of poachers with that of conservationists. Although these sketches are not intended to be political in nature, it is interesting to note the political ramifications and impact of each character. In Africa, as with the rest of the world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the land from the politics.

A diversity of perspectives also helps to stave off what writer Robert Michael Pyle calls “the extinction of experience.” Just as linguists try to preserve myriad

languages which are on the verge of extinction, the job of a writer is to observe and record the ways in which various people live and experience the world. Part of my goal in writing these sketches is to depict characters who have particularly unique historical and cultural perspectives regarding relations with the land. I imagine that nobody in Maine sees the environment through the same lens as a Rhodesian war veteran who owns 400,000 acres of prime safari land that he has spent his entire life fighting to maintain. Even if you don't agree with the lens through which this particular character perceives his world, at least you are now aware of one more response to nature which is not your own. The varying responses to nature that I became aware of while in Zimbabwe not only helped me better understand my relationship with nature, but also added some unique and powerful experiences to my environmental imagination.

As languages, animals, and experiences die, so too does the imagination.

The Researchers

“According to quantum mechanics, there is no such thing as objectivity. We cannot eliminate ourselves from the picture. We are a part of nature, and when we study nature there is no way around the fact that nature is studying itself.”

-Gary Zukav

The first time I met Peter and Greg they were laboriously crawling down a remote dirt road in Hwange National Park with thousands of dollars worth of tracking and collaring equipment strapped to their backs. Although it was well over 100°F, they wore thick Mexican-style ponchos and drooping Panama hats. I wasn't sure if they had seen me yet, so I stopped my Land Rover a hundred yards behind them and hollered, “Hey

guys, need any help?” Instantly, Greg threw his equipment to the ground and began rapidly walking towards me, tearing off his poncho and Panama hat. As he approached, he started yelling, “Man, do you think we’re dressed like bloody Mexican bandits just for the hell of it? You know what it feels like to wear these bloody bandit costumes all day long?” He threw the poncho at me, “Here, you wear the bloody thing!” I just held the sweaty wet poncho out in front of me and asked, “What the hell are you guys wearing these costumes for anyway? And why are you crawlin’ on the road way out here?” “Christ, man,” Greg exclaimed, “you bloody guys never get it, do you?” “What type of ‘bloody guy’ am I,” I requested, mocking his British accent, “since you already know me so well?” “I’ll tell you, man,” he blasted, “you’re a goddam bloody fool ‘cause you can’t figure out when people are involved in serious research!” I threw the poncho on the ground and said, “Yeah, man, looks pretty serious to me.” We both looked at the poncho crumpled on the ground, sand soaking up the sweat.

Greg started laughing first, a deep and hearty laugh from a man who’s spent many nights around a campfire. Looking at the absurd poncho lying on the ground, and the greasy Panama hat clenched in Greg’s hand, it was impossible not to join him. “Jesus,” he laughed, “you’re a testy little bastard.” “Well,” I rationalized, “you gotta admit it’s about the most absurd scene you could imagine out here.” We slapped each other on the backs like good ole pals and Greg said, “OK, since you screwed up our whole afternoon, the least you can do is drive us back to base with all this gear...then you can lay out some bloody cash and treat us to a night at the beer garden.” As he walked back to retrieve his gear, I could hear him yelling and whooping to his friend, “Peter, this bloody American chap is gonna get us pissed! To hell with the bush, *kulungile amajaha!*”

Growing up, I had romantic notions about *National Geographic* researchers. They were paragons of sophistication and refinement, and the world of millions of readers essentially evolved around the progress of their research. Like many other young boys that I knew, the reverence I held for anyone associated with *National Geographic* was equal to that reserved for seasoned explorers such as Livingston, Lewis and Clark, T.E. Lawrence, or Sir Richard Burton. It is fortunate, therefore, that as a child I did not have the opportunity to witness Peter and Greg at work, for all my enjoyable childhood fantasies would have been abruptly shattered, and the pages of *National Geographic* would have become filled with the grit and sweat of true research rather than the exotic dreams of a small-town child.

When I ran into Peter and Greg crawling down the road that afternoon, they were technically no longer working for *National Geographic*. The funding which had kept them going for the last five years had finally run out, and they were now dependent on donations, volunteers, and pitifully small government grants. No longer did they have the money to track the Painted Hunting Dogs in a well-outfitted Land Rover, nor did they have the time to spend in town drinking beer like other local researchers. Their lack of money almost seemed to enhance their devotion to the research, and in the months after losing funding they became almost legendary amongst southern African wildlife biologists. Sometimes they had to crawl through the bush for miles when their old 1962 Land Rover would break down, and when they were hot on the tracks of a dog pack they typically wore ponchos and floppy hats to disguise their human silhouettes. They spent months at a time sleeping in the bush, and often slept less than fifty meters away from a pack of dogs. To say the least, I was proud to walk into the beer garden that night with

these two grisly-faced legends who drank beer with the same conviction as they conducted research.

I didn't run into Peter or Greg again until several months after our night of beer drinking. One day when I was particularly distressed with the futility of my work, Peter came roaring up in his Land Rover and skidded to a stop in my yard. "I need a hand out there," he yelled. "Greg's got influenza and I need someone to hold the tracking antennae. The dogs are less than five kilometers from here, but we gotta move quick to find'em before evening. Grab a sleeping sack and let's go!" Although I had about 2000 papaya and guava seedlings to water, I could never pass up spending time in the bush. I grabbed a sleeping bag, a sack of corn meal, and a few minutes later we were on the road.

As we sped past an ominous herd of Cape buffalo, Peter began one of his endless and passionate lectures. "You know your job, ay? Just hold that antennae out the window there and if you hear a beep-beep-beeping then let me know, right. We've got radio-tracking collars on two in each pack, and what you'll hear is the heartbeat, ba-bomp, ba-bomp, ba-bomp. They've been movin north towards Malilagwe Vlei over the last few days--eleven in this pack--and I think we'll find'em over that way. But that old bastard Chapman lives north of Malilagwe and he'll shoot the dogs, pups and all, if I don't steer them away from his place. He says this pack killed twenty of his cattle in one night and then ran away without eating a thing. Bullshit, I told him, where's your documentation! He says that he didn't need any documentation 'cause it's his 'goddam land and he'll do what he likes on it.' Man, I'll tell you, I almost shot that bloody Rhodie down right there!"

