

BLACK MADE

(Pilot)

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FADE IN:

As the Jeep twists through the countryside, it passes battle-scarred BASOTHO TROOPS on horseback, flanked by high grassy mountains and rolling hills in an area known as "The meeting of the Hills". The Jeep disappears from sight passing a SIGN that reads, "SACRED ROCKS - AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN BUSHVELD EXPERIENCE". The Jeep Wrangler turns up a side road with a "Save a Rhino, Kill a poacher" bumper sticker.

INT. JEEP - DAY

CAROL, dressed in a khaki pants outfit with an AWF patch on her white sleeve, is driving. KATE, a tattooed USMC Army Vet with a full sleeve of tattoos, wearing khaki shorts, leather boots, and a 9/11 Memorial labyrinth pin on her shirt collar, sits beside her with a shotgun.

KATE

(looking at the sign)

"An Authentic African experience."

Kate opens a window and gets blasted with humid subtropical winds. Carol feigns disappointment and brings the window up.

CAROL

Don't.

KATE

(still fanning herself)

You've got a better chance of spotting the big five back home.

CAROL

(slightly annoyed)

When these animals don't want to be seen, you should respect that. And when they want to be seen, it's already too late, for you.

KATE

(leaning back, clearly not in the mood)

Well, you don't see armed forces at zoos.

CAROL

They're not "armed forces", and this isn't an animal sanctuary. We're in a national park inside a landlocked country. Around here, there's only one place a threat can come from.

They pass a '40' speed sign alongside the road. Behind that, a sign reads "YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO".

KATE

You wanted to drive, so just drive.
No more lectures, please. I didn't
come all this way to go on a
goddamn safari, anyway.

CAROL

Whatever, Kate.

Kate looks out her window for a beat, but she's not done yet.

KATE

I should've never let you talk me
out of signing an exclusive
contract to continue streaming.

CAROL

Is that what you want for your
legacy, how you want to be
remembered? As an Instagram model?

KATE

Tactical model.

CAROL

You're a goddam Army Vet with a
bronze star for Christ's sake. Have
some goddam self-respect, if not
for yourself, then at least for
that tag.

[CLOSE-ON] USMC sigil on Kate's sleeve. Below that, the
official VETPAW insignia.

KATE

I'm not putting my neck out on the
line to babysit - dinosaurs.

Carol gives her a look.

CAROL

(sternly)
Don't say it.

Kate exhales and returns her look.

KATE

Clearly we're not doing it for the
benefits or the money.

CAROL

In Africa, fauna is currency. It's the heart of their economy. Why do you think they put it on their money?

KATE

They got one thing right tough -- Action *is* the heart of community building.

Kate chambers a .338 cartridge into a Lapua Magnum rifle.

CAROL

"Action?"

KATE

I'm an Army Vet fighting poaching in Africa here to kill the bad guys. That's how I want to be remembered.

Carol shoots her a look. She had to say it.

CAROL

Don't forget saving critical endangered species from extinction.

KATE

That too.

Carol nods, satisfied, and focuses on the road ahead. Kate settles back into her seat, ready for whatever comes next. As they drive deeper into the national park, the scenery changes, and they begin to see glimpses of wildlife. Carol slows down as they pass a group of zebras grazing by the roadside.

INT. JEEP - MOMENTS LATER

The moment the jeep arrives at the roadblock, PEACEKEEPING FORCES POLICE VEHICLES obstruct the way.

Fatigue-clad IPSS RANGERS, barely awake, proceed to search the jeep. One SKINNY RANGER is so thin, he looks like he might fall down the drain if he tried to take a shower, and a SKINNY GUARD DOG is tied to a pole on the ground.

KATE

There's a good boy. (Kissing noises). What's his name?

SKINNY RANGER
(All business) Gumbi.

Rangers proceed with a quick search of the Jeep upon entry.

Kate notices a sign forbidding the use of drones and a poster asking for donations to save the rhino, giving hints of the ongoing crisis. Tshepo, built like a PSL defender with hard, uncaring eyes, approaches the Jeep, driver's side.

TSHEPO
(with a stern tone)
What is the purpose of your visit?

KATE
It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

Tshepo looks over at Kate and spots the rifle propped on the backseat. He then glances down and spots the bumper sticker.

TSHEPO
Are you hunters?
(with a commanding tone)
Switch off the car.

Carol quickly complies while Kate instinctively moves her hand to her holster. Tshepo and the skinny ranger exchange words while the skinny ranger punches numbers into his phone. The Rangers boast carbines, but some carry machetes.

KATE
(With a worried tone) What's going on? What's he doing?

CAROL
(With a reassuring tone) Park headquarters. It's just a formality. Sit back and (re: pistol) just relax. Okay?

Kate complies and her eyes meet a large sign outside that reads, "GIANTS CASTLE GAME RESERVE." She notices a police car with a sign that reads, "IPSS ANTI-POACHING UNIT." Kate then tosses a partially eaten garage pie to the dog who promptly looks at the skinny ranger for consent. The ranger looks down at the dog, who quickly gobbles up the treat without hesitation.

SKINNY RANGER
Moeki. (Traitor)

Kate spots several Rangers eyeballing her, equally starved. She notices the ID tag on her chest, which reads "TECHNICAL ADVISER - AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION."

TSHEPO

A-W-F?

Carol nods, agreeably. Tshepo hands her the ID, reluctantly.

CAROL

We're here for the seminar.

Kate leans over Carol, without hesitation, and picks up the ID tag from her chest, showing it to Tshepo.

KATE

We're technical advisers for the African Wildlife Foundation. Is there a problem, officer?

CAROL

(Forces a smile) Kate, these men are anti-poaching rangers. I'm sure they can teach us a thing or two.

Kate rolls her eyes and returns the rifle to its case.

KATE

I seriously doubt that.

Carol turns to Tshepo, the driver, and smiles good-naturedly.

CAROL

Sorry. She's just tired. We've been on the road for quite some time. We have a meeting with Simon Gambi, head of SANParks.

TSHEPO

Gumbi. Simon Gumbi.

Kate gives him a sharp look.

TSHEPO (CONT'D)

(points to the road)

Don't stop. Don't take pictures. And don't get out of your car.

KATE

Yes, of course. "The Big Five". We read the brochure, thank you.

CAROL

Yes. Thank you.

Skinny secures a leash to a pole and hands Kate a pamphlet, eyeing her up and down, starring at her arm.

KATE

If you're going to give me your number, at least do me the courtesy of telling me your name first.

(returns his look)

Lemme guess, Gumbi?

A smile flashes across his face for a brief moment. Tshepo motions with his hands, parting a way for the jeep through the police cars like Moses parted the Red Sea.

TSHEPO

(turns to Skinny)

Moeki.

The jeep breaks off the path and rolls into a private reserve, leaving Tugela Falls behind. The road winds through a wide valley with a steep escarpment on the northern side and lower hills on the southern side of the valley.

KATE

(hands Carol the pamphlet)

Here, you throw this away.

Carol gives her a disapproving look. Kate tosses it out the window.

[TIGHT-ON-PAMPHLET] ON THE GROUND:

"SACRED ROCKS RESERVE 'DO'S AND DON'TS' 1: STAY INSIDE YOUR VEHICLE! 2: DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS! 3: KEEP YOUR WINDOWS CLOSED AT ALL TIMES!"

EXT. SACRED ROCKS - DAY

The Jeep inches its way down a muddy two-track road along the River, steam rising from it like smoke.

KATE

Is everyone here named Gumbi?

CAROL

This tiny tucked away reserve is neither a huge state-owned park nor is it a private game ranch. It's a relatively young reserve, stitched together from the cattle and game farms that were restored to their original owners... the Gumbi clan.

KATE

Did you see the look on their faces? Bet they never seen-

CAROL

-Garage pie, before? Ya, I heard they have wifi too.

KATE

No, I meant-

CAROL

-Strong able women? Must've been your tats that gave it away. And here I was thinking VETPAW weren't a bunch of trigger happy GIs here to "kill the bad guys" -- Don't forget your mandate is to elevate the perception of the military back home and abroad.

KATE

(under her breath)

Not to babysit grown ass Men.

The car comes to an abrupt STOP. Carol has had it with her.

CAROL

We've been building trust with the government and strengthening relationships with the locals for decades. The last thing we need is bad publicity, Kate! Your actions affect every single expat and volunteer down here trying to do good. We're here to help, not to kill the bad guys. I want to hear you say it. Say the words. Say it!

Kate looks out her window for a beat, but she's not done yet.

KATE

Look Care Bear... Monkeys!

A family of VERVET MONKEYS jump off of a tree and start climbing on the Jeep. Monkeying around. Carol rolls the windows down... locking it.

Kate leans over Carol to unlock the windows. She brings down her window, starts snapping pictures. The sound of the shutter grates on every fibre of Carol's being.

Trees rustle as leaves fall like snowflakes and linger in the air before settling down on the ground below. Monkeys use the Jeep as a land bridge to get to the safety on the other side.

KATE (CONT'D)

They're scared of us, of me.

CAROL

Why do you always have to do that?

Carol brings the windows up, locking it. Forcing her hand.

KATE

Do what?

CAROL

Self-destruct. I'm sticking my neck out for you here, Kate. That's what big sisters do. Even if you are a clout chasing thot.

Kate leans over to unlock the windows and makes a face.

KATE

Okay. I promise I won't "self-destruct" in front of your boss.

CAROL

You're crossing your fingers.

Carol's face pulls into an angry sneer.

CAROL (CONT'D)

(shakes her head)

Who's babysitting who now.

Kate cleans the window from the outside. A Blue Compact behind them, hoots relentlessly. Kate gives them the finger. The compact goes around. Driver's eyes burn into Kate.

CAROL (CONT'D)

This was a mistake.

Carol stares out the window, her expression grave.

KATE (O.S.)

You're good at public relations, and I'm good at what I do. I might not have the best reputation, but if you wanna get people invested in the situation here in Africa, you're gonna have to drum up support for sponsorships.

Kate gives Carol a playful slap, but there's something more to it than just playfulness. She exits the Jeep, leaving the door open.

KATE (CONT'D)

Going viral goes a long way.

Carol's given up arguing and grabs her phone, opening the camera app.

[POV CAMERA] KATE POSES WITH HER RIFLE AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE AFRICAN BUSH.

[TIGHT ON CAROL] SHE DOES HER BEST TO DIRECT THE SHOT.

KATE (CONT'D)

I hope everyone's having a fantastic evening, afternoon, or pre-noon, no matter where you are in the world. This is Kate Kennedy, and you're watching the official VETPAW broadcast. Live from sunny Lesotho, baby! Whoooo!

[TIGHT ON CAROL] HER PHONE COMES DOWN SLIGHTLY, AND SHE NOTICES IT'S EERILY SILENT. THE RUSTLING HAS STOPPED. KATE CONTINUES RUNNING HER LINES.

