

THE LION OF ENGAZIWA

Written by

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EXT. THE GATE - DAY

Darkness turns to light as BLESSING NZIMA(30) a small, strong Zulu game ranger, heaves open a massive, solid steel, sliding gate for two gleaming safari trucks.

The open, canopied Land Rovers drive in. The South African savannah stretches out in all its dusty, dangerous glory.

The chiseled driver of the front truck, JACO VAN DER MERWE (30, Afrikaans) turns to address his nine GUESTS with a thick accent.

JACO

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to  
Engaziwa, truly the wildest corner  
of Africa.

Having closed the gate, Blessing jumps into the second truck, empty bar the driver, CHARL (27, Afrikaans) Jaco's younger, less attractive brother.

JACO (CONT'D)

Getting access to this place,  
bringing guests here- *ach*- it's a  
dream come true for us Van Der  
Merwes. And we are honored to share  
this exciting first expedition with  
you all, especially Minister  
Masondo who *finally* saw the light  
and sold us the damn place!

The guests all chortle, including government Minister FEZILE MASONDO(55, Xhosa). The air is thick with nervous excitement.

JACO (CONT'D)

All joking aside, I have a feeling  
that we'll all remember the next  
few hours for the rest of our  
lives.

Jaco nods at MSIZI(45, Zulu). Msizi climbs onto the hood and sits in the game spotting chair at the front. Msizi's khaki shirt bears a 'Head Ranger' badge.

The vehicles drive on, leaving a 25' high, solid steel wall, topped with razor wire extending miles in both directions.

As they drive down the overgrown track, a hot, blonde American AMBER (22) calls out from the second row.

AMBER

What does 'Engaziwa' mean?

Jaco finds her in the rear-view and smiles.

JACO

It means unknown. Besides our scout crew, no people have been in here for 25 years.

EXT. THE PLAINS - DAY

Jaco's truck rolls to a stop amidst a sparse herd of Zebra, wildebeest, blesbok and impala.

A warthog family scurries across the road, tails-up, single file. Skittish ostrich preen themselves on the verge.

A giraffe lopes out from the trees, majestic in the evening light.

The animals pass close, seemingly oblivious to the vehicle, entralling the guests.

The second truck rolls up alongside. Charl climbs into its spotter seat with a telephoto lens and starts shooting.

Behind Jaco, sitting with his WIFE(45) SON(10), Minister Masondo struggles loudly with his camera. Some of the animals turn to the noise.

Jaco points to the half dozen GoPros attached to his vehicle. He then points to Charl, taking photos from the second truck.

JACO

Got it covered Minister.

Fezile grins, puts his camera away and hugs his boy.

Most of the herd having passed, Jaco drives on.

In the follow truck, Blessing scoots into the driver's seat and turns the ignition.

CHARL

The hell you doing?

BLESSING

I thought I would drive, so you are free to take pictures.

CHARL

No. You don't drive this vehicle.

She kills the engine.

BLESSING

Must I go to the spotter seat?

Back in his seat, Charl looks at her like she's crazy.

CHARL

*Nay. Ach, nay.*

Blessing lowers her eyes as they drive off.

EXT. WATERHOLE - DAY

Charl slows to a crawl as he approaches Jaco's truck. They've spotted a herd of a dozen or so elephants making their way to a waterhole.

Charl steps onto the hood of Jaco's truck, camera in hand.

JACO

(Turning, whispering)

This is a matriarchal herd, all females. As soon as the males reach adolescence, the matriarch kicks them out of the herd.

Amber's father, PETER (60, rich, American) pipes up.

PETER

Feisty. Which one is she?

Another elephant passes in front of the trucks, eliciting more oohs and aahs.

JACO

I don't think she's out yet-

Jaco stops as a huge, ancient elephant lumbers into the road, much bigger than the others with scar damaged skin and a broken right tusk.

JACO (CONT'D)

(Whispering)

Here she is. *Shew*, been in a scrap or two from the looks of her.

The Matriarch stands in front of the trucks, raises her trunk and lets out a deafening TRUMPET.

Msizi and Charl instinctively step back.

JACO (CONT'D)

It's OK. She's just letting us know who's boss.

The elephant stares into Jaco's truck, scanning the captivated faces.

