

JUNGLE HAWK SERIES

2. Tamar and the Invaders



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TAMAR AND THE INVADERS

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SUMMARY

In the shadow of an immense and mysterious jungle on the border of Uganda and the Congo, a series of disappearances brings together a group of unlikely allies, each with their own motivations and secrets. Leading the charge is Sandra Voronej, a determined and resourceful leader, and her team, sent to unravel the enigma surrounding prior expeditions that have vanished without a trace. Among whispers of supernatural phenomena and the haunting “spirit of the forest,” danger is ever-present.

Their quest soon reveals a hidden world governed by Tamar, a formidable and enigmatic figure who straddles the line between legend and man. His strength and uncanny connection to the jungle and its creatures unsettle the expedition, leaving them to question whether Tamar is their ally or their doom. As alliances shift and secrets unravel, the jungle becomes a crucible, testing the mettle, loyalty, and humanity of everyone involved.

Entwined in this web of intrigue is Tina Naude, the headstrong daughter of a powerful businessman, and her companions, Hennie and Dr. Naude. Their journey to escape a war-torn Congo thrusts them into the same perilous wilderness where Tamar rules. Tina’s fate takes an extraordinary turn when she encounters Tamar and is swept into his primal world. Torn between fear and awe, she grapples with her perceptions of civilization and the raw, untamed spirit of the jungle.

In “Tamar and the Invaders,” suspense, action, and mystery collide in a tale that explores the limits of human resilience and the profound impact of the unknown. As the secrets of Tamar and the forest unfold, readers are taken on an unforgettable journey that blurs the lines between the civilized and the primal, and between myth and reality.

EXTRACT

They talk little, and they also say nothing when they are tied to two poles in the open space between the huts. They do not even speculate about their fate, because simply talking about it creates images of torture for them.

The pygmies click and clack excitedly and cheerfully. The leader waves his arm at the two girls and then he ducks into one of the huts. A little while later he emerges and takes a seat on a stump in front of the hut in the morning sun. He leans back comfortably so that he sits there baking like a dassie.

Twenty paces from Tina and them, a few of the younger pygmies take up positions. She shudders and glances at Sandra as the dwarfs put their blowpipes in front of their mouths.

“Have they brought us here just to kill us?” she exclaims anxiously.

“I don’t think so, Tina,” Sandra replies quietly. “Why would they go to all the trouble? Undoubtedly they will eventually kill us, but I think it’s going to be a slow death.”

“But what are they going to do now?”

“We shall see.”

She hears the soft popping sounds, and for a fraction of a second, she sees the fine, white object arc through the air. She would hardly have known that the pygmies had blown out their dart if she hadn’t seen his puffed-out cheeks.

The pygmies laugh. The one who blew, shakes his head in embarrassment. They are shooting at targets.

A second one blows out her dart. Her body jerks as she feels the prick as if from the point of a needle on her throat. The pygmies cheer the shot loudly.

2. TAMAR AND THE INVADERS

Chapter 1

NIGHT OF TENSION

“Nonsense, Saranov!” The voice rasps through the crackling of the radio. “Your reasons sound unconvincing.”

Saranov clenches his fists. His stocky figure is half bent over the transmitter. The sweat that runs down his square forehead shines in the bright glow of the large fires. It throws flickering and dancing shadows against the dense, dark edge of the forest, which encloses them like a black, impenetrable fence. His thick lips are compressed, and in his small eyes, a look of despair can be seen.

Once more he looks around him. Above the crackling of the flames and the crackling of the radio, he tries to hear the frightening sounds of the untamed wilderness.

“But I tell you we are in mortal danger!” he finally bursts out. He sounds desperate, on the verge of irresponsibility, like one who will revolt against established authority at any moment.

“You repeat it ad nauseam,” comes the answer, after Saranov switches the device over. “What are the so-called dangers that apparently threaten you?”

“I tell you it is invisible. We are just constantly aware of it.”

“But how on earth do you expect us to heed your pleas, as long as you can’t give us the slightest indication of the nature and extent of your threat?”

“Is it necessary?” Saranov almost shouts. “You know that the previous expedition simply disappeared from the face of the earth.”

“Hogwash,” comes the curt reply. “Sandra Voronej and her company reached their destination. They requested that we urgently send supplies and reinforcements. Unfortunately, secrecy was so essential that the message was short and concise. She provided no details of the circumstances they encountered there.”

“But precisely,” Saranov insists. “The helicopter that was sent also disappeared without a trace. Even less has ever been heard from Sandra and them again. I tell you there must be something, something big, intangible, and terrible...” His whole body trembles with the tension he

is under. "It is this forest. It is immense and so powerful, it is driving me out of my mind it...!"

"Saranov!" barks the voice through the small speaker, "control yourself. It does not befit a man of your status and intelligence to carry on like a trembling child. Sandra got through. We know this. Most likely she and her company were picked up by the helicopter, but it crashed somewhere in the forest. You know that we have since made several reconnaissance flights over the mountain peaks. Nowhere did we notice signs of life or trouble. You will proceed with your assignment. You must find out what happened to your predecessors. We also want full details about the terrain, for the construction of our rocket base."