KATE (CONT'D)

--Actually, I'm on a game drive in a private park inside a landlocked country here to show them how--

Kate stops herself mid-sentence, and they exchange a knowing look.

KATE (CONT'D)

-To elevate the perception of the military back home.

A slight smile flickers across Carol's face.

[TIGHT ON KATE] KATE HUMS AND WARMS UP FOR HER ARTICULATION.

[POV CAMERA] CATCHES SOMETHING BETWEEN THE BUSHES... WHERE THE LEAVES REST ON TOP OF SOMETHING HIDING, VERY STILL, CAMOUFLAGED... WATCHING THEM THIS WHOLE TIME.

CAROL

Kate?

KATE

I know. Run it back. One more take. We're good. I hope everyone is having an awesome evening, afternoon, pre-noon, no matter--

-- BUT SUDDENLY, KATE IS SLAMMED AGAINST THE DOOR BY SOMETHING LARGE AND POWERFUL! RIGHT IN FRONT OF CAROL/US.

[SLOW MOTION]

An IMMENSE MUSCULAR CAPE LION emerges in front of Carol and Kate, its black mane a striking contrast against gold fur. The predator's golden brown face and black distinct eyes radiate a dangerous intelligence. Its ears, black-edged, flicker as it extends its massive jaws, now firmly clamped onto KATE.

[NORMAL SPEED]

With a sudden twist, the PREDATOR SNAPS KATE'S SPINE. Her body goes limp, hanging helplessly from the lion's powerful jaws. The CAPE LION stares back at us, his exalted black eyes intense with satisfaction.

[TIGHT ON CAROL]

Carol lets out a blood-curdling scream that could strip paint.

[SLOW MOTION]

The CAPE LION creeps back into the bush, its incendiary black eyes fixed on us. Its black mane flowing behind it as it disappears, carrying Kate's lifeless body in its mouth.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. WOODBUSH FOREST - AERIAL VIEW - DAY

The camera soars over the Woodbush Forest Reserve, nestled in the heart of the Magoebaskloof valley. The mountainous region is renowned for its pristine Afromontane forests and the rich diversity of bird life that thrives there. We see a flash of emerald as an Emerald Cuckoo darts across the screen, followed by a Square-tailed Drongo and a flock of Blue-billed Fire Finches, unique to this part of the world.

Suddenly, a SILHOUETTE dashes across the screen, and the lifeless eyes of the Drongo stare right into the lens. The silhouettes multiply, revealing TWO BALOBEDU TEEN GIRLS running through the forest, startling a Narina trogon perched on a branch. The sound of a chopper interrupts the tranquility as it zooms overhead, casting a shadow over the girls who stop in their tracks.

EXT. WOODBUSH FOREST RESERVE - DAY

The Balobedu girls belong to the Monomotapa clan, and their village lies next to the Molototsi River, to the north of here, maybe. However, all we can see is the dense foliage, obscuring our view of them until they step into a clearing. They appear lost and speak in Sepedi.

SELEKWANA
Ga-Modjadji? (Home?)

Selekwana almond-shaped eyes and Rhodesia who wipes the sweat from her forehead and ties a colourful traditional headband around her head, shaking the leaves from her hair.

RHODESIA
Ha!

Without warning, Rhodesia dashes off into the forest. Selekwana follows in hot pursuit.

EXT. GA MODJADJI, QUEEN'S VILLAGE - DAY

A convoy of expensive cars winds down the dusty roads of GA MODJADJI, Queen's village, as famous dignitaries from around the globe pay their respects to the Rain Queen. Among them, we see former President OBAMA and the DALAI LAMA.

MR. SHABALALA "RAINMAKER" (60s), adorned in traditional garb, is seen praying on the hillside. MASELEKWANA (30s), slightly darker skin tone, and hair that is dark and straight or slightly wavy. Also in traditional garb, approaches him carrying firewood and a half-empty water bucket.

Maselekwana stops at a dry well and looks down it with disgust and hopelessness.

MASELEKWANA
(Translated from Sepedi)
Is there rain, oh Rainmaker?

Rainmaker keeps his eyes closed, facing the sun.

RAINMAKER
(Translated from Sepedi)
It does not rain anymore, because
the convoy gets smaller and the
tribute even smaller.

MASELEKWANA
Rhodesia?

RAINMAKER
A lineage needs its bonus. You must
respect your culture.

MASELEKWANA
I'm not complaining. Forgive me. I
walked up this hill--

MOROKA (30s), wearing slightly more upscale traditional garb, walks up the hill to meet them.

RAINMAKER

Ma'moroka!

MOROKA

Maselekwana?

(re: Rainmaker)

E.

RAINMAKER

I was telling Ma' that Queen
Modjadi has inspired me to recite
the poem 'Morokapula' on the hill.

Maselekwana shoots Rainmaker a look.

MOROKA

Morokapula? But-

Rainmaker throws a blanket around Moroka and takes her down the trail. Maselekwana grabs the firewood and balances the bucket on a bed of cushions on her head.

RAINMAKER

(whispering)

Yes, for the Queen's safe journey.

Maselekwana leans in, interrupting the private conversation.

MASELEKWANA

But that prayer is only spoken in
tribute after the Queen's death.

Moroka halts in her tracks, locking eyes with Rainmaker.

MOROKA

(before he can rebut)

The role of the woman is no longer
minor. Don't lie to me again.

Rainmaker glances away, his body language tense.

MASELEKWANA

He was praying for rain.

RAINMAKER

(sharply)

No-

MASELEKWANA

Then why today? Why when we suffer
from a drought?

MOROKA

A Queen has never lost her way.
Never.

Rainmaker strides towards Maselekwana.

RAINMAKER

In the ol days respect was the only
thing to ensure victories in war.

MOROKA

Respect does not only reside on the
battlefield. And we are not at war.
Now, leave us. Go and find
something in that book of yours
that mentions Queen Modjadi's
respect and capabilities.

There's an awkward moment of silence before Rainmaker steps
away from Maselekwana and walks off. They share a chuckle for
a beat, followed by an awkward silence.

MASELEKWANA

(assuring)

Don't worry so much. This is her
rite of passage. Besides, my
Selekwana won't let anything happen
to her.

Moroka's eyes brim with tears, overcome by emotion.

MOROKA

What if the city corrupts her?
(silently sobbing)
What if she decides to stay?

MASELEKWANA

She is Rhodesia, Rain Queen of the
Royal Kingdom of the Bolobedu
people. It is her time now. The
spirits of King Shaka and
Moshoeshoe guide her.

MOROKA

Bring us rain, my child.

Moroka gazes up at the sky, the cars continue down the road.

EXT. WOODBUSH FOREST RESERVE - DAY (RAINING)

The girls, still exhilarated from their run, pant as they
pause at the edge of the forest, where the lush trees give
way to asphalt.

Rhodesia walks boldly in the middle of the road, her youthful face aglow with raindrops.

As a car approaches, she is oblivious to the danger, but Selekwana quickly pulls her to the safety of the roadside just in time to avoid being hit by the oncoming vehicle, a black Toyota Tundra.

The menacing Tundra has a rugged black steel grille and racing shocks, giving it a foreboding appearance. It bears the badge "Die Duiwel" next to the tow winch, and its reverse lights beam back at the girls.

Selekwana grabs Rhodesia's hand, and they walk along the forest's edge, avoiding looking back as they move away from the Tundra. Their innocent faces are marred with worry as they sense the danger of being lost in this unfamiliar territory.

The truck reverses, creeping up on them as they reach the forest's edge. The electric window rolls down, revealing the driver. ROBERT VICKERS, a man in his 50s with an unruly black beard that contrasts against his pale skin. His eyes survey the girls with a deadly smile and a professional eye as he speaks in South Sotho.

ROBERT

Lumela. u ea kae?

(Hello. Where are you going?)

Selekwana hides behind Rhodesia, who stands tall and proud.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

u lahlehile?

They exchange a smile, and then they separate.

SELEKWANA

Mofumahali u se ke ua lahleha!

(A Queen does not get lost!)

RHODESIA

Modjadi etela lefatse la hau.

(We wish to visit your village.)

Robert looks confused, and they switch to Sepedi.

SELEKWANA

He doesn't understand us. Can't you see he's a stupid?

(to Robert)

Ha u tsebe hore na Modjadi ke mang?

(Idiot! Do you know who Modjadi is)

Robert surveys the girls up and down, and Selekwana continues.

SELEKWANA (CONT'D)
(to Rhodesia)
See?
(re: Robert)
Stupid.

They keep walking, but the Tundra creeps alongside them.

ROBERT
Polokwane? E-Town?

Rhodesia stops and surveys the menacing truck, touching it.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Does my car scare you?

Selekwana takes a step back, wary of Robert's intentions, but Rhodesia is drawn to the danger.

SELEKWANA
I don't trust him. Let's keep
going.

Rhodesia is unsure if they're headed in the right direction.

RHODESIA
Polokwane ke tsela eo? (Polokwane?)

She points in the direction they're walking.

Robert shakes his head, pointing the direction the truck is facing. That way.

Selekwana draws Rhodesia's attention to vinyls on the car.
SIMBA TZANEEN and **WILDLIFE PARK** insignias on the door.

SELEKWANA
Paki?

RHODESIA
E-Zoo.

Selekwana's visibly upset, spitting at the car that pulls up beside her.

ROBERT
E-re ke u nke. Ke khona ho lumella
mofumahali le motsoalle oa hae hore
ba tsamaee ba le bang.
(I can take you. It's dangerous for
a Queen to walk alone.)

Selekwana hesitates, exchanging intense whispers with Rhodesia, a poised and determined woman in the backseat.

[TIGHT ON ROBERT] He stares at Rhodesia for a long moment, sensing her authority.

[TIGHT ON SELEKWANA] She shoots Robert a questioning look.

[TIGHT ON RHODESIA] She scrutinises Selekwana, then nods with conviction.

RHODESIA

Tzaneen?

Robert looks at the sticker on the car door, impressed that Rhodesia can read.

ROBERT

E.

Rhodesia offers Selekwana an adventure, but she refuses, her intuition telling her not to trust Robert. Despite her resistance, Rhodesia senses a calling and offers her an emerald bracelet as a token of their bond.

Selekwana hugs Rhodesia tightly, giving her a parting message in Selobedu.

SELEKWANA

Modjadi.

As the car pulls away, Selekwana watches her friend disappear into the distance. She runs into the forest, disappearing into the lush foliage.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA - DAY

Limpopo Province, the northernmost province of South Africa, shares borders with Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. It's the perfect gateway into Africa and South Africa. Known as the Great North, Limpopo is a land of legend, where ruins, relics, and ancient forests abound, as do sparkling trout waters, hot mineral springs, and waterfalls. Much of it has remained untouched for centuries, an untamed Africa. This is the home of Modjadji, the fabled "Rain Queen."

