

JUNGLE HAWK SERIES

2. The Octopus



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THE OCTOPUS

by

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and

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SUMMARY

Deep in the heart of the untamed Congo jungle, the Jungle Hawk, hunter, protector, and master of survival, finds himself drawn into a deadly game when a dying pilot whispers about a shadowy organization known as the Octopus. With his unparalleled jungle skills, the Hawk embarks on a mission to unravel the web of secrets surrounding a sinister conspiracy that threatens not only the jungle but the world beyond it.

Faced with a series of escalating dangers, bloodthirsty vampire bats, prehistoric beasts, and treacherous swamps, the Hawk's journey pits him against both nature's fury and the darkest depths of human ambition. Along the way, he uncovers a network of betrayal, political intrigue, and the echoes of a powerful enemy hidden within the jungle's depths. But the jungle is not just his battleground, it is his ally. With only his bow, knife, and unyielding courage, the Jungle Hawk ventures into the unknown to confront forces far greater than himself. Secrets of a global espionage organization unravel, and the survival of not just the Hawk but countless lives hangs by a thread.

Will the Jungle Hawk outwit the Octopus and its deadly grip on the region, or will the jungle itself become his final resting place? For those seeking an adrenaline-pumping tale of courage, resilience, and the timeless battle of good versus evil, *The Octopus* is a must-read.

EXTRACT

Ten paces, nine, eight, seven... The buck tore a juicy leaf from the ivy wall, which surrounded the game path, coughed a little, and continued his trek to the water. Six paces, five paces...

The long hunting knife already rested in the Hawk's palm.

Now the buck was only four paces from the Hawk's position. The Jungle Man lifted himself slightly. Fine and perfect lay the muscles on his broad back.

The buck was below him, then one pace, two paces past. Like a cat, the Hawk left his hiding place and landed on the back of the buck, which snorted in fright and staggered onto its knees.

With one powerful hand, the Hawk caught the sharp horns, before they could fork backward. He slid off the buck's back and grabbed it by the neck. Back and forth they went. A fine dust cloud rose from the brittle ground. They bumped against a wall of vines and then struggled and thrashed back onto the path.

Powerful fingers grabbed the buck by its nose and bent its head sideways. In the struggle for life and death, the hunting knife had earlier been knocked out of the Hawk's hand. He planted his legs wide apart and leaned heavily against the struggling bushbuck ram's neck. Large bulges appeared on the Jungle Man's arms, as he slowly but surely began to bend the buck's neck backward. The animal bellowed wildly. Its warm breath was here in the Hawk's face. The buck's front legs were splayed wide. Then something snapped. The Hawk pressed harder. Again something snapped. A pitiful bellow escaped the graceful animal's throat and died away in the jungle. The buck's legs buckled. Shortly afterwards he lay kicking and with a broken neck on the ground. The Hawk hurried to his hunting knife which lay to one side and cut the animal's artery. He had barely finished this when he saw the first pair of jackals come running. Pointed noses and alert ears, with voracity clearly written in their hungry eyes.

2. THE OCTOPUS

Chapter 1 THE OCTOPUS

Like a man possessed, the Jungle Hawk, powerful king of the dense Congo forest in Central Africa, rushed through the highest treetops. Under him, fleeing antelopes, predators, and even big game tear through the dense vegetation in panic. High above, like a silver speck against the blue sky, the supple jet fighter comes droning closer again.

A few moments later, the steel bullets from under its pointed wings clatter down on the jungle. The highest treetops bend under the windstorm that it causes as it lets its graceful body swipe past them at close range. Moments later, a high-pitched whistling sound strikes the jungle. Lions roar anxiously. Elephants trumpet in fear and burst a path through the bushes, while their heavy feet literally make the earth tremble.

Thirty feet away, the Hawk's powerful body floats through the air before his fingers accurately grasp the next liana. A troop of fleeing maned apes scampers past him and makes a noise as if their last day has come. Birds flutter in terror through the branches. Some flee between the vines, into the blue sky.