A tiny baby elephant waddles out and shelters under the Matriarch who then shuffles over in front of Blessing.

The two hold eye contact a good while. Then she SLAMS her trunk down on the hood of Charl's truck. Everyone jumps.

The elephants lumber off to the waterhole.

Charl steps back onto his hood. Jaco drives away.

Blessing keeps eyes on the Matriarch, moved by their exchange.

CHARL

You right there? Never seen an elephant before?

BLESSING

No, I-

CHARL

(Sarcastic)

They're the fat, grey chaps with the funny nose.

BLESSING

(To herself)

Yes, and never will I take them for granted.

CHARL

-What's that? You got something to say to me?

BLESSING

No boss.

Charl grins and speeds after his brother.

EXT. ROAD ABOVE A CLEARING - DAY

A half mile behind Jaco, Charl's radio crackles.

JACO

(From Radio)

Boet, there's a clearing up ahead. Check it for sun-downers. I'll scout the ridge.

CHARL  
*Ja bru, lekker.*

Jaco drives away. Charl stops and lights a cigarette.

CHARL (CONT'D)  
 Ok girly, time to shine.

He kicks his feet up and pulls out a tablet. He starts watching the live, split screen feed from Jaco's GoPros.

Blessing walks to the back of the truck and starts undoing the straps holding a cooler.

She stops cold. Her gaze moves from the ground up into the nearby brush.

She creeps back to the passenger door and gets in.

CHARL (CONT'D)  
 The *fok* you doing? Get the drinks.

BLESSING  
 It is not a good idea to stop here.

CHARL  
*Izit eh?* And why is that?

Blessing looks out her open door to the ground.

BLESSING  
 Too many lion.

Charl whips his legs back in. He leans across her to look at the paw prints in the dust.

CHARL  
 You sure?

BLESSING  
 Big ones. At least ten, perhaps more. They went down there.

Charl dives for the radio.

CHARL  
 (Into Radio)  
 Jaco? *Ja Boet*. Guess what I just found.

EXT. THE CLEARING / STEEP HILL - DAY

Jaco expertly manoeuvres the 4x4 down the hill. Mzisi hangs off the spotter seat, following the lion tracks.

They make it to the bottom, Jaco parks in a grassy clearing, at the base of a second, adjacent hill.

Mzisi nods at Jaco and points.

JACO

(Whispering)

The pride's in there. Everyone must stay very still.

(Whispering into radio)

Ja Charl, we got them. Come on down, nice and easy.

Excitement builds as the bushes start to rustle.

A huge lioness then steps out and lazily collapses down in the grass, 20 feet from the truck.

Three of her older cubs stumble out and flop over her. She nuzzles them and starts to groom one.

Three more lioness emerge and also lie in the grass, softly panting.

Oddly, all the adult lions appear to have some degree of cataracts, their eyes milky and opaque.

Finally, a half dozen newborn cubs waddle out and roll around, like kittens.

It's a magical scene, the guests are ecstatic.

Charl's truck stops half way down the slope. He climbs into the spotter's chair with his camera. Blessing stands in her seat to see.

BLESSING

(Re: The lioness)

They are gigantic.

CHARL

Ja, lekker.

One of the youngest cubs gets curious and skips to within 10 feet of left side of Jaco's truck. The delighted guests jostle for position.

Behind the cub, two lioness crouch down, white eyes locked on the truck.

Mzise flashes Jaco a nervous look. Jaco pulls a rifle from under the seat.

MINISTER MASONDO  
Everything alright Jaco?

Jaco nods, smiles and puts a finger to his lips.

The rogue cub has found a grass hopper and swats at it.

Up the hill:

BLESSING  
Something is not right. They should start the engine.

CHARL  
Oh *izit*? You smarter than my brother now? Than Mzisi?

BLESSING  
No, I just-

CHARL  
-Keep quiet. Christ.

In the clearing: As the cub follows the grass hopper, its mother stalks toward the vehicle.

Jaco raises the rifle to his shoulder.

The cub's alongside the truck. Msizi fails to shoo it away.

The lioness is ten feet away and closing. Teeth bared, muscles wound tight.

Jaco sees her claws kneading at the earth. He cocks the hammer, his trigger finger twitches ready to shoot at the slightest movement...