EXT. TZANEEN, LIMPOPO - DAY

Beyond the mountains, mopani trees and giant, ancient baobab trees dominate the plains, sweeping northward towards Zimbabwe. The landscape of Limpopo is a beautiful and contrasting mix of scenery, typical of Africa, making it a popular destination for leisure and adventure travellers worldwide. The sun is shining, and the town of Tzaneen is buzzing with life.

The Tundra rumbles along the main road leading into Tzaneen city. It kicks up dust and gravel as it goes, causing a commotion in the otherwise quiet surroundings.

INT. DUIWEL (TRAVELLING) - TZANEEN CITY - DAY

Rhodesia glances out the window at the locals strolling their dogs, shopping, and carrying out daily chores. They appear to be inhabitants of a different planet to her.

Robert takes a drag from his cigarette and exhales through the open window. Rhodesia's attention shifts to a sleek BLACK MERCEDES, and she gazes at the CHINESE DRIVER, holding his gaze for a moment too long.

As Robert checks his phone, Rhodesia can't help but feel intrigued. She reaches for the device, attempting to unlock it, but Robert snatches it back, unconcerned about her running away, solely preoccupied with keeping her away from any prying eyes.

EXT. MOTEL TZANEEN - PARKING LOT - DAY

The Tundra pulls into the parking lot of the MOTEL TZANEEN, a modest lodging that barely meets its 3-star rating. It is situated at the base of the Wolkberg Mountains in the northern regions of the Drakensberg in Limpopo, green, misty, and humid, resembling the Shire.

Robert emerges from the truck, opening the cargo bed to reveal RIFLES and AMMO BOXES strewn about. He rearranges everything, uncovering a secret compartment beneath the floor, where an extensive collection of Rhino horn and Elephant tusks is concealed in a WHITE ONE TONNE BUILDERS BAG.

Robert zips the bag, concealing its contents, and stows his rifle away. He secures the truck, then knocks on the window, indicating Rhodesia should roll it down.

Rhodesia hesitates, still preoccupied with the phone, but eventually taps the button, gradually lowering the window.

ROBERT

I need that.

He yanks the phone from her grip, shoving her aside. Robert dials a number, the phone rings...

ROBERT (CONT'D)

This is important, do you understand? Wait here. Emela. Mona.

Rhodesia glares at him as she rolls up the window, inch by inch.

Robert checks his phone, noticing two missed calls from an unknown number. He shoots Rhodesia an irritated look before listening to a voicemail:

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Where are you Chilli?

VOICE (O.S.)

Robert, my people have spotted you in Tzaneen. I wish I could join you, but I'm stuck in an SSA interrogation room. I heard about the consignment from Rebah. Do you think you can handle the inventory without my help? When someone contacts you, don't make any promises you can't keep.

The message ends, and Robert removes the battery and sim card from the phone, crushing them under his boot and tossing them in the trash.

ROBERT

(muttering to himself)

No names, idiot.

Robert walks over and signals to Rhodesia to come over to the cubio. She approaches it cautiously, peering inside to find several disposable phones. Without a word, Robert takes one and tears through the packaging, swiftly inserting a sim card. He launches the compass app on his phone, aiming it up at the sky. The needle of the compass trembles slightly as it swivels in a definitive south-west direction. Rhodesia rolls down her window, gazing at him with curiosity.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Waterberg.

(beat)

But you already knew that.

Rhodesia stares at him, unsure if she understands what he's talking about. Robert strides off towards the reception area, while Rhodesia remains behind, watching a black Mercedes pull into the parking lot and park two spaces away. Suddenly, a convoy of black cars rolls into the lot, and a group of Chinese diplomats, South African ministers, and state security agents emerge from the vehicles.

Rhodesia feels completely out of her element as the agents and bodyguards guide the delegation into a nearby business centre, opposite the pool area. Glancing up at the sky, she realizes that it's already late. She fumbles with the car door handle, trying to open it, but Robert catches the door before it can close.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

U ea kae?
(Where do you think you're going?)
(beat)
How old are you? Fifteen? Sixteen?

Robert crushes a cigarette butt beneath his boot before continuing:

ROBERT (CONT'D)

You wanted to see my world. Well,
welcome to Tzaneen. Tloo. I booked
a room for us in that Motel. It can
get lonely on the road sometimes.

Rhodesia's eyes shift to the black cars as the envoys leave the parking lot. Robert takes off his jacket and offers it to her. She slips her arms into the sleeves, feeling slightly warmer. Then, the two of them move quickly towards a nearby room.

As they approach the reception desk, the receptionist observes them closely. The way the jacket engulfs Rhodesia makes her appear no older than thirteen. The receptionist reaches for the phone and begins dialling.

INT. MOTEL TZANEEN, ROOM #62

Robert guides Rhodesia into the room and flicks on the TV, changing channels in a frenzy until he lands on E-TV. Rhodesia looks up at him, confused.

ROBERT

TV?

RHODESIA

E. TV.

ROBERT

E-T-V.

RHODESIA

E. TV?

ROBERT

E-T-V.

RHODESIA

E. E-TV. Tsebe.

Robert raises an eyebrow.

ROBERT

I'm stupid?

(off her look)

You're a Stupid. Stupid.

Robert tosses the remote to her and disappears into the kitchen. Rhodesia sits on the bed, flipping through channels, amazed by the talking animals in an animated movie.

Cartoons play on the TV, and Rhodesia is agog at the anthropomorphised African animals in the movie. She glances around the room, unable to believe what she's seeing and experiencing. She rubs the emerald bracelet on her wrist, wishing her friend was there to share it with her.

Robert reappears, scrolling through his phone, and exits to the veranda. Rhodesia follows him, taking in the breathtaking view of the city below.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM #62 - VERANDA - DAY

Rhodesia inhales the air, but it's not as pure as the air in Ga-Modjadi. She notices scantily clad teenage girls being chased by boys out of the pool area, smoking hookah, flirting, and being typical teens. Meanwhile, the business centre is bustling with activity. Gorgeous women, escorted by their plus-ones, are wearing evening gowns, luxury cars are parked, and there are spotlights, velvet ropes, and a red carpet affair.

INT. MOTEL ROOM #62

Suddenly, there's a knock at the door, and Rhodesia spins around. She is beaten to the door by Robert, who is ending a call with an angry expression. The receptionist is standing there with Asian takeaways, scanning the interior when Robert blocks her view. Rhodesia peers under Robert's arm.

RHODESIA

Lijo?

RECEPTIONIST

(to Rhodesia)

And your name is? Hungry?

Robert hands over the cash and shuts the door on her. As he turns away, there is a pounding at the door. Before Robert can grab the handle, the door opens, revealing Sapa Pak, with a diamond pinky ring the size of a cashew, and bodyguards on either side. The two bodyguards look like retired sumo wrestlers.

ROBERT

I already got my Chow Mein.

Mr. Pak raises his finger to his lips, shushing him.

[CLOSE ON] PAK'S HAND TATTOO: five rings arranged in a circular pattern, each ring intersecting with the others to form a larger, interconnected shape. The rings are rendered in a deep, black ink, set against a stark white skin tone.

Rhodesia hides behind Robert. She's never seen Asians before. Robert moves his hand by her side, and they walk right in.

Robert closes the door and turns around, staring at them as if there's a bad odor in the air. The bodyguards are in first, clearing rooms and returning to collect Robert's cell. One of them pats Robert down, while the other takes the cell to the kitchen, where it's placed inside the microwave oven as their Modus Operandi.

INT. MOTEL ROOM #62 - KITCHEN

Robert leads Rhodesia into the kitchen where she sits, while Mr. Pak's eyes dart around the room until he finally takes a seat. The bodyguard nods his head, signalling that the room is clear, and Pak begins his sales pitch.

MR. PAK

China biggest buyer, South Africa
biggest seller. BRICS partners. Got
it?

Mr. Pak signals to one of his bodyguards, who opens a briefcase and empties its contents on the coffee table. There are telephoto (spy lens) images taken on various private parks, including African rhinos (white and black), African elephants, pangolins, Grévy's zebras, African lions. The briefcase also contains passports, travel itineraries, and an envelope.

Robert takes his place across the table, and they all sit down. Right away, Pak takes control of the room, trying to frame the situation.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)

Sapa Pak. Yeah, I got a reason for this.

Robert gets up, turns his gaze to Mr. Pak with a steely expression.

ROBERT

Where is Yang Zhilie?

As if on cue, a bodyguard places his hand on Robert's shoulder, but Mr. Pak motions for him to sit down. He leans in, his eyes locked on Robert's.

MR. PAK

No one has seen Yang Zhilie since Junping. You are moving up in the world, moving forward. From today, you will only deal with me. I'll handle the export, you'll fulfil the order by contacting your replacement, and you're not the Gun Master anymore.

Robert turns his gaze to Mr. Pak with a steely expression.

ROBERT

What good is a starter pack when you're already under contract?

Sapa Pak shrieks with laughter, but his men remain stone-faced. Robert raises an eyebrow, unfazed.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

You're Vietnamese?

MR. PAK

"Starter", you're a funny guy. It's pronounced Sapa, like the city.

Robert nods, his expression revealing his unease. He runs a hand over his stomach, unsure if it's hunger or nerves.

ROBERT

Vietnamese.

Robert shifts in his chair. As Mr. Pak traces his finger over a photo, Robert's attention is drawn to a picture of a Chinese man standing alongside a top South African official.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I like Chinese more. I've never had problems with food poisoning before like I did from eating bad pho.

Mr. Pak's temper flares, and he slams his hand on the coffee table. Robert watches as a tiny crack forms on the glass.

MR. PAK

You deal with me now!

Robert remains unfazed.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)

Conavirus may have ended China's honeymoon in Africa, but they're not going anywhere soon. And neither will my people, chú sao.

The bodyguards shift closer, surrounding Mr. Pak.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)

Hey, my friend, you feel like a prisoner in your own home now, eh?

Mr. Pak turns to the Bodyguards. Points to Robert.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)

Phi da trâng
(White African)

The room erupts in laughter, but Robert's mind is already elsewhere. He spots Rhodesia peeking around the corner and motions for her to stay put.

ROBERT

Soos die Boere, China sal nooit
Afrika verlaat nie. (Like the Boer,
China will never leave Africa)

[ANGLE ON--]

A banner flaps in the wind outside, reading "Chinese/African International Summit '22".

The room falls silent, and Robert leans over the table, organising the photos of fauna into the shape of the Africa.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

The Royal Natal Carbineers. They're my people. We fought in every conflict all over the world.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Crushed the Bushmen rebellion, and the Zulus at Isandlwana - even handed the German forces their first loss in northern Italy. My father was a P-O-W in '68 during the Tet Offensive and later released after the Americans retreat. It drove the Vietnamese to closer reliance with your former enemy... China -- See. We're all prisoners in our own homes.

MR. PAK leans in, his eyes locked with Robert's, as Robert traces his finger over a photo.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

MR. Chi. Chinese ambassador to South Africa.

MR. PAK points to a WOMAN standing next to him.