Miles away, the agile jet fighter is busy soaring into the air and slowly turning its nose around to sow another round of destruction over the jungle.

The Hawk came across the red parachute, which was hooked to the highest treetops, so suddenly that he almost lost his balance when he stopped on a branch. His piercing blue eyes briefly take in the scene before him.

A few thinner branches lie askew as they tore after the pilot on the parachute hit them.

Hastily, the Hawk swings over to where a man hangs lifelessly between the branches in front of him. His thick flight suit is torn and stained with blood. His oxygen apparatus has been torn clean from his back.

The Jungle Man's razor-sharp hunting knife gleams in the sun's rays that funnel through the broad leaves here. Feverishly, the Hawk works and cuts through the nylon straps that bind the lifeless man to the

parachute. His ears are pricked to the extreme as he tries to determine where that deadly jet fighter is now.

He grabs the man by his collar as the last nylon strap slips loose. Hastily, he throws the limp body over a broad, sun-tanned shoulder and clammers down to lower branches.

At that moment, the first steel bullets splatter through the branches, tear broad leaves into shreds, graze howling away from iron-tough trunks, bore with dull thuds, thumbs deep into the ancient trees, and whistle over the Hawk's head. Then the powerful jet fighter sweeps low over the forest, followed by a high-pitched whistling sound and trembling treetops.

Below and around him, big and small game flee, shout, and squawk anew, while the fear of death makes them completely berserk. Apes flee confused, bump each other off branches and ivy vines, and storm past the Hawk so that he can see the red of their throats and the razor-sharp fangs.

Carefully, the Congo King lays the man down on a broad branch. With brute force, he tears the man's clothes off his upper body and listens to his heart. He sighs with relief when he hears the light heartbeat. However, the man is bleeding badly where one steel bullet has torn through his chest and another through one of his legs.

The Hawk realizes that the man before him will not last long without medical treatment. His eyes wander to the blue of the sky that is visible in snippets between the shaggy canopy. But now everything is quiet. Far and faint, he can still hear the high-pitched whistling sound of the jet fighter.

He plucks a broad leaf from a branch next to him, knocks a large, fat spider clean out of its web, crumples the sticky threads together, and presses them into the bleeding wounds of the unconscious stranger. Then he places the leaf over the wound in the man's chest and binds it with a piece of thin vine. He does the same with his leg, swings the man over his shoulder, and slides down a gnarled vine to the damp, brittle ground, eighty feet lower.

Hastily, with even movements to cause the strange aviator as little discomfort as possible, the Hawk begins to weave between the dense bushes in the direction of the waiting South Africans.

His mighty chest rises and falls slightly, and the supple muscles roll powerfully under his copper-brown skin.

High above, he still hears the jet fighter moving.

Questions grow in his mind. Strange questions for which he currently can find no answers. Who is this man on his shoulder? Why was his plane shot down, and by whom?

A dense bamboo forest blocks his path and forces the Hawk to change direction.

While running, he thinks of the five South Africans and their native porters, whom he rescued from the clutches of the fanatic Basan in the Valley of Sheba. (read Gold City of Sheba) He was busy guiding them back to civilization when they saw the two fighting planes high above the jungle. One was shot down, but its aviator jumped out with a parachute.

This aviator now hangs limp and lifeless over the Hawk's broad shoulder.

The undergrowth gradually begins to thin out, and fifteen minutes later, the Hawk reaches the place where the group of Afrikaners and their frightened native porters are waiting for him.

The jet fighter, which has sped past low over the forest a few more times, is now only a speck in a northeastern direction.

Lena Landman, beautiful daughter of Prof. Karel Landman, Kurt Venter, Anthropology student, and Dr. Braam Kruger, spouse of Dr. Daleen Kruger, are the first to notice the Hawk with his motionless load. "Deon!" Lena exclaims with relief when she sees the Hawk, and rushes towards him, followed by Kurt and Dr. Kruger. Behind them come Daleen and Prof. Landman with his sparse goatee upright, where they were sitting on the soft grass.

The natives protest loudly in fright, and their eyes roll wildly in their black eye sockets.