Then CRUNCH.

An enormous, black-maned male lion blind-sides Jaco, wiping him off the hood.

Huge jaws pierce his skull, Jaco's dead before he hits the ground.

The guests barely have time to panic as two more giant males - one with a brown mane, one a golden color - leap from the adjacent hill into the vehicle.

Msizi lunges for the rifle, but he's set upon by two lioness.

Screams are silenced as throats are torn open. The attack is coordinated and merciless.

Amber's dragged from her seat and disemboweled.

Peter, somehow, breaks free. But the older cubs playfully run him down and pull him apart.

Up the hill: Charl staggers to his feet on the hood.

CHARL (CONT'D)  
 (Screaming)  
 Jaco! Nay Jaco!  
 (To Blessing)  
 The rifle!

Blessing passes him the gun from under the seat.

Charl takes a shot. A lioness falls dead.

The lions stop and turn to the sound.

The black-maned male - BLACK - nuzzles the dead lioness, and snarls.

The entire pride then charges up the hill - a dozen or more massive, blood stained lions thunder toward the vehicle.

CHARL (CONT'D)  
 Oh shit! Blessing, drive! Get us  
 the fok out of here!

Blessing clambers into the driver's seat and cranks it in reverse. The Land Rover bounces up the uneven hill, Charl clings to the spotters seat.

Driving backwards they see the lions gaining ground.

As they reach the apex of the hill, Black launches at them, both front paws extended.

Blessing cuts a hard turn but the lion's left claw digs into the grill, puncturing the radiator.

Its right claw sinks into Charl's ankle and wrenches him off the truck and into its bloody teeth.

Blessing throws the truck into first and finally manages to pull away from the determined pride.

Shaking hands grab the radio.

## BLESSING

Blessing to Lodge. Do you copy? ...  
Hello? Anyone?... Does anyone copy?

Static. She checks her cell phone - no service. She double-takes at the home-screen photo of a smiling baby boy.

She slams on the gas, something in the engine pops.

## EXT. THE GATE - NIGHT

Blessing sputters up to the gate and kills the hissing engine. She jumps out and heaves the gate open.

Then a DEAFENING ROAR fills the night. Much deeper, much much closer than any others.

She turns towards the sound, to an overgrown aircraft hangar at the head of an airstrip, a hundred yards down the fence line.

She sees something gigantic in silhouette, pacing on the roof.

It roars again and Africa trembles.

Blessing flies back to her truck and tries the engine, it shudders but fails.

She looks back to the roof, the creature's gone.

## BLESSING

Come on!

She turns the key again, the engine kicks and the truck rolls across the threshold.

Her foot hovers over the gas pedal, every instinct telling her to just leave the gate open and go.

But she leaps back down and labors the gate shut, inch by inscrutable inch.

Behind the gate, the long grass parts like a sea. It's coming.

Blessing slides the lock bolt in just as - BOOM - something huge crashes into the steel sheet, the gate opens a crack.

Blessing stumbles back and hears a low, irritated growl and a long deliberate sniff.

Then a gigantic single claw squeezes through the crack and starts scratching at the lock bolt.

Blessing tries to slam the gate, but the claw's too strong, it keeps digging.

From her truck, she grabs the rifle. She returns and sees a huge, cloudy eye staring at her through the crack.

Nearly frozen with fear, Blessing still takes aim and FIRES.

The creature HOWLS and recoils, the claw whips back inside. Blessing shuts the crack.

The creature explodes with rage. It SLAMS itself into the gate and claws at the iron.

Whatever it is, it wants out, badly.

Blessing climbs onto the hood. Behind her, the endless steel fence. Ahead, way, way down the road she sees a light.

She clambers back into the idling truck and hits the gas, but the truck, on its last legs, sputters forward at a crawl.

EST. INDLELA ENTSHA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE, FRONT GATE - NIGHT

A Rangerover drives into the private game reserve, past the sign 'Welcome to Indlela Entsha Private Game Reserve - A Van Der Merwe Property'.

The car continues up the hill, revealing a luxurious safari lodge.

INT. INDLELA ENTSHA GAME RESERVE, MAIN LOBBY - NIGHT

In the hotel's large, lavish lobby, ELSPETH VAN DER MERWE (35, Afrikaans, slim, striking) welcomes some well-heeled GUESTS in front of a map of the region.