MR. PAK

Interpol.

Robert sits back, mulling over the information. The atmosphere in the room is tense.

MR. PAK motions to a bodyguard, who grabs a Coke and Sprite from the bar fridge and places them on the coffee table. The room relaxes.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)

EU think they can come in here and mess with us? They investigate chokepoints in our organisation's vast network and put 'Blue Notice' on all our people? For people like us, there is opportunity in chaos.

MR. PAK writes something on a napkin and slides it over to Robert.

ROBERT

Interpol, huh?

(Reads the napkin.)

The "Summit" is a NEST?

Robert reads the napkin.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Operation Pachyderm"

Robert cracks open a Coke, mixes it with a nip of brandy, downs it in one gulp, and lights a cigarette. He exhales a cloud of smoke.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You're telling me the summit isn't
about "environmental information
sharing between our countries"?
Bliksim.

MR. PAK manages a smile as BODYGUARD #2 hands Robert a list.

MR. PAK
I have chosen your replacement-

ROBERT
Zimbabwean poacher. Mayo-Sande. I
have been grooming him for years.

MR. PAK
If you pick your own people, you
take care of them.
(off Robert's look)
We both know you can't ensure
everything on that roster. I like
you. You're not the brightest, but
you have a big hunger for success.
(looking for support)
You may not be a good boat rower,
but you're great at pushing it.

Robert bursts out laughing, his hand reaching under the table for his hidden Okapi knife. MR. PAK's veins pop as he grabs an envelope.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)
(talking rapidly, loud)
Them Chinese, they crave it all!
They ain't satisfied with just
what's in the trunk of your car.
They'll be wanting a whole lotta
black gold. Phi da trâng, eh?

The room erupts in laughter, but this time Robert pulls out the knife hidden in his right boot, flicking it open with a swift wrist motion. He grabs MR. PAK's wrist with his left hand, pulling him towards him.

With a swift motion, Pak's diamond shatters the glass table, sending shards flying everywhere. The Okapi blade glints dangerously as it presses against Pak's throat, held by Robert who looks like he's ready to decapitate him.

ROBERT

Want to know who I really am?

The bodyguards, late on the draw, fumble with their pistols while Pak's eyes dart nervously around the room.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Tell them to lay it down!

The bodyguards aim their shaking pistols at Robert while Mr. Pak mutters something in Vietnamese.

MR. PAK

Dat nó Xuông!

Robert stares at them with a cold, piercing gaze, as if they were children playing with dangerous toys.

ROBERT

Tell them to lay it down, slow.

MR. PAK

Dat nó Xuông, đat nó xuông chậm!

Mr. Pak looks frazzled, and the bodyguards look completely unprepared for an unexpected situation.

ROBERT

We are all responsible for our people.

FROM ABOVE, The bodyguards shout orders at Robert in Vietnamese, and Robert responds in kind, his words dripping with menace. A standoff in the shape of a circle inside of triangle unfolds, and in the kitchen, Rhodesia watches the scene with a tense glare and a fistful of noodles, never having had Pho before.

ROBERT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

"Meal Team Six" sit neer daai
tamagotchis voor ek sy kop af sny!
(Put it down cubbies before I cut
his head off!)

Mr. Pak speaks up, his voice shaking slightly.

MR. PAK

Don't be stupid. You know who I am.

The Okapi is so close to his throat that Pak can feel the cold steel against his skin, and a trickle of blood runs down his neck.

ROBERT

Diplomatic immunity means fuckall
to someone who moves with impunity.

Pak's voice is shaky, but he tries to maintain his composure as the cold blade of the Okapi presses against his throat.

MR. PAK

Listen to me - This will be the
largest consignment of fauna and
black gold in China's history.

ROBERT

What is this?

Robert's voice is laced with suspicion as he tightens his grip on the Okapi.

MR. PAK

Like I said, China's been kicked
out of Africa. But they ain't
taking it lying down. They made
billions in loans and changed the
face of the whole continent. Now
they're playing the long game,
planning their next move. You know
what they call it? 'Black Friday.'
And they're selling everything, no
matter the cost.

Robert lets go, and Pak gasps for air.

ROBERT

China is leaving and Vietnam wants
to take their place.

Robert casually pushes down on the metal piece on the tail end of the Okapi to close it, doing it with one hand.

MR. PAK

No. Vietnam is not big enough.
Second biggest market for black
gold, behind China, is U-S.

Mr. Pak raises his hand ever so slightly, and his men holster their weapons. He swipes the list from the table.

ROBERT

You're working for the Americans?

MR. PAK

Alone, we are visible. Easy
targets. But together, we are too
big to see the whole thing.

(MORE)

MR. PAK (CONT'D)
(Wiping blood off his fingers) Our
organization is restructuring.
That's where you come in.

ROBERT
Whatever gets me up the food chain.

Everyone returns to their original positions, except for Sapa
Pak, who straightens his silk shirt and vicuña wool suit,
exuding an air of danger and power.

MR. PAK
In my country, we say that the
shade from the Apricot tree is not
wide enough for two.

ROBERT
This is a test?

MR. PAK
(correction)
"Competitive examination."

Pak signals his men to leave and gives them a sharp look. He
knows that hiring friends for help never pays off.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)
When you're competing with the
person you mean to replace to
further your cause, this is the
definition of promotion.

ROBERT
Sounds like a Gulag.

MR. PAK
Yang Zhilie is exiled from his
country and has been in your
country's pocket ever since. He is
fluent in Sino-African. He can
reach places even you can't.

ROBERT
You let me worry about that weasel.
He'd never be able to satisfy the
world's insatiable demand for
exotics, even if he had Noah's Ark.

MR. PAK
And you can?

ROBERT
Yang Zhilie is a man without a
country.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Money can only get you so far
before you have to talk your way
out of an African cell. Because of
this, his reach is limited. Like a
small child reaching for a tall
branch on an apricot tree.

Mr. Pak stops at the door, turns, and hands Robert the list.

MR. PAK

The Chinese delegation leaves day
after tomorrow. Someone will make
contact with you. Until then-
(off his look)
You won't see me again. You don't
have diplomatic privileges.

They exchange looks. Sounds good to Robert. Pak hands Robert
an envelope stuffed with about 100k mixed bills.

MR. PAK (CONT'D)

Money does not discriminate, even
if your country does.

CLOSE-UP on the envelope stuffed with about a hundred grand.

ROBERT

Wrong. We are a very progressive
nation. See, even our money is gay.

Robert thumbs through Rand bills in just about every colour
in the rainbow.

ANGLE ON --

Rhodesia is thumbing through photos of exotic animals kept
tightly together in confined cages in a private zoo
surrounded by Middle-Eastern men. Tears well up in her eyes.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

U se ke ua sheba!
(Don't look at that!)

Robert grabs the photos from her, but she gets cut by glass
fragments.

RHODESIA

Ei Tjoe!

She irately switches between Selobedu and Khilobedu.

ROBERT

I don't speak dead languages.

RHODESIA
Morokapula. Morokapula!

ROBERT
Not even God knows what you're
saying.

Robert grabs her arm and pulls her away from the glass on the floor, or maybe he's just pissed. It's not clear.

INT. MOTEL ROOM #62, KITCHEN

Robert releases her arm as she SCREAMS. He opens the microwave and grabs his phone, but it won't turn on. He hits the power button repeatedly, wondering if Rhodesia's microwave caused the problem.

RHODESIA
Queen Modjaji attracts even Kings
from afar to appease her. I am the
only woman you'll meet with honour.
I am respected, and I have
capabilities.

Robert is unsure if she understood him when he spoke in South Sotho. He swaps SIM cards, and she pulls on his pants, tugging him towards her.

ROBERT
(in South Sotho)
Tlhompho e tsoa chelete feela
(Respect comes only from money).

Robert is unsure if she understood him when he spoke in South Sotho. He swaps SIM cards, and she pulls on his pants, tugging him towards her.

RHODESIA
I am a giant. I am Queen Modjaji!

Robert turns and slaps Rhodesia hard across the face. She falls to the floor, and Robert looks down at her.

ROBERT
When will you people learn... The
world had forgotten you. Your queen
may command respect from the likes
of kings, but out here, you are
nothing. And your so-called
"capabilities" won't save you from
the harsh reality of this world.

Rhodesia runs out of the kitchen, Robert chases after her.

INT. MOTEL ROOM #62, LIVING ROOM

Rhodesia doesn't leave the motel room. Instead, she sits on the couch, holding her face and sobbing silently.

ROBERT

E ntle?
(Great?)
E le mong.
(Alone.)

Rain pounds against the window as Rhodesia smiles to herself with her back to Robert. He misunderstood her; the direct interpretation of "giant" is:

RHODESIA

Seholohali.

Robert catches on but doesn't seem to care.

ROBERT

Whatever.

He turns on the TV, and the headline reads "WOMAN MAULED BY LION IN NATIONAL PARK." The news footage shows an image of Kate, and then a blurry image of the Cape Lion dragging her away. Robert recognises the monster.

Robert's phone rings, and he steps out to answer it.

ROBERT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Where the hell are you?

Rhodesia turns slowly, drawn to the sound of the TV.

EXT. MOTEL TZANEEN, ROOM #62 - VERANDA - CONTINUOUS

The rain drizzles, combined with the soft breeze, creates a mist that dances from side to side, blowing out the lights and signs, making dazzling spots of colourful bokeh. The streets are empty, and murmurs fade out from inside the "black tie" GALA.

[NOTE] {THE FOLLOWING PHONE CONVERSATION IS ALL IN CODE}

YANG ZHILIE

(voicemail)

Beckham's Kung-Fu Kitchen supplier.
If you placed order for Rice
Cooker... press 1. For Bamboo
Strainer... press 2 and amount.

{Rice Cooker = Black Gold} {Bamboo Strainer = Horn}

We glimpse a drunk TOW TRUCK DRIVER thrown out of the business centre by Chinese security. He curses out the men who laugh at the dirty white Afrikaner as they disappear back inside just as Robert lights a Joey.

ROBERT

(presses "2", into phone)
Don't ship the wrong order this time. Do you know how hard it is to move chopsticks in Africa. You do that again, and I'll start ordering from that Vietnamese place. I heard they give a lifetime guarantee.

{Chopsticks = Keratin} {Last time you tried to harden keratin and sell it to me as Horn.}

YANG ZHILIE

(voice mail)
Thank you for placing your order with us. We appreciate your business and look forward to serving you again in the future.

Robert hangs up the phone, looking out into the rainy night.

EXT. MOTEL BACKYARD - NIGHT

A Tow Truck driver approaches the Receptionist, who tends to his wounds. They exchange looks, and the Receptionist points in Robert's general direction. The driver, hot under his collar, storms towards him.

Robert watches the couple closely and stubs out his cigarette. They speak in Afrikaans.

RECEPTIONIST

Hold on, Dirk! Dirk!