I soon learned that every discussion with Peter about the dogs ended in a vehement tirade like this. Since he moved from England five years ago and began working with Greg, the dogs have been like brothers to him. After seeing the dogs for the first time on a safari vacation many years ago, Peter began keeping track of their survivorship and mortality rates via correspondence with researchers in Zimbabwe, and later, from various conservation web sites. The more he inquired about the dogs, the more stories he heard about the dogs being hit by cars on the dangerous Victoria Fall Road, getting tangled up in poacher snares, or being shot down by commercial farmers and ranchers who considered the dog vermin. What pushed him overboard, however, was when he learned that the pack he had seen while in Zimbabwe was killed by one of the local ranchers who managed to lure all seven of them into a wire-mesh sieve and shoot them one by one. Two weeks later Peter quit his job as manager of a prestigious hotel in London, transferred all his money to a Zimbabwean bank account, and became Greg's unpaid research assistant in Hwange National Park.

As Peter continued to lecture me about the dogs' excellent sense of sight, smell, and hearing, I picked up on a slight hum coming from the monitor. "Shhh," I whispered, "I think we've got 'em." Peter hunched forward and then slammed a fist on the dashboard, yelling, "Sure enough, we've got the critters!" He drove forward another two hundred meters and stopped the car. The hum had changed into a beeping noise, and it was getting louder. "I love it when this happens," exulted Peter, "when they come right to us like this." He began digging through the back of the Rover for his GPS equipment, the photography gear, and rolls of paper which held a year's worth of research statistics. A minute later and five dogs were lingering on the sandy road in front of us. Through

binoculars I looked at their faces and couldn't believe my eyes. I saw an absolute manifestation of rawness, of incomparable wildness; a mask-like ruddy apparition mottled with brown, orange, red, yellow, and black. Never had I seen anything that seemed to be so distinctly derived from the bowel-like clays of the earth, as if they were created specifically for this land, for no other purposes but hunting, running, and rolling about in the sandy soils of Africa. When I lowered the binoculars from my eyes, Peter was looking over at me. Softly, he said, "*Lycaon pictus*...the Painted Hunting Dog. Fossil records of *Lycaon* genus date back to over 15 million years ago...a lineage comprised of true hunters. There used to be thousands of packs across Zimbabwe, but now there's less than a hundred." He went on, "Like your wolf in America, their persecution has been merciless...savage. In the early 1960's, over 2500 dogs were killed in Zimbabwe by ranchers who sponsored bounty hunts and set snares. And there isn't one record of a hunting dog attack on humans. Not one." With this, Peter looked pensively back at the dogs and told me that it looked like their bellies were full and they were probably settling down for the night. As the dogs moved off into a dense stand of miombo trees, Peter and I got out of the car under a half-moon and began trolling the ground for firewood and dog spoor.

During our spiceless meal of thick corn porridge and canned beans, I sat on a weathered *muuyu* stump while Peter explained the predatory and social behavior of the dogs. He discussed how the dogs are probably the most efficient hunters on the African plains because of their tremendous sensory capacities, their ability to run 70 kmph for five to ten miles, and their well-coordinated hunting strategies. "And when they catch up to an impala or kudu," said Peter, getting excited, "they use this technique called

‘twitching,’ where they grasp the prey by the snout and bring it to the ground. As soon as it’s on the ground they disembowel it and start eating. And our research has shown, contrary to popular belief, that unlike lions or hyenas, the dogs assist each other in stripping the carcass and allow others to take turns after they’re full. Man, I’ll tell you, it doesn’t look anything like the chaotic feeding frenzy of lions, but they’re the ones that everybody wants to conserve, while nobody gives a damn about the dogs.” Off in the distance we could hear hyenas cackling their way through the night, and sitting there by our kindling campfire, I was overcome with the myriad sensations of the bush. The smell of campfire and cornmeal, the Southern Cross blessing us from the tangled web of stars above, a gentle night breeze blowing through our grove of *musasa* trees, the sounds of mysterious rustlings in the bush and a yellow network of eyes blinking at us from the dark shadows beyond the firelight. Peter’s devotion, he later explained, was not only to the dogs, but to this lifestyle of stars, fires, smells, unpredictability, and freedom.

At one point during our conversation that night when Peter got worked up about historical documentation of the dogs, he ran over to the Land Rover and grabbed a few books. “Hear what this bloody fool R.F.C. Maugham has to say,” exclaimed Peter. “‘Let us consider for one moment that abomination...the murderous wild dog. It will be an excellent day for African game and its preservation when means can be devised for its complete extermination.’ And here’s another one actually written in *National Geographic* in 1989: ‘...in the shade of the tailgate lay one sullen dog, yellow eyed, mud-colored, thick footed, head on its forepaw...an eerie embodiment of the hound of hell.’ Man, can you believe it? I’m bloody ashamed...bloody ashamed of us all.”

Our small fire crackled and Peter stretched out on his sleeping pad. “You know,” said Peter, “a lot of these white folks around here think we’re totally crazy for doing this. Since they all depend on safari tourism you’d think they might understand the concept of ‘endangered species’ or ‘conservation,’ but most of them have never even seen a dog unless it’s through the scope of a rifle. It just shows deeply rooted these historical biases are.” Peter had been particularly hurt a few days earlier when he overheard one of the white safari operators say to a client, “Just imagine devoting your entire life to an animal who has no idea that you even exist and couldn’t give a shit about you. Basically, you’re just makin’ your business part of their business so you can live your little conservation fantasy.” In the world of wildlife research, this was blasphemy of the highest order.

Before throwing sand on the fire, Peter told me that it’s fairly common for lions to sleep nearby a pack of wild dogs so they can try to scavenge off an early morning dog kill. “Sometimes I wake up in the morning and find all kinds of tracks around myself,” said Peter, “it’s a pretty exhilarating sensation, you know.” Exhilarating wasn’t quite the word I had in mind as Peter told me this, but I was reassured when he told me that the dogs would start howling if the lion got within fifty meters of their pack. “In fact,” whispered Peter, “one of the dogs often comes to check us out in the middle of the night. I think it may be comforting for them to have us around too, but who knows.” As we fell asleep, I tried to imagine Peter as a hotel manager, fastidiously dressed in suit and tie worrying about little bars of soap in the bathrooms and mint chocolates on pillows at eight in the evening. No matter how hard I tried, the image just wouldn’t fit.