A smiling WAITRESS(20s) hands out arrival cocktails.

ELSPETH

As you can see, the lodge is set within 15,000 hectares of prime 'Big Five' territory. Game drives, at dawn and dusk, are included, so please, no wandering off!

The guests chortle.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
 For the intrepid among you, we just  
 opened a totally pristine new  
 reserve, Engaziwa, just a short  
 three hour drive away.

Elsbeth points to a distant section of the map. Her phone rings, she excuses herself and answers.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
 (Into Phone)  
 Ja. Blessing!? I can barely hear  
 you. Where the hell are you  
 guys?... What happened.... What?!

Elsbeth's face drops.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
 If this is some sick joke...

Elsbeth starts for her office, she breaks into a run.

INT. THE VILLAGE, SHIBEEN - NIGHT

Blessing's calling from the nearest village's shanty bar -  
 watched by the last few DRINKERS and the long suffering bar  
 woman, NCEBA(65, Xhosa).

BLESSING  
 (Into phone)  
 I wish it were a joke. I'm  
 uploading the footage, but the wifi  
 is terrible.

Nceba raises eyebrows. Blessing checks the Ipad's upload bar.

ELSPETH  
 OK, sit tight and tell no one.  
 Wilson is on the way.

Blessing hangs up. Nceba, seeing her distress, hands her a  
 Guinness. Blessing smiles thanks, but her hands are shaking  
 too much to drink it.

Blessing glances at her phone and sees the picture of her  
 son. She tries another call.

BLESSING  
 (Into Phone)  
 Mom! Hello?... Mom?... Can you hear  
 me... Mom?... Arrgh!

She hangs up in frustration, emotion threatens to overwhelm her.

Nceba, having come around the bar, collects Blessing into a bracing, maternal hug.

NCEBA

Shh. It's ok. You're ok.

After a moment, Nceba pulls back.

NCEBA (CONT'D)

I take it there is somewhere you need to be?

BLESSING

With my Mom and my child, but...

Blessing looks out the window, her truck is still smoking.

Nceba digs in her apron, pulls out some car keys and offers them to Blessing.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

Really? Are you sure?

NCEBA

I am sure there are times in every child's life when they need their mother. I am sure this is one of those times. And I am secretly pleased that tonight, it is a two-for-one.

Blessing giggles and wipes away a tear.

NCEBA (CONT'D)

Just bring it back when you come for that. (Re: Blessing's truck)

They swap keys. Blessing hugs her a grateful goodbye.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Blessing forces herself to stay awake as the rusty old pick-up bounces along the dark, desolate road.

INT. ELSPETH'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Elspeth sits at a mahogany desk in her opulent office, below a pretentious, painted family portrait: Elspeth as a teenager with Jaco, Charl and their parents - JOHAN(60) and LAURYN(55), looking happy, looking rich.

The video finally uploads. Elspeth hits play on her laptop.

INSERT: Laptop. Split-screen footage of the six GoPros from Jaco's truck.

The cameras capture both the inside and outside of the vehicle, the sequence starts with the cub and grass hopper.

Elspeth then watches the massacre from six angles, flashes of golden fur and red teeth, muffled screams and blood.

She can hardly breathe. Trembling hands grab a picture on her desk of her, Jaco and Charl as adults, standing in front of the Lodge welcome sign.

ELSPETH

Keep it together Elspeth. You're a  
Van Der Merwe.

She reaches for her phone and dials.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

(Into phone)

Ja, Colonel, Ja it's Elspeth. Van  
Der Merwe. Sorry to call so late,  
but I need your help, you and your  
guys... How fast can you get here?

I/E. BLESSING'S MOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Blessing bangs on the door of a weathered, two room house on a small patch of dry land, on a hillside, amidst dozens of similar dwellings.

MOM (60, Zulu) answers in a fluster, struggling with her dressing gown and glasses.

MOM

Blessing?! What are you doing here?  
Is everything alright?

Blessing sinks into Mom's arms, tears flood down her face.

BLESSING

I can't do this anymore.

MOM

Do what? This is not like you. Tell me what happened.