DIRK

No, Joanne! This is my fucking Motel. I'm not taking any more shit from anyone tonight!

Dirk stomps drunkly over a small backyard garden.

DIRK (CONT'D)

Hey, shit head! Where's the girl?
(nithing)
Don't play dumb, Epstein!

RECEPTIONIST

He's lying. I saw her.

DIRK

Are you calling my girl a liar? The
black girl. Where is she?

ROBERT

Modjadi!

Rhodesia walks out, drawn to the commotion outside.

JOANNE

Hello, meisie. Do you know this
man?

(leans on the railing)

Do you need help? Is there someone
I can call?

Rhodesia looks at her sideways, then back at Robert.

ROBERT

Rhodesia, etela lefatse la hau.

Dirk and Joanne exchange looks - then look at Robert.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(to Couple)

Mofumahali u se ke ua lahleha.

Rhodesia stares at Joanne's crimson cheeks.

RHODESIA

E-tsebe.

Rhodesia squeaks a laugh through her hand. Robert shrugs.
Rhodesia wafts his cigarette smoke. Then she retreats inside.

ROBERT

She said, "a Queen is never lost."

(leans over the railing)

She thinks she's "royalty."

Joanne takes a step back, looks at Dirk, then sighs.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Ha u tsebe hore na Modjadi ke mang?

(Do you not know who Modjadi is?)

DIRK

Get that fucking dirty-ass monkey
language out of my fucking hotel!

Robert puts his hand on his heart with mock solemnity.

JOANNE

Dirk! He's a guest. Do you want to
get me fired? Enough now, let's go.

Robert looks Dirk in the eye, never blinking once. Robert
takes another long drag.

DIRK

I don't trust this one.
(he studies Robert)
Call the Sergeant before I do
something we both regret.

Dirk rips his hand away, stumbles and breaks eye contact.
When he looks up, Robert is standing right in front of him!
Robert's mouth is closed, smoke coming out of his nostrils.
He opens his mouth, and Dirk looks into his mouth, sees a red
coal, and Robert flips the Joey out of his mouth! Robert
takes a drag and blows it in Dirks's face, as the couple
stare at him bewildered.

JOANNE

(close so he gets it)
Dirk, Serg Laz said they're already
monitoring the situation. Let the
police do their jobs.

Dirk uses Joanne as a crutch, limping back to the Motel.

DIRK

Okay skattie. Jy wen.

JOANNE

It's not a competition, idiot.
Apparently a tribe caught a poacher
trespassing. You know what they do
to poachers, Dirkie. "Mob justice."

Robert puts out his Joey and starts scanning his surroundings
suspiciously. He looks at the sky and every face before
returning inside.

INT. MOTEL TZANEEN, ROOM #62

Rhodesia is watching TV, over the animated movie from
earlier. Robert enters from the veranda. He draws the blinds
in the room.

With a sudden movement, Robert snatches the TV remote from
Rhodesia's grasp. She FLIPS out, screaming and throwing a
TANTRUM, disappearing into the bedroom. The door SLAMS shut,
muffling her angry cries.

ROBERT
(into phone)
Yang, where the hell-

MAYO SANDE (O.S.)
Robert, it's over.

Robert spins around, the phone pressed to his ear.

ROBERT
Sunday! Where are you?

MAYO SANDE (O.S.)
Zim, I think.

ROBERT
Zim... How did you get there from
Mozambique?

MAYO SANDE (O.S.)
Uh huh. The other side.

ROBERT
Botswana?!
(a beat)
If you get caught...

MAYO SANDE (O.S.)
It's too late, Robert. In the next
8 hours, we'll be in Ga-Modjadji,
where they'll proceed to drop me
off in the park, not for the
animals, but for the villagers.
(voice shaking)
I have a family. Do you know what
they do to poachers in Limpopo,
Robert? It's over.

The phone call abruptly ends, causing Robert's heart to race
as he stares at the phone. He sinks down into a chair, his
mind racing with thoughts.

Robert gets up from his seat and carefully picks up photos of
majestic African wildlife. He flips through them until he
finds a photo of the African Cape Lion. B-roll footage of an
"animal attack on American tourist" plays on the TV, with
scrolling text confirming that DNA has confirmed it to be the
formerly extinct Cape Lion.

Robert searches for a mixer in the bar fridge, but finding
none, he drinks his drink neat. He scans the motel room,
which is eerily quiet except for the buzzing of the hotel
sign.

Sensing that something is off, he peeks through the blinds and surveys the area. The world around him is desolate, and Rhodesia is nowhere to be seen.

He quickly checks the bathroom but doesn't find her there either. Robert takes one look on the veranda and draws the blinds.

EXT. GA MODJADJI, LIMPOPO PROVINCE - NIGHT

A winding dirt road, resembling a snake wrapping around the mountain, twists and turns through the desolate landscape. Its treacherous curves forbidding B-DOUBLE TRUCKS from traveling on it. We find ourselves at a TRUCK STOP where armed Snare Trappers load one tonne builders bags into the trailers, taking each one up the mountain separately.

The once-thriving wetland community, now a mirage in the desert, is a ghost town, with hardly any traffic to be seen. The petrol garage, flanked by zinc houses, is a stark contrast to the vibrant colours of the people who emerge from them. The residents, dressed in traditional garb and adorned with beaded feathered instruments, go about their business as usual.

But as the rumble of approaching footsteps grows louder, the scene erupts into chaos. Men, waving Knobkerries, march down the road, followed by women ululating, and even children joining in the protest. The Snare Trappers, taken aback by the sudden uprising, toss away their firearms and abandon the trucks, leaving the bags of builders materials strewn about the ground.

As the chaos unfolds, a towering figure strides forward from the mass of people - a man with an intimidating presence and a mane of dark hair. This is Yang Zhilie, a steely and determined Sino African whose deep, dark skin commands the attention of all those around him. His piercing gaze surveys the scene with a sharpness that betrays a lifetime of experience in the face of adversity.

EXT. GA MODJADJI, SEHLAKONG

Ga Modjadi is the kingdom of the Balobedu tribe, each with a headman representing the Modjadi Rain Queen. The central Balobedu tribal village is Sehlakong. At a clearing, the Rainmaker and ELDERS gather with Moroka, Selekwana, and her mother Maselekwana. They converse in Sepedi.

MASELEKWANA

Selekwana speaks on her behalf.
There is no lie in her eyes.

(MORE)

MASELEKWANA (CONT'D)

A white man in a white truck took
Modjadi to Tzaneen.

RAINMAKER

We have no water, no rain, no way
of life. And why does she not wear
her traditional robe? She swapped
it out for tracksuit pants and a
dress. She wants to confuse us.

SELEKWANA

I witnessed it rain. I felt it!

MASELEKWANA

Selekwana!

Maselekwana pulls her daughter Selekwana by the arm.

MASELEKWANA (CONT'D)

(re: Rainmaker)

He prays for Moremo's return. He
wishes misfortunes on Modjadi.

Rainmaker stares at her with disdain. Her words are like
daggers to his soul. Moroka turns to Maselekwana.

MOROKA

She wants to be modern. An earthly
representation of the rain goddess.
Rhodesia "QUEEN MODJADI" is on a
trip to the city, the modern world.
Her rite-of-passage.

MASELEKWANA

She cannot ascend to the throne if
she is dead. She has a mind of a
child.

MOROKA

She is a child.

RAINMAKER

She is part of a dynasty. A
deification of heroes of a long-
gone age who have overcome
impossible odds. She must return
under her own volition or become an
emanation of the most high God:
Cosa.

MOROKA

You will not make a martyr of my
child. She is reborn as the
firstborn son of man!

Maselekwana puts a hand on Moroka's shoulder.

MASELEKWANA

She is a child of Earth, Tintibane,
not a spirit of the dead, Badimo.

(re: Rainmaker)

He incites Podimo to turn away from
God, so that we adopt customs that
were never intended by Modimo.

Modimo = God. Podimo = Worshippers.

Maselekwana looks to Moroka for emotional support.

MOROKA

No. Modjadi must be educated in the
ways of the new world before she
can lead her people, so that future
generations may match the times.
Should she not return from a long
time on the road, let death be her
resting, and let there be no return
for the Rain Queen if she dies.
That is her destiny. That is her
choice.

Maselekwana nods in agreement, and Moroka takes her hand in a
tender gesture.

RAINMAKER

When you pray for rain, you have to
deal with the mud too.

He catches the attention of passing Tribesmen, who join a
group of worshippers at the beginning of a ritual dance. The
rain dance has begun.

Maselekwana notices Moroka on the verge of tears and shields
her from the view of the tribe.

MASELEKWANA

Come. Don't let them see you like
this. I did not mean to upset you.

MOROKA

Did I make a mistake? Tell me, did
I send my baby to her death?

MASELEKWANA

No. Rhodesia is a strong young
woman. Modimo o mogolo will guide
her. Modimo is mother, is light, is
in the sky. Watching over all of
us.

Suddenly, a commotion erupts as a group of tribal people drag a man into the village. They are led by the Podimo from a neighbouring tribe, numbering in the hundreds, with men waving Knobkerries, women ululating, and even children.

The group converges with the Podimo of this tribe at the edge of the clearing, overlooking a steep cliff. The man in their custody is MAYO SANDE, a Zimbabwean national in his 30s, wearing a torn Kruger Park Ranger uniform. He looks upon the crowd, horrified.

The men tie Mayo Sande to a steel pole protruding from the ground, which is severely scarred and heavily scorched. They then begin pouring petrol into car tires and placing the rubber tires around his arms and neck, forming a twisted parody of a rubber necklace and chains, preparing him for an extrajudicial trial by "Necklacing". The weight of the tires is enough to keep him from running.



INT. GA MODJADJI, QUEEN'S VILLAGE, MOROKA'S SHACK

Moroka slams her weight against the door as the sound of the marauding crowd outside sends chills down her spine. Inside, she checks under the mattress and retrieves a prepaid cellphone.

She periodically looks over at the door and window, holding the flip-phone as it boots up. The village is a powder keg about to blow.

The phone buzzes in her hand, and the boot tone nearly stops her heart. She grabs a pamphlet on her dressing table with the words "Born Free" and a name "Reeva" and number below that. Moroka punches the number into the phone, and a voice answers.

VOICE

(over phone)

Reeva speaking, how may I help you?

Moroka, frantic, responds into the phone.

MOROKA

(into phone)

Miss Reeva. Moroka Gumbi.

REEVA (O.S)

Miss Gumbi, what's wrong?

MOROKA

There is a man. In my village.

REEVA (O.S)

Slow down... what man?

MOROKA

These podimo will do anything to send a message. They will kill him. You have to come, now!

REEVA (O.S)

Who's caught? Who is he?

MOROKA

Mayo-Sande.

Reeva goes quiet on the other end.

MOROKA (CONT'D)

They found him crossing Ga-Modjadji. He was going East.