Despite the somewhat disconcerting news that a dog with razor-like “carnassial shears” would probably be sniffing my face during the night and lions might be sleeping

nearby, I slept miraculously well until Peter shook me awake at five. "They're on the move," he said. "We gotta get goin'."

As we hopped into the Land Rover, I could hear the heartbeat pulsations of the radio collar come alive, indicating that the dogs were moving fast. After a few minutes of driving south along the *vlei*, we saw the dogs tearing through the bush in the opposite direction. In front of them was a duiker, one of the smallest antelope species in Africa, and certainly no match for a pack of dogs. Peter immediately began pushing buttons on the GPS equipment and clicked on a stopwatch. We drove off the road and started following the dogs across the grass. By the time we caught up, they were lying contentedly underneath a Baobab tree and nothing was left of the duiker but a warm skeleton. "Seven minutes!" exclaimed Peter. "After we saw them it only took a minute or two to catch the duiker, then only about four or five minutes to eat it. Lions would still be fighting over who gets first dibs."

As the dogs rested, I almost wished I was one of them. Hunt hard for a few minutes, eat a big bloody dead meal, relax in the shady grasses, watch the pups, travel in stealth through the bush, hunt some more, sleep where ever it all takes you. I looked over at Peter, smiling, and knew he was thinking the same.

Later that afternoon, after we had trailed the dogs on their midday hunt, we sprawled out on top of the Land Rover and basked in the sun. Peter looked out at the dogs playing in the distance and said, "See how happy they are out there? If everybody could spend one afternoon watching the dogs play like this, I don't there'd be any more trouble. I could take off their collars and go home."

“So you think they’re having a good time now?” I asked Peter. “Isn’t it against your scientific standard to think that?”

“Yeah, Greg always gets a little anxious when I start talking that way, but part of me thinks all that academic science stuff is a load of bull and just distances researchers even further from the animals. I mean, look out there now,” he said, handing me the binoculars. “Look at that pup jumping on its mother. Tell me that’s not a smile on its face...tell me it’s not having a ‘good time.’” I saw a face as animated as a newborn baby’s: smiling, laughing, crying, whimpering, and snarling. “Of course, the art of it all,” Peter said, “is knowing the dogs well enough to know what each animated move of the face means, and caring about the dogs as living and feeling organisms rather than items of statistical analysis.”

As Peter drove me back to my house on the periphery of the park later that evening, I realized that I was not nearly as selflessly devoted to anything as Peter was to those dogs. Something Peter had said earlier about caring more about the dogs than himself now struck a chord in me, and I was reminded of the assumed final writing of teenage explorer Everett Ruess. In the side of a sandstone canyon in Utah, he scratched what amounted to a petroglyph:

NEMO

1934

He disappeared later that year, and to this day his body has not been found. “No one,” he wrote in 1934. No phrase is so utterly wild, so full of wild meaning. It is also a phrase that I can imagine Peter carving in his final days, after he has devoted a life to

researching and saving several packs of wild dogs, into the side of a *mopane* tree before he lies in the grasses and waits to become part of the earth.

No one will have known, except the dogs.

THE SAFARI GUIDE

“An extreme and intractable landscape might... appeal to a more extreme and intractable man.”

-Patricia Limerick

As I walked into the den of Buck's split-level farmhouse, I noticed that a guest sat in the corner of the television room with his eyes riveted on the screen. He beckoned for me to come sit next to him, and whispered, almost in tears, “Unbelievable...absolute carnage.” After studying the screen for a moment, I just nodded my head to the ground and said, “Yes, I've seen it before.”

The video was from 1989, the last official elephant cull in Zimbabwe, when about sixty men from National Parks surrounded a large herd of forty-eight elephants and systematically slaughtered them all in order to control population levels in Hwange National Park. This was the infamous “culling video,” a monument to conservation in the eyes of a few, but most commonly interpreted as an inhumane display of butchery and savage cruelty. I had entered the room after the slaughter had taken place, so the video now showed a panorama of the scene: the wrinkled dead carcasses of forty-seven elephants strewn about a desolate landscape of dusty gray earth and trampled acacia trees. In some cases, elephants were piled upon each other where attempts had been made to protect the young, and the streams of blood that were oozing from forehead bullet holes in each elephant were beginning to coagulate. The video now showed a fetus sliding from

the womb of a dead female as a black man chopped at its sides with a well-sharpened axe. Each dead elephant had five Africans around it: one peeling away the thick, leathery skin, one sawing away at the ivory tusks, two carving out large chunks of bloody meat, and the last one worked busily with a large knife cutting off the feet, the tail, and the trunk. It was obvious that this was a well-organized and efficient process, but in the mind of Buck's guest, efficiency did not justify mass murder like this.

The guest's name was Malcolm MacPherson, a short, round-faced man with soft hands who had spent fifteen years in Kenya as a *Newsweek* correspondent. For the last fifteen years he had written "cheap" novels, many of which had been produced into popular movies, and now Malcolm was ready to do some serious writing, some real reporting that would "get to the heart of matters," as he said. Currently he was on contract with Saint Martin's Press to write a book about a baby elephant that had been rescued from a cull. He was tracing the path of this elephant from Zimbabwe where it had been saved, to New York City where it starred in the Barnum Circus, to Colorado where it was bought and befriended by a cattle rancher who rode it around the plains herding lesser steer. Just as Malcolm turned to me and asked if any elephants were save from this cull, Buck deVries, organizer of the cull and self-proclaimed conservation advocate, thundered into the room and cried, "Man I tell ya, if those folks from Greenpeace or any save-the-world organization saw this tape wouldn't they raise a goddam hoot! Hell, anybody from the Bleeding Heart Society! They'd show this tape in America and I'd get millions of letters, I mean millions, telling me how cruel and evil and unjust and sick and savage I am. Ha, to hell with those American environmentalists, I say. They've never seen one of them rouge elephants go crazy through a farmers field and destroy his entire crop in one

night. No, also they haven't seen the bush when it's been plucked bone-dry of every last piece of vegetation and there's no more left for the other animals to eat. Hell, they even..." But suddenly Buck went silent and pointed at the television, "There she is Malcolm, there's the one you're writing about. Isn't she a beauty."