Mom guides Blessing into the modest room.

At one end is a single bed and makeshift crib. At the other, a threadbare sofa, coffee table and box TV. A handful of well worn toys litter the tiled floor.

A framed picture of Blessing graduating and her Wildlife Science Degree hang prominently on the wall.

Mom pulls back to look deep into Blessing's eyes.

MOM (CONT'D)

If someone has hurt you, I will find them and rip out-

BLESSING

-No, Mom, nothing like that.

Blessing sees the crib and runs to gather her sleeping boy, THANDO(3), she clutches him to her chest.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

They were killed Mom, all of them... The lions, I've never seen-

MOM

-What!? I don't understand? Some lions were killed?

Blessing collapses on the sofa, still holding Thando.

MOM (CONT'D)

My poor, brave girl. You're famished.

Mom missions to the other room.

Blessing watches Thando sleep. She cups his face, softly strokes his nose and kisses his forehead.

Then she lies down, her arms wrapped tight around her son.

Mom comes charging back with a sandwich and a thousand questions, but sees Blessing is now dead asleep.

Mom watches her daughter sleep. She cups her face, softly strokes her nose and kisses her forehead.

She places a blanket over them and switches out the light.

INT. BLESSING'S MOM'S HOUSE - DAY

Morning sun pours in through the small, open windows.  
Blessing hasn't moved.

BANG. BANG. BANG. Blessing panics awake and scrambles up. Mom leaps out of her bed. Thando starts to stir.

WILSON  
(Through door)  
Blessing. It's Wilson, open the door.

Blessing nods at Mom who opens the door to a fellow game ranger, WILSON (50, Zulu, overweight and balding).

WILSON (CONT'D)  
You were told to wait with the truck. Get up, it's time to go.

BLESSING  
I don't take orders from you.

WILSON  
Actually, you do.

Wilson taps the 'Head Ranger' badge on his shirt and winks.

BLESSING  
I don't care, I'm not going anywhere.

Wilson's about to reply when Elspeth steps into the doorway. Blessing hands Thando to her Mom.

ELSPETH  
*Howzit* Blessing. Can we have a word?

EXT. BLESSING'S MOM'S HOUSE - DAY

Blessing leads Elspeth to a small vegetable patch. Wilson leans on his safari truck, parked nearby, and watches them.

BLESSING  
You want me to go back!? To Engaziwa!? Right now!?

ELSPETH  
I have to find my brothers- or whatever's left of them- and you're the only one who knows where to go.

The terror on Blessing's face is unmistakable.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
 Don't worry, I'm not taking any  
 chances this time. We'll have  
 proper protection. Professionals.

BLESSING  
 I'm sorry for your loss and wish  
 you well but I cannot go back  
 there.

Beat.

ELSPETH  
 Then you'll have to find another  
 job.

BLESSING  
 What!?

ELSPETH  
*Ja*, and we both know how  
 competitive it is to find game  
 ranger jobs.

Blessing scoffs.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
 Is something funny?

BLESSING  
 Ranger jobs, yes. But drinks girl,  
 not so much. Being ridiculed and  
 overlooked and taken for granted,  
 that work I can find anywhere.

This comment stings Elspeth, she hides it with bluster.

ELSPETH  
 I don't have time for this sassy  
 new attitude.

Blessing turns to go back inside.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
 Where do you think you're going?

BLESSING  
 To be with my people. Fire me, I  
 don't care anymore.

Elspeth scampers after her, she grabs Blessing's shoulder.

ELSPETH

And what of my people? My brothers  
are out there as we speak, getting  
ripped apart by vultures-

BLESSING

-And your 'professionals' will find  
them.

ELSPETH

How? They don't know where to go.  
It's a hundred square miles!  
(Quietly)  
Please Blessing, I'm desperate.  
Every minute counts.

Inside, Blessing hears Thando crying. She looks to the sound.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

A pay rise then? Double wages?

BLESSING

I'm sorry, my baby needs me.

Blessing walks again. Elspeth looks back at Wilson, he's  
still watching them closely.

ELSPETH

What if I brought your baby to you?  
What if I make you head ranger?