REEVA (O.S)

East? -- The Reserve. Moroka. You need to keep him there. It is very important nothing happens to him, until we get there. Do you understand?

Moroka hears knocking at the door. She hides the phone just in time as the Rainmaker enters, and they speak Sepedi.

RAINMAKER

The Podimo bring word of a poacher
in the village. He was caught
crossing Ga-Modjadji. It's him!

Rainmaker hangs up his coat and approaches Moroka, stroking his hand on her exposed shoulder.

RAINMAKER (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

Moroka draws his attention to the commotion outside the window.

RAINMAKER (CONT'D)

Don't worry about them. What they
don't know is for their own good.
Our baby is going to be okay.

Moroka swats his hand away. She quickly exits, but he blocks the entrance with an outstretched arm.

RAINMAKER (CONT'D)

What is this?

Rainmaker grabs her arm spots the phone in her hand.

RAINMAKER (CONT'D)

At last, an answer is sent by the
chameleon.

MOROKA

We can't kill him. It's not right.

RAINMAKER

Tourism enriches our lives, and
without the animals of the earth
our village suffers a thousand
fold. This is no longer about
water. This is about fire.

Rainmaker's rough hand closes around Moroka's neck, not tight enough to choke her, but with enough force to make his message clear. Moroka struggles against him, but manages to break free and push past him, her heart racing with fear and adrenaline. She bursts out of the hut, tossing the phone on the ground. We hear Reeva's voice calling "Moroka", the sounds of the angry mob outside growing louder by the second.

**EXT. LESOTHO/SOUTH AFRICAN BORDER - MALOTI - DRakensberg
TRANSFRONTIER - DUSK**

The camera pans over the rugged terrain of the Lesotho/South African border, showcasing the beauty and vastness of the African landscape.

Suddenly, the sound of a military helicopter echoes through the air, casting a sharp silhouette over the ground below. A herd of water buffalo stampedes in fear at the sight of the chopper. The Lowveld, known as the Phalaborwa area.

The SAAF Atlas Oryx military helicopter lands with a thud, kicking up a cloud of dust. A WOMAN waves a red flare to signal the rangers' arrival. The elite unit of ARMY veterans, VETPAW, jumps off the chopper, along with two ATTACK DOGS:

U.S. Special Operations Lieutenant TIM KENNEDY, a retired veteran; BLAKE FUCHS, an African American Texan with an M-4 across his chest; CHASEN GOMES, a corn-fed Montana rancher and CAL-FIRE "probie," and former ARMY RANGER; and SABAH FORESTRY RANGER TAN SRI-AMAT, a veteran of the Thailand military.

Red and Blake are each holding leashes to a pack of Alsatians fresh off the plane from Texas. They approach a Kruger Park ranger 4X4 where the driver, JAN LANDIS (50s), awaits. Jan wears the same old Boer patch on his sleeve "Vierkleur".

JAN LANDIS

(soft to Reeve)

So, they're "sending their best"
huh? Lemme guess, the VET in VETPAW
doesn't stand for Veto?

REEVA GOODALL

"VETPAW is a group of post-9/11
U.S. Veterans with combat
experience who are committed to
protecting and training park
rangers and combating poaching on
the ground in Africa."

JAN LANDIS

So, they gave you the PR spin?

REEVA GOODALL

(Nods) They gave me the PR spin.
(into phone)
Moroka, call me back, please.

REEVA GOODALL, a fiery, no-nonsense, red-blooded Boere meisie ends the call. As the chopper's blade slows, she shields her face from the downwash and reaches out her hand to Tim.

VEX, a counter-poaching dog snaps at Reeva! She pulls her hand back, seconds away from getting nipped.

TIM KENNEDY

Vex.

Tim firmly wraps his hand around Vex's leash and pulls back gently.

REEVA GOODALL

I didn't know you were bringing
attack dogs?

TIM KENNEDY

(Re: Alsatians) Them too.

The three hardnose Rangers take their place by Tim's side.

INT. RANGER 4X4 (TRAVELLING)

The rugged 4x4 barrels down a dirt road cutting through a vast national reserve. Instead of tourists, the Vetpaw unit occupies the back. Reeva rides shotgun as they converse in Afrikaans.

JAN LANDIS

The only time they venture down
here is to save elephants or
protest rhino poaching or when one
of them goes missing.

REEVA GOODALL

We both know she's not missing.

They pass a blue compact TATA INDICA VISTA from the window. The crushed hatchback lies flattened, an anomaly in the wild.

TIM KENNEDY

(leans over)
Elephant?

JAN LANDIS

Bull.

They are looking at a crime scene before driving off.

EXT. SACRED ROCKS, GAME LODGE - DAY

The 4x4 halts near a convoy of SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL PARKS Toyota Land Cruisers. The team disembarks in a single file, converging at an Outdoor Building "Business Centre" in the Game Lodge.

INT. SACRED ROCKS, GAME LODGE - CENTRE - NIGHT

Inside the dimly lit room, a small crowd has gathered for the event. SANParks Rangers, a helicopter pilot, a WWF representative, a group of Canadian trainees, and various staff, volunteers, and spectators are seated under the buzzing lights of the bug-infested structure.

The Vetpaw unit enters and takes a seat two rows from the stage, accompanied by two free-running dogs trained for the mission. Red secures the aisle seat, ready to debark quickly. Two PARK RANGER trainees stare at Red's playful rapport with his dogs. One of the dogs pants by Red's side.

PEACE PARKS RANGER #1

What are their names?

CHASEN GOMES

Chase. Blake. From a lineage of law enforcement bred to track and follow every scent known to man.

(leans in)

The dogs are pretty good too.

PEACE PARKS RANGER #2

They're not thoroughbred, they're mixed.

(to the Alsations)

Black redbone and tan redbone.

The Ranger makes kissing sounds at the dogs who growl at him.

CHASEN GOMES

I don't remember giving you their names. And they're thoroughbred.

(to the Alsatian)

Red. Sit.

PEACE PARKS RANGER #1

I wasn't talking about the dogs.

Tan leans in, quietly to the Parks Rangers.

TAN SRI-AMAT

Of course their dogs have names. I'm pretty sure they have birthdays, too.

PEACE PARKS RANGER #1

Does the dog sleep in your bed?

PEACE PARKS RANGER #2

And kiss your wife?

The Rangers burst out laughing. Red glances down at his engagement ring, then loosens his grip on the leash. Redbone stares at the rangers, waiting for Red's command. When SADF Ranger #1 makes a clicking sound with his tongue, Black Redbone lays down passively, obedient to command.

SAWC RANGER
(off Red's look)
Happy World Ranger Day.

Pronounced "SAAWEK," the ranger sports insignias from the Southern African Wildlife College and Peace Parks Foundation on his sleeve.

Jan and Reeva take their seats behind three new Gabonese Ranger recruits, joining their team, the Big Cat Liberation Group "BORN FREE." Two plainclothes detectives and two SAPS police officers flank Simon Gumbi, SADC Executive Secretariat, on either side of the podium as he addresses the Room of Pros. Seated on stage with Simon are Jan, Reeva, Tim, and Chinese CITES Agent WEI-ZHANG LI "Weili" (20s).

SIMON GUMBI
(addressing the crowd)
Welcome to Ndzalama, a Southern African Development Community-owned reserve. My name is Simon Gumbi, SADC Executive Secretariat from Gaborone, Botswana. Ndzalama, meaning "sacred rocks," rests on the borders of South Africa and Lesotho. The National Reserve Conservation and Development Project has a rich and diverse range of plant and bird species and soon to be Elephantidae to complete the Big 5.

They exchange looks and return their attention to the podium.

CHASEN GOMES
How do you explain the compact?

BLAKE FUCHS
I think when he said "Bull," he wasn't talking about Elephant.

SIMON GUMBI
My people run the reserve in partnership with the nonprofit Wildland Conservation Trust, employing hundreds of people, offering Rangers-in-training and internships in anti-poaching.
(MORE)

SIMON GUMBI (CONT'D)

The rangers are hired from
neighbouring communities to protect
our main source of revenue, the
Rhino.

The room shifts.

SIMON GUMBI (CONT'D)

The big question is the
sustainability of these operations.
How long can this last? How long
can we keep purchasing and flying a
helicopter that costs \$1,000 an
hour? Military intervention can
only be a short-term strategy; in
the long term, what's needed is
support from the international
community. Otherwise, conservation
will never be successful. This
project seeks to raise funds to
build on the framework and
cooperation between the rest of the
world and South African tourism.

(without hesitation)

We offer three gourmet meals
prepared daily at the main
building. We gladly accept all
major methods of payment and of
course, American Express.

Murmurs from a dozen Mozambique Peace Parks Rangers sitting
in aisle seats.

SIMON GUMBI (CONT'D)

Okay, lets proceed-

PEACE PARKS RANGER #1

-What about overtime?

SIMON GUMBI

W-What about it?

PEACE PARKS RANGER #2

We come from dilapidated camps with
no electricity or running water,
and sometimes we live out in the
bush for months at a time.

SIMON GUMBI

This isn't what this convention is
about.

Reeva leans over, softly to Weili.

REEVA GOODALL

This is a convention?

Weili shrugs her shoulders.

PEACE PARKS RANGER #1

This job is high stress. I haven't seen my wife in five months.

PEACE PARKS RANGER #2

Sometimes my family feels like I care more about the Rhino than I care about them.

PEACE PARKS RANGER #1

The Rangers in South Africa are well supported and well looked after. But we have not had a break in three or four years now.

The Peace Parks Rangers stand in protest, their mental and physical exhaustion evident. The atmosphere is tense as Simon Gumbi speaks to a room full of volunteers. The Peace Rangers leave the room, drawing the attention of everyone present.

SIMON GUMBI

Let me remind you. Everyone on this Task Force, are here as volunteers. Not everything is about money. This is not Mozambique.

Around a dozen or so Peace Rangers, hailing from various parks, exit. The flickering light of torches cast eerie shadows over the faces of the group gathered in the lodge. CHRISTIAN MARONGA, a rugged Gabonese Ranger, stands up.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

We are from Gabon. Our Rangers are underpaid and under appreciated, yet you ask them to do the most important job in the world: to defend the heart and lungs of the planet. Have some respect.

SIMON GUMBI

Most African countries don't have the mandate and political will from the top down, unlike Gabon, and you people.

(re: Peace Rangers)

Their concentration lapses at crucial moments will make them susceptible to becoming double agents, or even worse, poachers.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

You so-called "conservationists"
are clueless about the realities on
the ground. You sit in your fancy
suits, raking in donations and
sympathy dollars, while we're out
there in the trenches, risking our
lives to protect endangered species
from faceless devils. For what? For
who? America? China?

Simon steps off the stage, and Weili takes his place. She has
an air of confidence and intelligence about her.

WEILI

Hello?

(adjusts the mic)

H-Hello? My name is Zhao Weili,
CITES secretariat. I am from the
Guangxi province in China...

CHASEN GOMES

Louder. We can't hear you in the
back!