"I beg you," Saranov begins again, but he is coldly and abruptly interrupted.

"You will not contact us again unless you have important information to report. These long conversations are dangerous. No one may know of our plans. Someone may accidentally tune in to this wavelength at any time. All success forward, comrade."

There is a clear clicking sound. Then it is just the hum of the small device on the massive stump of dry wood, in front of the man, who has half shrunk as if the last words have crushed his spirit. Without his thoughts controlling the movement, he switches off the transmitter.

A distance from the small tent in the middle of the fires, ten native porters of the safari sit. They sit close to each other and close to the flames as if they find protection in them. They could not follow the conversation because they do not understand the white man's language, but from the sound of his voice, his expression and his gestures, it is clear to them with what anxious seriousness he spoke. They also see the fear in his eyes, this man who, at the beginning, when they were still close to civilization, had driven them forward with so much brutal recklessness. But now he is insignificant and small in the overwhelming power of nature, his bravado of before he has lost completely. With each crack of a dry twig, as a stump of wood is thrown on the fire and a few coals scatter, or when the lions roar in the distance and the hyenas laugh, Saranov swings the barrel of his sten gun with a jerk in that direction. Then his fingers, clammy with sweat, tighten their grip on the stock and the trigger.

But tonight, like the previous night, there is an ominous silence around them. Only now and then do they hear a soft rustling, as if a large body is carefully moving somewhere through the bushes and then rubbing against the leaves of plants in the process. And it is as if they are all aware that one influence or another has drawn a tight circle around them, an invisible something that is constantly present and has already chased all animals out of the area. It creates the impression of a supernatural power that has isolated the small company for its personal prey.

Behind Saranov sits a second white man. He also has a sten gun across his knees. He is quite a bit taller than his companion, but his shoulders are broad and powerful, although he pulls them slightly forward like a boxer. He also followed the conversation with a frowning forehead and an anxious look. Yet with him, there is not the intense fear of the other, as if he has less imagination and the unfamiliarity of their threat does not affect him so deeply. It is he who gets up first and shrugs his shoulders slightly.

“The fact remains, Saranov,” he says slowly. “Sandra and her expedition followed this same route and they reached the mountain peak.”

“But how do we know what misfortune they had?” Saranov cries out desperately.

“Then they must have overcome it,” the other answers philosophically. “I told you it would do us no good to once again request that we abandon the search. In any case,” he adds dryly, “you know well enough what will happen to us if we return with our tail between our legs. Then we won’t live long anyway.”

“But listen, Molenski. They could have at least sent a larger expedition. We are two men and a few useless servants. It’s easy for you to talk. You are trained for espionage. You know that death follows you like your own shadow. But I am a scientist. These things upset me!”

“It’s your mere imagination,” Molenski calmly replies. “Sandra and them were only four and she was a woman. If they could get through, so can we. A large company would have attracted attention. Secrecy is of the utmost importance, you know that well. We must try to find out what became of them and then complete their work.”

“I know! I know!” Saranov cries out. “I know that we can control all of Africa if we can succeed in establishing a strategically located rocket base, before anyone realizes what is going on. I also realize of what inestimable value it would have been if it already existed. With the current developments in the Congo, we would have had enough reason to intervene immediately. From there, it is but a step or two to world control.”

“And you are not willing to sacrifice your life for your people, your ideals and the future of the world?” Molenski remarks with a touch of sarcasm.

“Death makes my services useless,” Saranov simply snaps at him.

“In any case, I’m going to sleep now.”

“Sleep!” Saranov bursts out. “Who can still sleep under such circumstances?”

“Then you just sit and listen to nothing.” Without another word, Molenski bends into the tent opening.

Saranov glares after him. He realizes that he will have to pull himself together. It is as Molenski says. There is no choice for them. Moreover, it is a humiliation for him to expose his feelings to his colleague and to the natives. But still, Molenski’s calmness irritates him.

He walks around the fire to the group of porters. Their chief is an intelligent native, and they are all from the Baziru tribe who live in the northeastern corner of the Belgian Congo. Here Saranov hired them, after he and Molenski left the last bastion of civilization, along Lake Albert. He decided against hiring a white guide, as it would be necessary to get rid of this little group of Bazirus once they reached their destination.

They would have to explain their mission to a white guide and it would be more difficult to mislead them. Also, there are likely few who would venture into these unknown regions. Even Warango strongly objected when Saranov, after they had been on the road for a few days, informed him that they had to move southwards up the mountain ranges, along the border of the Congo. Warango shook his head violently. He informed Saranov that the thousands of square miles alongside are impenetrable and that nothing can exist there, except the pygmies and the gorillas. He also spoke of the mysterious spirit of the forest. But

after that he merely referred to it as a supernatural phenomenon. He could not provide any further details and Saranov quickly dismissed it as nonsense. Yet that reference is now the sharpest in his memory.

“It is very quiet tonight, Warango,” he says in a subdued tone, while his eyes again feel around to see through the pitch darkness outside the camp.

“It is quiet, bwana,” the chief replies, and his gaze also wanders anxiously around. Behind him the Bazirus sit huddled together.