Blessing stops. Elspeth pounces.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

It's lovely you know, the head  
ranger house. Four bedrooms, two  
full baths, kitchen, patio, private  
garden and *braai*. Your son could  
have his own room. Your mom *as-*  
*well*. No more six-weeks-on-one-week-  
off. No more time apart.

Blessing looks at her mother's aging house, its chipping  
paint and cracked walls.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

And of course there's more money,  
more power. Respect.

BLESSING

(Re: Wilson)  
What about him?

ELSPETH  
 He can deal with it, or quit. Or  
 you can fire him.

Blessings nods, but her face remains tense with fear.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
 What is it, what's wrong?

BLESSING  
 Ma'am, the cameras, they did not  
 capture everything. There is  
 something else in Engaziwa,  
 something big.

Elsbeth exhales with relief.

ELSPETH  
 Oh don't be hysterical, they're  
 only animals, and as I said, we'll  
 be ready for anything.  
 (Beat)  
 Come. We go in, find the bodies and  
 get out. And the minute we're back,  
 the head ranger job is yours. I  
 promise.

EXT. BLESSING'S MOM'S HOUSE - DAY

Blessing struggles to escape her Mom's goodbye hug, the elder woman's face is wracked with worry.

Blessing then peels Thando from her legs, kisses him and hands him to his Grandmother. He starts to cry as Blessing heads for Nceba's pick-up.

Elsbeth and Wilson sit in the safari truck watching it all.

WILSON  
 What did you tell her, to get her  
 to come?

ELSPETH  
 I threatened to fire her.

Elsbeth turns away. Wilson seems skeptical, but nods and adjusts the Head Ranger badge on his shirt.

EXT. THE VILLAGE, OUTSIDE THE SHIBEEN - DAY

Sat in the front of Wilson's truck, Elspeth scrolls through photos of Jaco and Charl on her phone, fighting back tears.

She checks her watch and throws her hands up in frustration.

Nearby, under a pop-up tent, Wilson oversees three MECHANICS fixing Blessing's safari vehicle. They work out of a large repair truck.

Blessing is talking to Nceba by the pick-up, the women watch excited CHILDREN play in the dirt road.

Wilson closes the hood of Blessing's truck and drives it up next to his own.

Blessing jumps in the old pick up and drives it under the tent. The Mechanics, unsure, look to Elspeth. She nods.

The mechanics then set about overhauling the pick-up. New parts and tires are rolled off the repair truck.

Nceba hoots with delight.

Wilson returns to his driver's seat. Blessing hers.

Down the road, Elspeth sees a plume of dust. She grins.

ELSPETH

About time.

Seconds later a convoy of tinted black SUVs thunder past.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE GATE - DAY

Blessing's and Wilson's trucks arrive at the gate to see four heavily armed MERCENARIES unloading weapons and supplies from the SUVs.

Standing by a third safari truck, are three stunned Americans BIOLOGISTS.

Two others Mercenaries, RAND(40, Afrikaans) and MAMBA(30, Zulu) are opening the huge steel gate.

Blessing pulls up and runs over to them.

BLESSING

Stop! Do you have any idea what's  
in there!?

The Mercs all laugh. Their leader, COLONEL SCHALK PRETORIOUS (60, Afrikaans) steps forward.

SCHALK

(Sarcastic)

Ach nay, is it very big and scary?

An imposing presence, Schalk proudly wears the scars from a lifetime on the front line. He cocks his M-16 rifle.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Is it scarier than me?

More chuckles from his team.

Blessing rolls her eyes and turns away, but runs into DR. MITCH MEYNARD(65, Caucasian), offering his hand.

Meynard is rangy and bearded. There's vanity in his appearance, despite his years in the African sun.

MEYNARD

Hi, hello. Dr. Mitch Meynard. Perhaps you've heard of me? Or seen my docs? The New York Times once said I wrote the book on lion behavior.

SCHALK

Wrote the book on being a pompous wanker *as-well*.

The Mercs laugh again, as do Meynard's team; DANTE WELLS (27, African American) and SUZIE CHO(22, Chinese-American).

A tall, thin man with dreadlocks, Dante pulls out a small video camera from a backpack and starts filming Meynard.

Suzie pulls out her phone and also films. Super-fit, Suzie has short, green hair and an arm full of color tatoos. She wears a "NY Marathon finisher" T-shirt.