Buck appeared on the video, holding an elephant rifle in his right hand and waving his left hand frantically in the air. "Do *not* shoot this one! Do *not* shoot this one!" he yelled into the chaotic scene of swinging axes and chopping machetes. He had noticed that a young elephant was still alive, burying its head into a dead mother's side, and had instantly decided to save it from the carnage. Buck bellowed directions in Zulu while ten Africans immediately came to his side and started helping him wrestle the baby elephant into the back of a truck. He orchestrated the rescue brilliantly, and within several minutes a Scoline tranquilizer was injected into the baby's ear and she drowsily laid her head on the bed of the truck. This was not an unusual episode for Buck, though it would have been unusual for any other white landowner or safari guide in the area. Buck regularly rescued animals from culls, helped nurse sick or crippled animals back to health, and saved many animals from the guns and snares of poachers. At first, Buck's idea of wildlife conservation seemed riddled with unmanageable paradoxes and self-interests, but the more time I spent in the bush with him, the more I began to understand his philosophy as a common sense, nuts and bolts way of thinking. Nuts and bolts, after all, are what hold his Africa together, not a lot of fancy ideas and theories about game management, population growth, and carrying capacity.

Growing up in the rural farming lands outside of Johannesburg, South Africa, Buck learned at an early age how to work, fight, and run. While other boys on the school

rugby team would go out running and exercising for practice, Buck's father would make he and his three brothers endure the rigors of "productive" training. This meant chopping wood for hours, sprinting along the miles of barbed-wire fence to look for damage, carrying logs home from the distant mountains, and dragging the mule-plow through the fields during planting season. "My old pa could take any man in South Africa during his day," Buck told me once. "He'd turn the most menial task into Olympic-style training, like stuffing grain into a sack or swinging a scythe and making your wrist feel like a vice-grip from grasping that handle so hard. A vice-grip, I tell ya!" As a devout Afrikaner growing up in a British-dominated part of South Africa, Buck was also forced to use his fists quite often. "I'll tell you, man," Buck would occasionally say, "I beat up every bloody rat in that town. My brothers did the same, and then we moved on to bigger rats and bigger towns." At eighteen, Buck joined the South African Air Force as a mechanic and also became the youngest middleweight boxing champion in South Africa. But after a few years of repairing fighter plane engines by day and boxing at night, Buck began to yearn for the rural landscape that he grew up on.

Ten years later, after making a small fortune harvesting tobacco for a large-scale farmer in Bloemfontein, Buck decided to buy 300 acres of grazing land in Southern Rhodesia and try to make it on his own. He arrived at his property in 1961 with a wife and one worker, as well as a cargo truck carrying eighteen cattle. "We slept under that huge Rhodesian Teak out there for six months," he would say, pointing outside, "and as soon as I finished building this house you're sittin in now I realized that only three of our cattle were still alive. The goddam wildlife had eaten everything...I mean, those cows were just meat on the table for any animal. So I just kept my mouth shut and started

watchin all the other ranchers around here. And man, I'll tell you, they spent more time killin the wildlife than they did herdin cattle or butchering meat. It seemed like a tragedy to me: all these great big beautiful animals dying for the sake of stupid cows." So Buck decided to take matters into his own hands. He started capturing wild animals from farming lands and releasing them on his land. Then he'd build concrete watering holes throughout the property so the animals wouldn't leave. His three hundred acres soon became a haven for wildlife, and he quickly bought up the neighboring land of ranchers who became too frustrated to continue. Whenever he bought new property, he made sure to install watering holes, plant optimal grasses for grazing, and hire several armed officers to keep watch for poachers. He built safari lodges on his ever-growing properties, and began catering to trophy hunters and tourists from around the world. What had started with the soiled and calloused hands of two men and one woman was now a veritable safari empire of nearly 400,000 acres. "The only reason I was able to do all this," says Buck, "is because I learned early on, back in the farming days, that you just can't work against nature. If cows don't belong there, then don't put 'em there." It was this simple wisdom that always prevailed in the bush.

Most Sundays Buck would grab me and a few workers and we'd jump in the back of his truck to join in some random adventure. One Sunday, while on our way to go tranquilize and tag some white Rhinos, we came across one of Buck's safari guides who had broken down on the road with a truckful of clients. All the clients were out on the road looking at the engine, and the guide was crawling out from underneath the car covered with oil and sand. Buck immediately jumped out of the car and began screaming in a fury, "Get back in the truck, dammit, what do you think this is? This ain't Disneyland

or some American park...these animals bite, they kill, they'll eat the lot of you!" As the shocked clients got back in the truck, the guide tried to calm Buck down. "Hell, man," Buck screamed in his face, "you get back in the truck too. Don't waste my fuckin' time!" Within five minutes Buck had the engine fixed and sent them on their way. As he returned to his seat, he looked over at me and said, "Man, it makes me want to cry, you know, these young guys who want to be rough and tough safari guides but don't know two things about the bush. What if that guy had broken down way out there? Lions would've eaten those folks, or elephants would've trampled'em to death. These boys aren't true guides, man, they're just glorified tour drivers. You know what a true guide could do? He could take his grandmother and walk her through the bush from here all the way to the Botwana border without givin her one scare. Give her a real guide and she wouldn't even know she was in the bush!" Buck generally felt that the younger generation of guides were a bunch of softies. They knew the flora and fauna of the land, and they were even fairly competent at identifying various tracks on the ground, but they had no knowledge of the more technical aspects of guiding that Buck had mastered, like repairing car engines, fixing broken water pumps, or rigging up bait for leopard hunters.

To Buck, these skills were the foundation of his practical environmental ethic, and essentially proved the tremendous love he had for the wild bush that surrounded him. He would continually berate "environmentalists" from abroad who had irrational devotion to charismatic creatures such as elephant, lion, or rhinoceros. "I remember one time we had some woman from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) visit us on the ranch here," Buck told me, "and she lost control when she saw what was going on. I mean totally lost control. She started yelling at me about the crocodile farm and the

buffalo in the kraal over there and all the elephant meat we were smoking that week. So I asked her what she had done for all those animals lately...how did she plan on conserving a few hundred displaced buffalo and what did she plan on doing with a two-ton elephant that had recently been poached for the tusks? I remember she just spat on the ground and walked off.” To people with radical views on wildlife conservation and environmental ethics, Buck always had the same response, “It may be fun to look at all those animals, but it sure is a different story when you have to live with’em.”