“You would probably like to go back, Warango?” Saranov remarks as calmly as possible.

“Our homes are far away,” replies the Baziru. “We long strongly.”

“It seemed to me a few times that you might leave us in the lurch, Warango.”

“Never,” the native assures him vehemently, but Saranov knows that it is untrue. He also knows that Warango has grasped the threat in his words. But fortunately, he realizes that they will not dare to undertake the return journey alone at this stage, without the protection of the sten guns. Their fate is sealed with that of the two white men, for they have already advanced further south than any native has ever dared to.

“You spoke of the spirit of the forest a while ago, Warango,” says Saranov, still as conversational as he can.

“Auk!” cries the Baziru as if a sudden blow has been dealt to him. The others also shuffle uncomfortably around and many large, white pairs of eyes look terrified over their shoulders. “He is here, n’kos,” the Baziru then says in a whisper. “We feel him out there in the night.”

“But what or who is it?” Saranov wants to know.

“Warango does not know,” replies the native. “No one sees him. Everyone is afraid. The animals of the night run away. That is why it is so quiet, n’kos.”

“But what does he do then if no one has ever seen him?” Saranov can barely keep the fear out of his voice.

“He kills, n’kos. The black man who comes here never sees his house again. He can never tell.”

Saranov stands still for a while. The images that flash through his mind threaten to crumble him again into a trembling and sweating coward. He clings convulsively to his sten gun.

“And yet you came this far,” he says coolly.

“The weapon of the white man is strong, n’kos.”

“You mean that it is stronger than the spirit of the forest?”

“No one knows, n’kos. It is just better for the Baziru to stay nearby.”

Saranov can barely suppress a smile. Warango is not stupid. It is impossible for him to weigh the power of the firearm against the power of his superstition. But he prefers to enjoy the protection of the guns.

“These guns kill quickly,” is all that Saranov says. “A few of you should go to sleep now. The others must keep the fires burning. I will...” He sees the Baziru’s eyes widen and he sees the naked fear in them. He sees the helplessness of the native to open his lips and scream.

Saranov had already been tense. Now he swings around as if his muscles are steel springs that put him in motion. He had noticed that Warango was looking over his shoulder at something behind him.

The movement there between the two furthest fires catches his eye. The flames throw for the smallest fraction of a second, a pale glow on a white figure that disappears into the darkness with incredible speed and with absolute noiselessness. By the time Saranov raises the rapid-fire gun, however fast the gesture is in his opinion, the phantom has already disappeared.

And yet his finger tightens around the trigger. The shots thunder so quickly that one cannot be distinguished from the other.

A distressed scream bursts from the tent. Distraught with fright, Molenski storms out and then stands indecisively still. Saranov has released the trigger. Only the crackling of the flames is audible in the oppressive silence that has fallen on the camp.

“What the devil is going on?” Molenski then cries out. His voice is trembling, but he is also aggressive from the shock he had to endure through Saranov’s doing.

“There was something between the fires,” says Saranov barely audibly.

“Something!” Molenski bellows. “I have had quite enough of your ‘something.’ What was it, man?”

“I, I don’t really know. I...”

“The spirit of the forest,” mumbles Warango anxiously behind him and Saranov turns around slowly. The Bazirus sit anchored around the fire. A few have their hands over their heads as if they are expecting blows

from above. They are too afraid to look up.

“You saw it first, Warango,” says Saranov sternly. “What was it?”

“The spirit, n’kos. The spirit,” it trembles through trembling lips.

“The spirit’s foot!” barks Saranov, but uncontrollable anxiety throbs in his throat. “Just tell me what you saw.”

“He floats past the tent, n’kos, and he floats between the fires. That’s all.”

Saranov swings around. He had barely taken a step towards the tent before he freezes.

“What did you do with the transmitter, Saranov?” Molenski asks sharply.

“But it, it was there on the stump. What do you mean?”

“It’s not here now.” Molenski looks in all directions to make sure it hasn’t fallen off.

“Here, Saranov!” he then cries, “come look here.”

Saranov runs closer. He bends down beside Molenski.

Clearly in the soft ground are the tracks of something or someone who ran fast. It has the shape of five toes like a human’s. It is also the size of a normal man’s foot.

“Warango!” Saranov bellows. “Come look here.”

Hesitantly, the Baziru approaches. He stops a short distance from them as if he is too afraid to get too close to the place where he saw the spirit. Impatiently Saranov shouts at him and for safety’s sake, Warango comes to peer over the white man’s shoulder.

“What is it?” barks Saranov.

“The track, the track of a man, n’kos.”

“And would a spirit leave a track?” Saranov is suddenly full of courage again. Whoever or whatever it was that had flashed through the camp in a blink of an eye, is nevertheless something of flesh and blood. It is tangible and is dependent on the usual methods of moving across the earth. It will therefore be something that can be fought with normal weapons.

“Come,” says Molenski, and when Saranov hears the relief in his companion’s voice, he realizes for the first time that Molenski has only succeeded in not showing his true feelings because of his strict training. He was also firmly caught in the grip of the unknown danger.