MEYNARD

You're her, right? You saw the attack? Christ, that footage threw up so many questions. The males, were they up or down wind of the trucks? Did they all appear to have cataracts? Or just the females?

Blessing's totally overwhelmed. She swats Suzie's lens away.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

It's OK, these are my assistants.

DANTE

Colleagues.

MEYNARD

Assistants.

SUZIE

Grad students slash animal  
activists slash creative directors  
slash-

MEYNARD

-Assistants, who help with social  
media.

DANTE

Colleagues would probably work  
harder.

SUZIE

And make better content.

MEYNARD

Don't get semantic. You're both  
extremely lucky to be here.

DANTE

So a black man ain't welcome in  
Africa now?

MEYNARD

No. Here. Engaziwa. This place is  
an industry legend: a mysterious  
old compound, a hundred miles from  
anywhere, locked up and left alone  
for a quarter century. It's like El  
Dorado for biologists... I mean,  
who knows what's in there?

DANTE

I do. Mean motherfuckin' lions.

MEYNARD

Man-killers no less.  
(Sotto to Dante and Suzie)  
And we have them all to ourselves.

Meynard winks and makes the "cash" sign with his fingers. He  
turns back to find Blessing, but she's long gone.

Instead, he runs into Schalk.

SCHALK

Be clear. All of you are lucky to  
be here.

MEYNARD

No. You're lucky we happened to be  
in country, and available.

SCHALK

You saw the footage- it's time for  
guns not *fokin'* science.

MEYNARD

Well clearly Elspeth disagrees.

Schalk storms off to find Elspeth, he whispers something to  
another of his roughnecks, BAKKIES(30s, Afrikaans), en route.

Meynard turns to Dante's camera. He smooths his hair.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

(To Camera)

The sun is high in Southern Africa  
and I'm about to embark on a truly  
extraordinary adventure, even by my  
standards-

Bakkies appears right behind Meynard.

BAKKIES

(To Camera)

-Wanker. Twat. Cock and balls. Big  
balls. Big hairy balls.

Meynard makes the "cut" sign and turns to confront Bakkies.

Schalk has caught up with Elspeth by the gate.

SCHALK

(Re: Meynard's team)

Get rid of them Elsie. You need to  
keep a lid on this.

ELSPETH

But if we don't know why the lions  
did what they did, then we won't  
know how to fix it.

SCHALK

Fix it!? Let's just kill the things  
and walk away.

ELSPETH

No chance, not after what this  
place cost me.

SCHALK

So we have to put up with this shit  
the whole time?

He gestures to Meynard, trying in vain to wrestle Bakkies out  
of his shot.

EXT. THE GATE- DAY

Inside the fence line, Schalk calls over two of his men, GILLETS (25, Xhosa) and DAVIS (30, English-African).

SCHALK

Stay here. No ins, no outs, no exceptions, no excuses.

DAVIS

Understood.

Schalk points to the elevated guard tower by the gate.

SCHALK

Clearly, we're in the middle of *fokin'* nowhere, comms are shit, so get that radio up and running. Stay alert and don't *fok* around.

GILLETS

Ja Colonel. Copy.

SCHALK

Hundred Percent.

Two of the trucks are now inside the fence. One left outside. Blessing also remains outside, unable to cross the threshold.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

(To Blessing, loudly)

Oi! Time to shit or get off the pot.

Blessing takes a deep breath then steps back into Engaziwa.

Gillets and Davis start closing the gate behind her. The SUVs drive back to town.

Blessing walks to the lead truck's driver door. Schalk stops her getting in. He looks her up and down.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

(To Elspeth)

So this one got away, but Jaco and Charl didn't?

ELSPETH

Correct, *Ja*.

SCHALK

That didn't strike you as suspicious?

Blessing tries to push her way past Schalk.

ELSPETH

She's coming with Colonel, she's  
the only one who knows where to go.

SCHALK

Ja, well she's not driving my guys.  
(To Blessing)  
Can you even reach the pedals?

The Mercs and Wilson laugh. TOMMY(35, English-African) jumps in to drive. He winks at Blessing and suggestively pats the passenger seat.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Elsie, a word before we go?