At 68 years old, Buck still possessed the strength of a vice-grip and could work full days in the garage, but he had mellowed considerably in other aspects of life. For instance, he went hunting only twice in the fourteen months that I lived with him, and he treated his black workers with a great deal more patience than he had in the past. Some people who had known Buck for years thought that his current conservation efforts were a sort of atonement for the days when he used to hunt on a weekly basis. When I asked him one afternoon about his need for atonement, he looked at me quizzically for a second and then answered, “You know, I honestly don’t know what I’ve done wrong. We used every part of all those animals I killed. We froze it or gave it to the workers or sent it down to the communal lands. The difference is that you Americans just get your meat out of the fridge, unwrap the packaging, and magic, there it is. No bullets, no blood, no smell of death and hot flesh.” Buck felt that there was something valuable in the process of hunting and securing your own food, especially if you’re forced to skin the animal and soak your hands with its blood. For this reason, Buck could never give up hunting entirely, because that experience of taking a life, of killing and carving out the organs of a

wild animal, always made him feel vitally alive and reconnected him with his fundamental predatory nature.

One afternoon I got a true taste of Buck's predatory nature when he invited me to join him on "a drive" through the bush. I had learned by now that "drives" with Buck never actually involved that much driving, and almost always ended with a dead creature in the back of the truck or a poacher handcuffed to the tailgate. As we sped along the edge of Kumuna valley, Buck told me about the time during the Independence War when he was scouting out an area by the Zambezi River to determine whether or not the Rhodesian forces should move in. "Man, everything was so dense with goddam acacia thorns, that the only way to move forward was to follow those old elephant migration trails. But I didn't trust those trails, you know. I learned a long time ago never to trust the only trail. I crawled about two miles, all scratched up, until I came to this camp with about twenty-five ZANU soldiers. Man, these guys were all relaxed, smokin cigarettes and playin cards, so I knew something had to be up. When I finally got back to the boys, after crawlin through all that crap again, they were real excited to hear my plan, I tell ya. Ha, so you know what we did? Well three or four hours later a plane flew right along that elephant trail, as low as it could go, and dropped out forty or fifty baboons we had captured that afternoon. Woosssss, you could hear those landmines goin off like popcorn. Bam! Bam! Bam!" But as we approached another truck in the road, Buck trailed off on his story and began to rub his chin in thought. As we pulled up, I noticed that the truck was a safari vehicle from Touch of the Wild Safaris, one of the many safari operations around the area, but I didn't notice anybody in the truck. This absence surprised me, because one of the unwritten laws of safari guiding is never to allow clients

to get out of the vehicle, and especially not to leave the swath of relative safety provided by the dirt road.

While I sat there pondering the situation, Buck jumped into action. He honked the horn a few times, and then got out and began walking around the abandoned safari truck. "Let's go," he said, pointing into the bush. "The tracks lead this way." As we walked, Buck told me that nine people had left the safari vehicle about an hour and a half ago, and they were all wearing foreign-made dress shoes, with the exception of their guide, who was wearing elephant-skin boots. Buck crept forward with his rifle in hand, examining the ground every ten or so steps to make sure there weren't individuals or small groups walking off alone. At one point, he whispered back to me, "You know, they're not carrying guns and they're not hunting, otherwise they'd be walking on the balls of their feet like we're doing, trying to stay real quiet." The more we walked, the more I realized that the ground contained a secret code of messages and subtle clues that only Buck could read. In fact, our surroundings were humming with a distinct energy which he knew how to interpret, from the sporadic singing of the lilac-breasted rollers, to the nearly indiscernible shifts of breeze.

Suddenly Buck stopped and looked back at me. "They're up here just a ways," he quietly explained. "Man, I don't know what their doin' up here, but no matter what it is they deserve a good whippin' for bein' so dumb." With this, he cocked his rifle and said, "Come, let's go. Whoever they are, they're only about thirty paces from here." We walked forward until we heard voices talking on the other side of a huge knob-thorn acacia. Buck listened to the incoherent voices for a moment, grinned my way, and then

let off three blasting rifle shots into the air. The group began screaming and whimpering, and then Buck craftily stepped out from behind the tree.

“Where the hell’s the guide?” he burst out. As Buck waited for one of the terrified clients to answer, a man in tan safari gear crashed through the bush crying out, “God, is everybody ok? Don’t worry, don’t worry.” It was a man named Clyde, whom both Buck and I knew, and who claimed to be a professional safari guide and tracker when he wasn’t practicing politics or law in Harare. Like many white African men, Clyde thought that simply because he grew up in Africa he was an expert on the bush. As soon as Clyde came into view, Buck lifted the gun to his head, exclaiming, “Clyde, I’m gonna have to kill you, man. Then I’m gonna have to kill all these folks. We’ll have them dig their own graves, you know, make it easy, and then say the lions got to you or somethin. What do you think?” Before Clyde could stammer out an answer, Buck lowered his gun and broke into a deep laugh. “Follow me, folks,” he commanded, “Now you’ve got yourself somebody who knows what they’re doing. None of this bloody fake stuff.”

The whole way back to the cars he lectured the clients on aspects of the bush, while Clyde dragged behind with head hanging. “Let me tell you folks,” Buck said, “that I think of these animals as kind of like my children. This place was just a wasteland of grazing stupid cows before I started moving these animals in here, and now it’s got one of the highest densities of wildlife anywhere in southern Africa. You know, all this stuff, these safaris, these researchers, these Peace Cops or whoever, all these wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t devoted my life to this land and these animals. And that’s what pisses me off about your guide back there...he thinks he can come straight from the city to my land

anytime he wants and just start walkin people through one of the most dangerous sections of bloody bush anywhere in the world. Ha!"

I looked back at Clyde with a hint of sympathy, because I knew that for all my Maine Guide license was worth, it wouldn't have helped me one bit in this bush. But I also realized that the difference between simply learning the lay of the land and truly mastering every aspect of the land meant pouring many years of labor and sweat into a place. Buck not only loved the animals and the land he lived on, but he had also planted thousands of these trees, torn apart miles of barbed-wire fencing, built and drilled dozens of watering holes, and spent hundreds of nights in the bush to defend valuable rhinos or bull elephants from the guns of poachers. To Buck, this land was so much more than I could see, and I understood that I would never have his intimate relationship with any piece of land unless I rolled up my sleeves, put on some boots, and started to work.