Tim Kennedy shoots him a look and puts an end to it.

WEILI

You all think China is the only
market for Elephant tusks and Rhino
horn. But this is an outdated
stereotype. Today, China is
listening to the voices of its new
generation and has taken steps to
fight this scourge alongside, BORN
FREE, CITES, SANPARKS and VETPAW.
Lets not approach this strategy as
a dandelion but as four or five
strong flowers. That is better than
one thousand dandelions any day.

BLAKE FUCHS

(to Chase)

Did she say Guangxi province? Isn't
that where they have the Dog eating
Festival?

CHASEN GOMES

I have a question: As a dog lover,
something that is close to my
heart... are you people still
munching on pooches?

BLAKE FUCHS

Valid.

WEILI

Okay so maybe I share a funny fact with you. I am coming from the exact province where this dog eating festival is hosted. The biggest group of activists are from China and especially Guangxi province. So, I appreciate your activism, but to answer your question, I have never eaten dog, especially the younger generation.

A Gabonese Rangers in the aisle seat up front, lashes out!

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

What about the people in charge? By the time your generation takes control of the party, it would be too late. There would be no Elephant or Rhino to protect.

SIMON GUMBI

Christian, this is what the Nest was designed for. Miss Zhao is part of the task force. Our generation must learn to lead. We need to strengthen relationships between our countries, not go backwards.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

Right now our leaders sit in Tzaneen, strengthening their pockets.

The Rangers are agitated. Most seem to agree with everything Christian says.

SADF RANGER #1

Most of the time, no, all of the time we ride around... you hear a gunshot... Ha! It's too late.

SADF RANGER #2

By the time we find a carcass, the vultures are full.

SADF RANGER #1

We are chasing shadows!

The tension in the room is palpable. Jan Landis abruptly takes the stage, replacing Simon and plunging an Okapi knife into the pulpit.

JAN LANDIS

Manne!

The room falls silent, struck by the weight of Jan's commanding presence. He represents a long line of Afrikaans authoritarianism that stretches back to the Transvaal era when his forefathers fought for their place among the African tribes.

JAN LANDIS (CONT'D)

I don't care about Elephants or Rhino, because I know what Man is capable of. All I care about is this land and the people who decided to stay. When they're done hacking the big five and every animal into extinction, who do you think they'll come for next?

Jan sits down, leaving the knife in place as a chilling reminder.

REEVA GOODALL

Dankie... Jan.

Zhao takes a seat, and Reeva takes her place at the podium.

REEVA GOODALL (CONT'D)

I think what Jan is trying to say is, the loss of valuable resources is directly tied to the devastation of our planet's ecosystems and affects us all. That's why we work tirelessly to protect and preserve the natural world--

Reeva looks over at Jan who gives her the thumbs up.

JAN LANDIS

PR spin, really?

REEVA GOODALL

(clears her throat)

As Simon has said, this is a joint operation. NGOs and international agencies are here today with a simple aim: to combat illegal trade in wildlife and fauna specimens.

(MORE)

REEVA GOODALL (CONT'D)

If we fail, we must ensure that it does not threaten the survival of species in the wild. While we can control what happens within our borders, we have no authority over international trade in these species. However, since CoPl8, international pressure has been building against wildlife crime syndicates. Commitments from our governments create task forces as organised as this one to combat highly trained wildlife trafficking syndicates. So, why has poaching increased despite international pressure? We are targeting one specific syndicate, "the Ring". There are five topologies in their organization.

The lights go out, and the projector whirs to life.

(ON SCREEN, EACH SLIDE REVEALS A NEW LEVEL IN "THE RING")

LEVEL 1 "POACHER" – A picture of Mayo-Sande, the infamous "Zimbabwean national poacher", blending in with the good guys by wearing full Kruger Park Ranger uniform in a group photo-op with a group of Rangers.

LEVEL 2 "GUN MASTER" – A picture of Robert "Otto" Vickers and Yang Zhilie with the words "extradition to China" next to his.

LEVEL 3 "THE DEALER" – The words "Sapa Pak", and circled in Red "Vietnamese diplomat"?

LEVEL 4 "EXPORTER" – A hazy image of an Egyptian middle-aged woman Rebah "real name unknown" and "international smuggler".

LEVEL 5 "CONSUMER" – A sheik, European royals, presidents, millionaire politicians, all whose faces are obscured.

REEVA GOODALL (CONT'D)

Mayo-Sande is on the run from Botswana's finest.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

He's crossed over our border for the last time.

Reeva and Weili exchange looks not sure to what he's referring to.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA (CONT'D)

We need to put an end to this once
and for all.

REEVA GOODALL

That's why we're here tonight. The
CITES directive has made it harder
for these criminals to hide behind
their diplomatic immunity. It's
time to hold them accountable.

Reeva clicks to the next slide, revealing a picture of a
cheetah chasing a rabbit in the Arabian desert.

REEVA GOODALL (CONT'D)

The illegal exotic animal trade is
becoming more and more prevalent.
The extinction of the rhino is
imminent, and the biggest threat we
face is the exploitation of exotic
animals.

The next slide shows Arab men dressed in traditional garb
posing with cheetahs in luxury 4x4s.

REEVA GOODALL (CONT'D)

Traditional medicines and arcane
hunting are having a devastating
impact on big cat populations. And
with the increase of new money in
the Middle East, the exotic animal
trade has spiked.

Another slide shows a pride of lionesses ripping apart a
domesticated cow as Middle Eastern suburbanites take selfies.

REEVA GOODALL (CONT'D)

But it's the new trend on social
media that is the most disturbing.

More slides follow: a chimp in an elaborate stroller, a
cheetah prowling past a yellow Lamborghini, a lion cub in a
Louis Vuitton carrier.

SADF RANGER

People will never stop buying,
eating, consuming.

SAWC RANGER

How can we stop this?

Weilli's phone rings, and the lights snap on. The mood in the
room changes.

WEILI

We need to make conservation aspirational. Like astronauts, or presidents.

The room is filled with tension as the group exchanges glances.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

"Presidents"? Be realistic.

REEVA GOODALL

Okay, maybe not that last one.

CHASEN GOMES

Oh, look at that, you're a 'companion animal.' Only 40,000 years too late.

TIM KENNEDY

Enough, Chase. We get it.

WEILI

Do you know what country is the largest importer of Ivory?

The group looks around, confused.

WEILI (CONT'D)

United States.

BLAKE FUCHS

Bullshit.

Blake raises his eyebrows, while Tim remains unsurprised.

REEVA GOODALL

Let's hold off on the questions for now. CITES will coordinate with the State Security. Which is why Weili is heading this operation in coordination with Jackie van der Beek of Interpol. (Ignoring the jeering) Our focus is targeting the smaller players in 'the Ring.' Mayo is not the target, he is insignificant, but he may lead us to someone at the top. Which is why we need him alive.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

For what? Leverage?!

The tension in the room intensifies.

Weili looks to Reeva for guidance, but she is on an important phone call.

WEILI

W-We have an undercover agent in their organization!

The room freezes, then like molasses it settles.

WEILI (CONT'D)

He is tasked with disrupting the supply train, shaking the tree. We don't know when the exchange will take place, but we do know that a massive supply of black gold is scheduled to depart South Africa for an unknown destination, very soon.

TIM KENNEDY

(leaning forward)

Who's the Agent?

WEILI

I can't say.

Tim looks disappointed, feeling that the group doesn't trust him.

TIM KENNEDY

I understand why you wouldn't trust us. China and the US have a complicated relationship.

WEILI

The US withdrew itself from the World Health Organisation, UN Human Rights Watch and threatened to remove itself from almost every partnership it signed. We're not the same thing.

TIM KENNEDY

Like I said, "complicated."

A cold breeze sweeps through the room, and an uncomfortable pause ensues. Tim looks up at Weili, who is fidgeting with the remote.

REEVA
(stepping in)
I know you have questions, Mr.
Kennedy, but it's in everyone's
interest that the agent remains
anonymous.

Chase interjects, his tone impatient.

CHASEN GOMES
All L.T wants to know is who's
watching whose back around here.

Blake Fuchs adds his two cents.

BLAKE FUCHS
I mean, I've never seen troopers
walk out of an op mid-briefing.

Reeva, fed up with the bickering, cuts in.

REEVA GOODALL
What do you want?

CHASEN GOMES
I want her (re: Weili) to apologise
for what she said about my country.

BLAKE FUCHS
Valid ask.

Weili responds calmly, trying to smooth over the situation.

WEILI
I know it is frustrating for
someone from the outside to
understand our culture. The
American market for diamonds for
gift giving goes back to the 1930s.
But ivory carving for gift giving
goes back centuries. Ivory means
love just like diamonds mean love,
even if it is a blood diamond.

The room settles, and Chase touches his diamond engagement
ring.

SIMON GUMBI
Eh, World War 3.

The non-American and non-Chinese members of the group
chuckle.

Tim Kennedy refocuses the conversation.

CHASEN GOMES

So, China keeps secrets from us and runs their own secondary operation?

WEILI

This is not the army. Everyone here today, are volunteers.

Reeva interjects, trying to bring everyone back to the main mission.

REEVA GOODALL

VETPAW is a nonpartisan NGO launching a new joint operation to coincide with our task here today, led by Tim Kennedy. Tim?

Tim stands and walks up on the stage, addressing the group.

Tim clicks to the next slide, revealing a picture of a Cape Lion with a massive black mane, overexposed on the wall.

TIM KENNEDY

Our primary mission, is to retrieve a black-maned lion that recently made international news and relocate it to the park. This is no ordinary lion, but a rare subspecies of the African Lion, weighing in over 300 (pauses) or 272 kilograms. Reeva is correct, we are partisan in our operations in Africa, but we are Americans first.

Tim gracefully takes his seat.

REEVA GOODALL

I hope that when this international "crisis" is over, our partners from the United States will stick around a little longer.

WEILI

And maybe, for once, see through an international treaty.

Jan notices that the Okapi is missing and shifts in his seat. He shoots a look at Tim, who twirls the knife in his hand. Jan knows that if he has to ask for it back, he's already lost it.

SIMON GUMBI

Okay, manne. You heard the Lady. We leave first thing in the morning.

But Reeva interrupts with a sense of urgency.

REEVA GOODALL

No. We have to leave tonight.

The room becomes uneasy.

CHRISTIAN MARONGA

Why are we still talking? Lets go.

SIMON GUMBI

My men are short-staffed, and they don't get paid overtime. Why tonight? Why all of a sudden?

Reeva responds with conviction.

REEVA GOODALL

I got a tip. Mayo Sande is being held in a village in Limpopo. That's all I can say for now.

The atmosphere is tense as the team strategizes. Tim Kennedy proposes a plan to split into two teams, each working on a different lead to catch the elusive lion terrorising the park.

TIM KENNEDY

We should split up into two teams to follow up on the lead and link up with SANParks and the rest of the team at the Park to catch that thing.