"What... what happened? Is he... dead?" Lena gasps breathlessly as she stops in front of the Hawk and stares at him worriedly.

"He's just unconscious. Two wounds. He lost a lot of blood," says the Hawk matter-of-factly.

"Let me see." Dr. Kruger, the physician, steps forward. Carefully, the Hawk lays the limp body down. The stranger's eyelids are closed, his

face is pale, and his breathing is labored.

Daleen and Prof. Landman have now also arrived. Their eyes are wide and full of questions. Dr. Kruger looks up from where he has just felt the stranger's pulse.

"My bag, quickly Daleen," he commands his wife. She runs immediately to where their large packages of supplies lie.

"Kurt, tell the porters to help you light a fire. Heat water. It's a matter of life and death." Dr. Kruger bends over the wounds. He quickly looks at the Hawk.

"Your work?" He points to the leaves over the wounds. The Hawk nods. With practiced fingers, he loosens the ivy plant and pulls off the leaves. He shakes his head when he pulls the spider web out of the wounds.

"You jungle people! Must say it stopped the bleeding..."

"Here, old man," Daleen hands the medicine bag to Dr. Kruger. He opens the bag, looks for a small bottle of spray, disinfects the thin needle of the syringe as well as the wounded man's arm, and injects the tonic into his veins.

After this, he orders the Hawk to carry the unconscious man to the shade. On one side, Kurt is struggling to get the wood to burn.

Prof. Landman walks slowly after him, to the shady spot where the Hawk lays the stranger down. He continually tugs at his goatee and mumbles incomprehensible things to himself. Lena stays near the Hawk, content that nothing has happened to him.

In the meantime, the Hawk has begun to rummage in the stranger's pockets. Apart from a bunch of Belgian banknotes, two letters, a map of the Belgian Congo, and a small diary, there is nothing.

The two letters yield nothing. They were apparently written by the man's wife and are in Flemish. Nowhere does she mention his name. However, the diary quickly piques the Hawk's curiosity. It is full of notes, at least, so he suspects, but no matter how he looks, he can't make head or tail of it.

"Apparently a kind of code script," says Lena, looking over the crouching Hawk's shoulder at the contents of the book.

"Looks like it. I have a hunch that the contents of this will be able to clear up this whole mystery..." The Hawk sighs and gets up.

He looks at Dr. Kruger, who is working with the wounded man with the

help of his wife, and asks. “Will he make it?”

Dr. Kruger shakes his head. “Nothing is impossible, but I doubt it. The man is also injured internally.” The Hawk thinks of the broken branches where the man fell through the highest branches before the parachute got caught and left him swinging between heaven and earth.

“If only he can regain consciousness for a few minutes so that we can question him. Something bad is going on in the jungle, and I’m burning with curiosity to know what it is,” he says.

While the group is sitting in the shade around the wounded man a while later, their attention is suddenly drawn by a native, who shouts loudly and points with his arm in the direction from where the Hawk had just returned. Thick, dark clouds drift slowly over the forest and gradually funnel into the sky.

“What is it, Deon?” Lena calls out worriedly, while she comes to stand right next to the lithe Hawk.

“Smoke,” he says. “The jungle was naturally set on fire by that burning plane.”

“Will we... will the flames not come this way?” There is fear in Daleen’s voice.

The Hawk tests the wind and then looks at the sky where hail-white clouds are starting to gather. Then he shakes his head.

“I doubt it. This wind is blowing diagonally past us and will drive the flames past us to the south. Besides, I think the plane crashed on the other side of the river.”

He points to the sky. “The flames only have two hours before it rains.” Prof. Landman looks at him doubtfully.

“How do you know that?”

The Hawk’s strong, white teeth gleam, and Lena feels like she wants to cradle his attractive face in her hands. She suddenly wonders if this wild man with his civilized manners who calls himself “Jungle Hawk” wants to spend his whole life in this wilderness. She flatly refuses to call him by his “barbaric” name and prefers Deon, which is also his real name, as he told them in the Valley of Sheba. Deon Rossouw, he had said, son of an Afrikaans missionary who sacrificed his life in the service of his missionary work among the Matongas, a native tribe of the Belgian Congo. In the meantime, the Hawk has turned to Prof. Landman, and

he now answers his question. “When the bird starts building its nest, we know that new life is near. Just like that, I also know that the rain is very near.”