The Poachers

"We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes-- something known only to her and to the mountain."

-Aldo Leopold

All eight dogs began barking loudly when I entered the front gate of Lucky Mapfuwa's home. Hunks of meat and skin hung on a long wooden rack outside, drying in the sunlight, surrounded by a humming constellation of flies and other parasitic insects. The red-brick huts were crumbling from heavy rain, and the thatch was on the brink of caving in. Chickens, goats, and dogs scrambled about on the dusty earth of Lucky's compound. The dust and grime mixed with the hanging meat, and blood slowly dripped to the ground. The blood dripped and dropped slowly to the ground and the dogs would

occasionally stop barking to lap it up. I knocked on the hinge-less door of Lucky's cooking hut and I could hear men's voices quiet into whispers and hushes. An old toothless man with gray whiskers pushed the door slightly ajar and squinted out at me suspiciously from the smoky darkness of the hut. The mass of meat and dead animal hanging a few meters away was nauseating and left me with little patience for the protocol of introductions. "Yebo, I want to see Lucky," I said. "A message from Yemukono." With this, the door immediately opened and Lucky was standing before me, a broad-shouldered, muscular man of fifty-two, silhouetted hugely in the firelight.

As the official liaison between the white safari world and the black communal farmers, I often had to deliver important messages between the two worlds, but rarely was I confronted with a situation as uncomfortable and critical as this one. Lucky was something of a legend among the farmers in the area because he had poached successfully for over thirty years without ever getting caught or killed. He generously handed out meat to poor families and always offered a stick of dried, salty elephant biltong to visitors. The white land-owners knew from his abundance of dogs and the stories about him that he was responsible for either organizing or participating in much of the poaching in the area, but they could never catch him in the act. As he loomed over me in the doorway, I considered that I was probably the first white person ever to visit his compound, and I wasn't sure whether this would fill my legendary host with anger or with pride.

After introducing myself, I cautiously said to him, "Yemukono says he wants to see you up on his ranch. He caught two boys this morning cutting up a sable antelope on his property and they mentioned your name. Yemukono says that if you don't come he'll

either kill the boys or send them to jail. If you do come, he says, he just wants you to walk out on his property and take down all the snares. He says he'll keep the boys as workers for a week or two and then let them go. Nothing will happen to you, he promises. He just wants all the snares off his land." While I was delivering the message, Lucky listened intently, trying to clearly understand my mispronounced Zulu. When I finished, he looked me in the eyes real serious for a moment and then reached out his hand, "Maybe we will meet tomorrow morning at the ranch." We shook hands, and I knew from the intonation of his words that he not only expected me to be there in the morning, but he depended on it.

All the white land-owners in the area were known to people in the communal farming lands predominantly by their indigenous nicknames, and Yemukono, or Mr. Lionel, had been given the name of "bull-beast." The name derived strictly from his enormous size, and the fact that he had wrestled and pinned an adult bull ten years ago at the Gwayi Fair. Generally, he was considered a relatively gentle man, who harbored much less hostility and bitterness towards the blacks than did other land-owners in the area. He also tended to deal with poachers in a more sensitive manner than the other whites, for he understood the complexity and never-ending cycle of the poaching situation. Although Lucky never mentioned to me that he knew anything about Yemukono, I'm sure there are very few whites who Lucky would have so readily agreed to visit.

The next morning I arrived at Yemukono's ranch right after sunrise. The sun rose in this particular part of the world like a golden orb, searing with heat everything that lay in its path. Five minutes after sunrise I was already sweating, and as I took a swig from

my ever-present water bottle, I noticed that Yemukono and Lucky were emerging from the skinning room talking excitedly in a dialect of Zulu that I'd never heard before. When they both looked up and saw me, they pointed in my direction and nodded their heads in agreement. I knew this could only mean one thing: I was in for a long day.

As it turned out, Yemukono wanted me to join Lucky and the other two poachers in the bush as they de-rigged and collected old snares. He figured that I would “keep the boys honest” and make sure they didn’t stash any snares or run off into the bush. Although I was probably the softest disciplinarian in the whole country and knew that I wouldn’t be able to argue with three rugged African men, I agreed to go as an educational experience. After all, I was going into the bush with an extraordinarily successful poacher who was the mentor for these two unsuccessful poachers and would be teaching them, in a sense, how to anti-poach the land that they had already set for poaching. This was definitely not an opportunity that I would ever come across in my role as a Maine Guide.

As soon as we started walking through the high grasses of the spacious valley, Lucky looked over at me and spoke in English: “Thank you for coming, Joshua. It keeps us safe, I think, having you here.” I was shocked by the politeness of this man, especially considering that I had only heard stories about vicious, blood-thirsty, money-hungry poachers who wastefully slaughtered rhinoceros for horn and elephant for tusk. I knew that Lucky was not one of these brutal men when I first met him, but I had no idea that he was educated and able to carry on conversations in English. When I asked him where he went to school, he knitted his brows together and answered, “No, no, no, I haven’t been to school ever. I learned from working so many jobs where you have to learn quickly. If I

went to school I wouldn't be here now in the bush; I'd have a real job somewhere. Ahh, but now I'm an old man, Joshua, and this is my life."

The two men lagged behind Lucky and me, keeping a close watch on the distant trees for any movement, and would occasionally ask Lucky a question in a language foreign to my ear. Suddenly, from the southeastern corner of the valley, two-dozen kudu came into sight. Without hesitation, Lucky knelt on one knee to watch as they sauntered across the valley floor. I joined him on one knee and watched as these beautiful creatures with curved spiral horns periodically stopped to graze. Lucky was in awe of the animals, and said to me, "You know, Yemukono is a lucky man to have all these animals on his land. If I had these animals on my land I would never leave the bush...I would just sit out here all day watching." I had a hard time believing, however, that this notorious poacher would be content simply to watch animals all day long from a grassy perch. A question burned inside me as we peaceably knelt side by side in the open country, and though I didn't want to offend my great companion, I couldn't walk around with him and observe these stunning animals without an answer.