Simon Gumbi, who knows the stakes are high and the orders come from the government, agrees to the plan, and they all get ready to leave.

SIMON GUMBI

Alright we'll converge at the Letaba basin near the Park, where a helicopter will take the two teams to search for the Lion.

(beat)

Miriam will take your payments.

As they prepare to depart, Reeva notices Zhao on her phone and asks who she's talking to.

REEVA

Who're you talking to?

Zhao responds cryptically, telling Reeva to first reveal her source.

WEILI

You first.

But before she can respond, Tim leaves, and Reeva follows shortly after, catching him in conversation with another woman, Carol, saying their goodbyes.

EXT. SACRED ROCKS GAME LODGE - NIGHT

The night sky is clear, and the stars twinkle above, unobstructed by city lights. A crowd gathers at the braai area of the reserve's main camp. The SAWC Rangers and two Peace Park vets share a bottle of champagne and discuss anti-poaching tactics with the SANParks Rangers.

Canadian trainees shower the dogs with love and attention.

Tim walks towards the edge of the lodge overlooking the Crocodile River, which curls around it like a moat. Reeva is already there, lost in thought.

TIM

Breathtaking view, it's no Montana
but it'll do.

Tim gazes out at the river.

REEVA

Under all this beauty lies an
ugliness that's hard to defend,
even for me. But apart from the
rampant crime and corruption, it's
not bad to look at. I may not be an
idealist but you won't hear me say,
(spreads her arms wide)
"This is the way Africa should be."

TIM

The U.S. is the world heavyweight
champions of idealism. I'm nothing
like them, neither miss.

Reeva raises an eyebrow.

REEVA

Miss?

Tim offers to escort Reeva back to her chalet, and she bows her head in gratitude.

EXT. SACRED ROCKS - CHALETS - NIGHT

Tim and Reeva reach her chalet.

TIM
You're right.

REEVA
About what?

TIM
VETPAW is non-partisan, but we can't afford to compromise the unit. We don't take sides, but the guys aren't so sure about your friend.

REEVA
Why are you here, Tim? Why did you come to Africa? Was it for the people, the animals, or China?

Reeva turns to the key on her door. Tim grabs her hand.

REEVA (CONT'D)
Who was she, that woman you were talking to? D-C-S? C-I-A?

TIM
I promise you we're not here to step on anyone's toes. Our mandate-

REEVA
Spare me the marketing spiel, Tim. I believe the US sees Africa solely as a strategic military outpost. I'm not defending China, by any means, but Russia and the US make up 75% of all arms sold in Africa. If you're here to "kill bad guys", I promise you, you're pointing your gun in the wrong direction.

She pulls her hand away, turns and grabs the door handle.

TIM
Corruption will never go away because there's nothing to take its place. In this worlds, you just have to learn who to trust.

Reeva hesitates for a moment before taking her hand off the door handle and turning back to face Tim, ready to talk.

EXT. MOTEL TZANEEN - RECEPTION - DAY

Robert storms over to the front desk and slams the keys down onto the counter. Joanne whirls around, still holding the office phone to her ear.

On the TV, a LIVE NEWS CHOPPER captures footage of a man being dragged off by an angry mob. The headline reads: "LIMPOPO - POACHER WEARING KRUGER NATIONAL PARK RANGER UNIFORM CAUGHT BY GA-MODJADJI RESIDENTS."

Joanne takes the keys and hands over Robert's I.D and R200 deposit.

JOANNE

Dankie meneer "Bismarck Du
Plessis."

Joanne gives him a suspicious look. "Bismarck Du Plessis" is also the name of a famous Springboks Rugby Player.

Robert places the I.D and money in his wallet, then grabs an "Anti-Fog Membrane Car Mirror Film Protector" and pays for it.

Joanne takes a "Animal Colouring book" off a rack.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

Vir die meisie?
(For the girl?)

Robert studies her. She's fishing, trying to buy time.

ROBERT

She's gone home, but I still have a
soft spot for animals.

Joanne raises an eyebrow at Robert's response, sensing there might be more to the situation than she initially thought. She decides not to press the matter further, instead opting to give Robert a curious look as he takes the colouring book.

Robert holds the door for Dirk and several WORKERS carrying chairs and banners reading "Pachyderm - Improving China/Africa Relations" from the business centre enter. One worker's jacket catches on the door frame, revealing a 9mm Glock 17 (Police issue) in its holster.

EXT. MOTEL TZANEEN - PARKING LOT

Robert strides purposefully towards his truck, deftly pressing the button on his keys to unlock it.

Once at the vehicle, he quickly applies Waterproof Anti-Fog Membranes to the side-mirrors and scans his surroundings.

Suddenly, his phone rings. He opens the door and reaches for his smokes before lighting up and answering the call.

HAO XIANG CHI (O.S.)

I have plenty space in my carry-on luggage. Will you help me to heavy the load?

ROBERT

(tense, into phone)

Who is this?

HAO XIANG CHI (O.S.)

My name is Mister Chi. Our friend from Laos told me you are a very resourceful man.

Robert gets out, looks around, scanning faces, with suspicion.

ROBERT

Right. Mr. Chi. I'm afraid I need more time. These things take time.

As he speaks, the dome lights flash, and he turns to face the truck. When the lights die, he quickly surveys a one tonne builders bag from the cargo bed. Satisfied that the Black Gold cargo is still there, he closes the back door.

HAO XIANG CHI (O.S.)

You are not very good at reading the tea leaves. Summit is four days. You have two.

The call cuts.

INT. DUIWEL (PARKED)

Robert gets into the driver's seat of his truck and adjusts the rear-view mirror. Suddenly, the passenger door opens, and Shang-Wen Li (20s) enters, extending his hand to Robert.

ROBERT

(startled)

Who the hell are you?

SHANG-LI

I'm here to ensure that you procure every item on this list, as requested by my client.

Robert doesn't take his hand, and Shang-Li begins writing in his daily planner.

ROBERT

Mr. Chi?

SHANG-LI

My father. I'm also his accountant.

ROBERT

What, are you all related?

Shang-Li tears out a page from his planner and hands it to Robert, who rejects it.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(waves the list)

I have my own.

(tosses the cell to him)

Call your boss.

SHANG-LI

(tosses it back to Robert)

You'll never meet him. And you'll never hear from him again.

(off his look)

You didn't think we were going to let you handle the largest consignment in our organisation's history without any oversight?

Robert notices a Chinese security detail walking towards a Black Mercedes parked nearby.

ROBERT

What is my phone number on the "smugglers anonymous phone-book" or something?

SHANG-LI

Don't be silly. It's on a database.

Shang-Li points to the Mercedes in the lot.

Robert tightens his grip around the builder's bag and hops out.

STILL INSIDE THE TRUCK: Robert walks over to the Mercedes where a Chinese man in all black pops the boot. Robert puts the bag inside and the boot closes. Next to the number plate reads: 茶叶 Cháyè. The words "Tea Leaves" appear over VFX.

Suddenly Robert is surrounded by Collin Visser, a four-year veteran of the anti-poaching unit, and several members of the FLYING SQUAD team, and the begin shouting orders to Robert.

COLLIN VISSER

Get down! Down! Now!

Undercover cops walk past Collin Visser and pigpile Robert. Collin Visser chews gum, exuding confidence and glad to be a cop. He is always the smartest guy in any given room, but only if that room is in a small town.

Collin Visser opens the boot and looks inside the one-tonne bag, pleased with himself.

COLLIN VISSER (CONT'D)

(to Robert)

It's people like you who give our people a bad name.

Robert is lying side-by-side on the tarmac next to the Chinese Man, who winks casually at him.

CHINESE DIPLOMAT

Do you know who I am?

Collin pats him down and finds a 4.5 Magnum and a diplomatic passport.

COLLIN VISSER

Moerskont? Is that your name? Your mother never loved you.

(off his sly grin)

What makes you think I won't turn your brains into umqombothi, right now, huh?

CHINESE DIPLOMAT

Because of that... (pointing).

Collin looks up, following his finger to the number plate on the Mercedes.

MILTON JACOBS (O.S.)

State Security. Get your knee off of that man's neck. Do you know who I am?

Collin looks up at Milton, flanked by two SSA agents.

COLLIN VISSER

I know who you are, sir-

Collin raises his knee and lifts the diplomat up to his feet. The rest of his squad exchange confused looks, thinking this is going to be an open and shut case.

MILTON JACOBS

Him too.

Milton motions to Collin, who reluctantly helps Robert up to his feet. The SSA agents motion to the SAPS cops to stand down. Milton takes Collin aside.

MILTON JACOBS (CONT'D)

Mopani Flying Squad? You're a long way from Phalaborwa.

COLLIN VISSER

Our resources are thinning and I-

MILTON JACOBS

It's okay. I'm from Warmbaths, I understand small town politics better than anyone. I like you. You have ambition, but judging by your age, I'd say you've peaked. So, why don't you do us all a favour and tell these men you made a mistake and you apologise for wasting their time and the city's resources.

Collin gestures to the members of Flying Squad who stand around waiting for orders, and walk back to the reception where Joanne is waiting.

Milton picks up a set of car keys and hands it to Robert.

MILTON JACOBS (CONT'D)

I suggest you hit the road Mr. Vickers. You don't have much time. Tomorrow, he'll give a statement to the media. I'm going to toss him a bone. A tonne of bones.

Robert goes down to grab the one-tonne bag but Milton motions to Collin and the SAPS cops and Milton shakes his head 'no'.

INT. DUIWEL - SAME

Robert gets into his car. Outside, SSA agents escort the Diplomat back into the building, leaving SAPS to clean up the mess. Shang-Li sits in the passenger seat, clicking in his seatbelt and putting on sunglasses.

SHANG-LI

That's all the Black Gold you have?
That won't cut it.

ROBERT

Had. That was all the black gold I
had. Past tense.

SHANG-LI

Then you'll have to find more. Much
more. The exotic is for a Consumer
in Spain, with expensive taste, so
you'll have to pull out all the
stops.

ROBERT

Spain, as in Europe?

SHANG-LI

No. Spain, as in Africa.

ROBERT

Morocco.
(nods)

Shang-Li clicks in his seatbelt. Puts on sunglasses.

SHANG-LI

Mister Vickers, this is the cost
for your ambition. My only hope, is
that you don't smoke.

Shang-Li brings up the window.

INT. DUIWEL (TRAVELLING)

Robert smokes. Shang-Li wafts the smoke out of the window.

Robert brings the window down and gazes out at the cloudless
sky. He's completely unaware of the drama unfolding behind
him.

OUTSIDE

Beneath the tarp at the back of the truck, there's sudden
movement. Someone is there, stirring beneath the heavy canvas
cover.

PEEKING OUT OF THE BACK, it's Rhodesia, who snuck in the
truck undetected. She knows she shouldn't be there, but she's
determined to explore the world that she is destined to
inherit as the "Rain Queen."