Prof. Landman mumbles something incomprehensible, cuts off a piece of chewing tobacco, and returns to a shady spot.

All interest in the burning jungle fades when Dr. Kruger suddenly exclaims that the wounded aviator is starting to recover. The Hawk kneels next to the wounded man, looks at his feverish lips, the streams of sweat that flow down his pale face, the hail-white bandage around his upper body.

The man groans, moves slightly, and groans again.

“He’s feverish,” says Dr. Kruger. “If he starts talking, he’ll probably be delirious. I don’t believe he’ll last longer than tonight...”

The man’s eyelids flicker open painfully, but close again immediately. His lips tremble, move slightly.

“No... no...” it stutters over his lips. Suddenly, he sits up and screams incoherently. Dr. Kruger pushes him back gently. The man fights under his hands. Words stream over his lips. Flemish words.

“Flames... no... the Octopus... I must die... die...”

He is silent for a moment, his eyes wide open, red. Sweat glistens on his face.

“Letitia... they have me,” he then bursts out again. “The Octopus... beware of... him. Flames. They are planning murder... murder... treason... the Kremlin.” He begins to cough. Blood forms on his lips, running in a fine stream diagonally over his chin.

Lena screams softly and grabs the Hawk by his arm. Prof. Landman has also shuffled closer, touches his goatee, and mumbles. “Stupid man.”

Then the stranger mumbles incomprehensibly again. Swamps. Wild animals. Murder. It makes no sense.

Dr. Kruger injects him with a tonic. A while later, the dying man calms down slightly. His breathing, still choppy, is nevertheless calmer. His bloodshot eyes rest for a moment on the Hawk, on Dr. Kruger, Lena, and the others.

“Who... who are you? My plane. They shot at me...”

Dr. Kruger comforts him. “Friends. We are friends.”

“Friends? Friends you say... not... not from the Octopus?”

His breathing becomes more difficult. Weakly, he searches for his pocket. “Here... in my pocket... book... give to Colonel Fleerackers... Leopoldstad.”

His head nods. His lips form “Letitia.” His eyelids close. He is dead... The long, muscular giant with blond hair, loincloth of leopard skin, hunting knife at his side, and supple bow over his torso, raises his arm warningly. Behind him, the South Africans and their porters gather together. A week behind them lies the Flemish man buried under a jungle giant. He died a few hours after his jet was shot down by another over the Congo forest, due to blood loss and exhaustion.

The Jungle Hawk stands on the edge of an opening. Before him, it is a hive of activity. Black warriors with glistening torsos and spears in their hands stand in a circle around the two whites who are trying in vain to make themselves understood.

Behind them is a rough wooden hut and further back, a small wooden church.

A world of memories falls on the Hawk. Here... here his father and mother, missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church from far-away South Africa, carried out their work with faithfulness and dedication.

And there, to one side, away from the people in the open, is the grave where his father and mother lie buried, after they succumbed to poisonous toadstools. Mpingo, or Good Heart, as the Matonga called his father...

“What is it, Deon? Who are these people?” Lena comes to stand right next to the lithe Jungle Man. The Hawk is startled out of his reverie.

“Oh, them?” He points with his hand to where the natives are excitedly babbling among themselves. “These are the Matonga.” His voice sounds proud. “My parents worked among them. There... do you see over there to one side? That is my parents’ grave.”

Prof. Landman steps closer curiously. “Old Rassie...” He thinks back to their student years, to old Rassie Rossouw, his great student friend, who left civilization to come and do his good work here, here in the wilderness where death lurks around every corner...

“But Deon, will they not murder those white people?” Dr. Daleen Kruger’s voice sounds concerned.

The Hawk smiles. “Not the Matonga. They are Christians.”