"How can you look at these animals and admire them so much," I asked, "and then go out and *kill* them with wire snares and metal jaw-traps? Don't you feel any guilt? Don't you know that what you're doing is wrong?" Lucky kept looking ahead at the kudu. He rubbed a hand over his balding head and gently plucked a blade of grass from the ground. "There is so much, Joshua, so much to say about this," Lucky finally said to me in a whisper. He paused for a moment, eyes intent on the kudu, and then went on. "Don't you think everybody who kills animals is a poacher? Why is it called hunting when Sikwatula or Yemukono or Diqala shoot animals, but it is called poaching when I

kill something? Do you think my family is not as hungry as their families?" He slowly rose from his knee and began walking down the path. "Let's go," he said, looking up at the cloudless sky. "It will rain hard this afternoon."

Within fifteen minutes we came to a thick, thorny web of acacia trees where Lucky stopped and explained something to the two men. Without hesitation, they thrust their hands into the tangle of white acacia thorns and parted the branches. As they disappeared into the hidden fortress of vegetation, Lucky pointed at a small pile of leaves and grass lying underneath a *isikiwa* canopy. "Watch," he said, throwing a long, heavy stick at the grass. The whole pile jumped a foot in the air when the stick struck, and I could see metal jaws clench together with unrelenting pressure. "You see, I don't like this trap," said Lucky, "but it always works." I was appalled to look at the torturous device, for I had seen many pictures of impala, kudu, Painted Hunting Dogs, and even eland, whimpering and slowly bleeding to death in its merciless grip. "If I owned land," Lucky explained, "I would shoot animals like Yemukono does. But if I use a gun out here everybody will hear it and they will come to find me. There is no other way."

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Before Rhodesian colonization of the Hwange area in 1898, Lucky's great-grandfather lived in a village where men hunted freely in the bush with metal-tipped spears and bow-and-arrows. They hunted and killed what they needed for food, and rarely used primitive trapping or snaring devices to capture animals. Although there were many difficulties in living so close to wild animals, there was never a shortage of meat in the village. However, when the Rhodesians finally trekked to this part of the country, they forcibly relocated the native villages to areas where wildlife wasn't as abundant. The

white settlers additionally put up barbed-wire fences and kept guards around their huge properties for protection from rebellious villagers. People like Lucky's great-grandfather were suddenly forced to survive without one of their major sources of food, and desperation led many villagers to sneak onto the white lands to hunt.

While most white Zimbabweans still often refer to the tragic "poaching problem" in the country, many black villagers, including Lucky, consider the problem one of ownership. "I don't understand," Lucky later asked me, "why Yemukono or Sikwatula can't make a deal with us. Maybe let us hunt two days every month, or give us meat sometimes. Why does one man need so much land...so many animals?" It was useless to explain the capitalistic goals of these white safari operators to Lucky, a man who seldom owned a surplus of anything, particularly money. We sat down on a log and watched as the two men emerged from the cluster of acacias with their arms full of thin, long wires. "You see these men?" asked Lucky. "They could earn big money if they killed rhino, elephant, leopard, or lion. They would kill with a gun real quick, and then chop off tusk or horn or cut off skin. But these men, Joshua, they love the animals like I do, and they wouldn't kill just for money. No, we hunt with these traps and snares because we need to be quiet, because we need to skin and butcher the animal out here. We can't carry it home. There is no other way." As the men approached with the wire snares, I suddenly realized that what these men were doing was absolutely natural. I realized that there were probably thousands or millions of natural predatory relationships occurring at that very instant of my thought, and that this cycle of predation is what nourishes and energizes the world. However, these men have been involuntarily cast into the roles of clandestine predators, and are now being punished by the media, environmentalists, and white settlers

for continuing a predatory relationship that existed for thousands of years before any safari tours or animal-rights candlelight vigils.

As I looked at these three men, smoking their hand-rolled cigarettes on the dead *muuyu* log, I was comforted by Lucky's assurance that he discouraged poaching merely for money. "See this land, Joshua?" Lucky asked, sweeping his hand over the landscape. "I would like to be able to walk through it one day without any problems. Without being shot at or thrown in jail. I want to eat meat and not feel that I have stolen it. When I eat the meat, it becomes my body... and I must feel like whatever is in my body *belongs* in my body. Otherwise, Joshua, I am made from stolen goods."

I watched as Lucky stood up from the log and extinguished the cigarette between his thumb and forefinger. He put the remaining butt in his pocket and looked back at the men. "*Sesiqedile*," he said. "Let's go! There are many more to find...many many more." He strode into the open savanna, majestically spreading his arms to the valley, and began loudly singing a popular Ndebele song. He turned in all directions and let his voice carry across the openness. The men danced up behind him, laughing and singing, with the metal wires hanging from their shoulders. They sang to the sky and finally fell back laughing into the golden grasses. I suddenly understood that this was their first day of freedom in ages, their first day in the bush without fear, guilt, or stealth. As I awkwardly danced out to join the men, I wondered what lessons lay in the liberation of this terrain. What ancient burden was being lifted as these men rolled around freely on the dry savanna floor?

The Stone Carver

“I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out,
I found, was really going in.”
-John Muir

My time with Siweti Mathe consisted of several hours late one afternoon digging up hummusy earth in search of underlying rock. We stabbed our spade-tipped blades into the ground until it got dark, until the dark shadows and noises of the bush became too haunting for either of us, and then we finally talked. Siweti, the carver of stone, the stone-built carver, told me a story about his art as the mysterious hum of African night crept upon us. We had found no rock, so he told a story about his art, about his land.

He told me that as a boy growing up in the small farming village of Sianyanga, he discovered that he was the only boy who could not kill. Goat, chicken, cow, sheep, no matter what animal, he could not kill. The knife would tremble in his hands and fall into the dusty weeds. In a rage, his father once put a knife in Siweti's hand and tried to push the blade through the neck of a chicken. The blade would not cut; it was too dull.

Many people began to wonder about Siweti. “Who is this boy that cannot kill?” they asked. “Maybe we should put him in a hut with one chicken and no food. He will begin to starve and *then* he will kill the chicken.” As rumor of Siweti's weakness began to spread, one day he was asked to visit a local doctor of plants and magic. He sat on a mat in front of the old doctor, who wore the skins of many animals on his body and the feathers of many birds in his hair. He sat very still for a long time, the doctor looking into his eyes, looking far back beyond his eyes. Suddenly, the doctor jumped from his knees and shouted very loudly, “*akuhlahlani*, you cannot kill! You can only give life!”

The words of these doctors are powerful, and on his walk home, Siweti began to wonder how he would give life, how he would substitute the urge to kill with the urge to

create. When he returned home and told his father the words of the doctor, the father pointed a trembling finger to the door of the hut. "You are not my son, and you will never again eat meat in my house. Out." So Siweti, at fourteen, ran off into the bush.

Two weeks later, Siweti lay emaciated, bloody, and nearly dead on the side of the Victoria Falls Road, thirty kilometers from his village. He remembers nothing of the long car ride, the medicine given at the clinic, or the chatter of the young men, he only knows that when he regained consciousness he was on the other side of the country, in the well-known but mysterious community of Tengenenge.

Tengenenge is the place where African men go to create art. They carve wood and chisel stone and weave fibers and paint dried skin. They find a great chunk of soapstone and work it with a hammer and chisel, day and night, until their hands bleed and the firewood runs out. They watch a dead *isikiwa* log lying in the forest for hours until they can see what shape, what spirit, is hidden beneath its crude surface. Their huts rest on the side of a south-facing hill, but Siweti told me that they only sleep to prevent delirium. Otherwise, they are obsessed with their creations.

The men told Siweti the most important rule of the community: they will teach him art, but when he begins to sell his art, he must give twenty percent of all profits back to Tengenenge. This is the only way, they said, that poor men can become artists in Africa. That night he walked around Tengenenge and watched the men laboring by fires over their creations. One of the older men, Prince Tschuma, called him over to his workbench and told him to look at the great stone in front of him. "What do you see in this stone?" asked Prince. Siweti reached out his hand and touched the firm coldness of stone, the smooth belly and ragged edges of something from under the earth. "This is a

woman with a beautiful face,” said Siweti, looking up. “Her face is growing in the soil of a garden and she is smiling as she sees the world.”

“You are exactly right,” said Prince, handing him a small hammer and chisel. “Go ahead, this is your rock.” Siweti placed the chisel on one of the ragged edges of rock and lifted the hammer. His hand trembled, and he thought of his father pulling back the horns of a goat and quickly slashing a knife across its neck. He thought of death and dull knives and murderous axe blades. But he brought the hammer down on the chisel and fragments of rock and powder burst up into his face and he brought the hammer down again and again until his face was white with fine grainy powder and Prince touched him on the shoulder. “Your beautiful woman can wait until tomorrow,” laughed Prince. “Don’t worry, there is plenty of time.”

I sat with Siweti that evening, our hands covered with soil and damp humus, and I could barely believe what I was hearing. The great stone carver Siweti Mathe, who had just returned from his fifth international art show and was touted as one of Zimbabwe’s most creative and ambitious stone sculptors, had been kicked out of his own home, was essentially raised as an orphan by the men of Tengenenge, and nearly cried when he brought the hammer down on his first chunk of stone. “You know,” said Siwete, “I think all of my art comes from those two weeks I was lost in the bush. I was horrified of everything I saw, and especially at this time of night, when the shadows make you believe that a lion is behind every tree and a mamba under every bush. I would find a big tree and lean against it, crying and crying. But now I come into the bush and that fear is changed into something else. That fear is now an energy, and when I look at all these trees and shadows and hear the sounds of leaves and branches and hyenas in the distance,

I think of my stones which are older and stronger than anything out there. And then this energy seizes me and I want to grab a stone and work it into something beautiful, into something forever. I tell you, everything I see in this bush gives me the energy to carve a stone.”

When we stood up and put our shovels in the back of the pick-up, I looked off into the bush. I wondered what it was like to see this land through the eyes of Siweti. Through the eyes of a man who works his sweat into stone every day...through the eyes of a creator.

Justification for Poetry in Third World

"I imagined a powerful and sweet odour coming from her, as from a still panther,
and the head was nothing else but heraldic."

-Derek Walcott, "Light of the World"

The odour of the still panther
and the heraldic head
almost made me cry
for it's beauty
 and I wanted no more food
 to eat along the roadside
 lest I become stranded like the panther
 to inherit the earth.

So I gave my half-eaten banana
to a passing boy
and he ate it up
even licked the peel
 and smiled
 running off
 to his ochre hut

And even though he'd never read a poem
in his life, (I know it)
he did once eat a banana
on the dusty roadside
because of a poem.

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APPENDIX A
Spiritual Mediums in Dande

Mudzimu are referred to frequently in this essay. They are able to possess the spirits of chiefs of the past (*mhondoro*). *Mudzimu* act as a villages link to the spirit world, where the spirits of chiefs and other leaders can be accessed for advice. Although the role and concept of the *mudzimu* is extremely complex, this essay will refer only to the aspect of the *mudzimu* which deals with taking care of a certain lineage or spiritual province of people. A *mudzimu* watches over people who have a clan name derived from a particular lineage (for example, all people whose names end with *nzou* belong to the elephant clan). These people come from a particular lineage, and the *mudzimu* allows them, through spirit possession, to access the wise spirits of this lineage for advice. In addition, all people living within the land of a certain clan (a spiritual realm) are also watched over by the *mudzimu*, but they are not considered to have roots in the land until they either marry into the elephant clan or perform a series of functions. Only after they are rooted in the land and officially accepted into the spiritual province by the *nzou* ancestral spirits, can they go to the *mudzimu* for consultation or to ask for spiritual assistance.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Joshua Caine Anchors was born in Bangor, Maine on January 6, 1976. He was raised in various towns and townships in Maine, Iowa, Georgia, and Alabama. He lost his first fistfight in Stillwater, Maine, but beat the same kid several years later in Old Town, Maine. After a childhood of sniffing dandelions, reading poetry in closets, attempting to play football, and graduating from Orono High School, Joshua embarked on a journey of higher education that led him to Nevada, Florida, and Arizona. Ultimately, he graduated from the University of Maine, Orono in 1998 with a B.A. in English.

Like a true Maniac, Joshua returned to Maine after spending two years in the Peace Corps/Zimbabwe, and entered the English graduate program at the University of Maine, Orono. He is a candidate for The Master of Arts degree in English from The University of Maine in May, 2002.