Schalk and Elspeth step off, toward the abandoned hangar.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

I just wanted to say I'm sorry  
about your *boets*. They were good  
*okes*. Your mom and dad would have  
been so proud of them, of all three  
of you.

ELSPETH

Danke Schalk. I'm glad you're here.

SCHALK

I- we appreciate the work. It's  
been a lean year or two.

She turns back. Schalk holds her up.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

And, you know I hate to ask at a  
time like this, but my guys-

ELSPETH

-The transfer's all set, soon as  
the bank opens Monday.

SCHALK

Ach, Elsie, you're one of the good  
ones.

CRACK. Something big snaps over by the hangar. Elspeth jumps.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Elephant I'd say. Come, it's time.

EXT. THE PLAINS - DAY

It's slow going for the trucks on a dilapidated dirt road running next to a fast flowing river.

EXT. THE ROAD NEAR THE ATTACK SITE - DAY

The trucks turn onto the road above the attack site.

BLESSING

We are here.

Blessing points to dried blood just off the road. The trucks stop. The Mercs ready their rifles.

There's blood, but no body. Drag marks lead down the hill toward the attack clearing. Everyone alights.

Elsbeth spots Charl's camera in the grass, she pulls out the memory card and breaks it.

Schalk whistles and his team starts down the hill.

EXT. THE ATTACK SITE - DAY

It's like a war zone. Dried blood has stained everything.

Jaco's truck has been worked over - its tires slashed, its seats and canopy shredded.

But again, no bodies, just drag marks off into the bush.

Dante and Suzie film the scene. Elspeth stops them.

Schalk whistles. He nods at PETRA (45, Afrikaans), a massive human with eye-liner and a pony tail, who disappears into the foliage.

SUZIE

(To Dante, Re: Petra)

Hey, is he... a he?

Bakkies, passing by, overhears and butts in.

BAKKIES

He used to be, but now they are a they and they will kick your ass.

SUZIE

Wow. Weirdly progressive for you guys.

BAKKIES

Nah. Do your job right, boss  
doesn't give a shit.

The bushes start rustling. Guns go up. Blessing aims hers to where the male lions attacked.

The rustling gets louder... Petra pops back out of the undergrowth and gestures for the others to follow.

EXT. CLIFF NEAR THE ATTACK SITE- DAY

The bloody drag marks lead down the river bank, across the shallow river and then up over the opposite bank.

ELSPETH

What are we waiting for?

Blessing's about to lead off, but Schalk blocks her and gestures for Wilson to take the lead.

Suzie passes Petra, smiles and winks knowingly. Petra snarls and shoves Suzie down the bank.

EXT. THE FOREST, TURN OFF - DAY

Walking single file, the group slog through the bush, following Wilson, tracking the drag marks.

Schalk pulls Elspeth behind a few steps.

ELSPETH

What? What's wrong?

SCHALK

Won't they be missed? ... The Minister and his family, the rich Americans.

ELSPETH

Not for a while. They're glamping. Three days and nights all alone in pristine wilderness.

SCHALK

*Izit? Shew*, smart girl. Just like your old man.

Ahead, Blessing stops. Elspeth rushes up.

ELSPETH

Have you found something?!

Blessing studies a jumble of broken branches and animal tracks. Meynard nods to Suzie and Dante who start filming.

Blessing blushes, not used to the attention.

BLESSING

Ah, it is probably nothing. Wilson didn't even notice it.

SCHALK

Then why are you wasting our time?

MEYNARD

(Half to Cameras)

Tell us Blessing. On my expeditions, I insist that all voices be heard, equally.

BAKKIES (O.S.)

Dick! Big dicks. Testicles!

Meynard tries to keep his composure. He gestures for Blessing to continue.

BLESSING

Lion came through. Chasing a herd, I think buffalo. We should follow.

SCHALK

We're here for human bodies, not buffalo. Forward.

Meynard interjects, playing to the cameras.

MEYNARD

-Hey, Johnny Rambo, would ya shut up and listen, for one minute.

Schalk squares up to Meynard. Elspeth pulls Schalk back.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

Go on Blessing.

She points to vultures circling nearby.

BLESSING

The kill site is close. The lion could still be around, so we must keep tracking them.

SCHALK

And why is that, exactly?

BLESSING

Because if we are not tracking them, then likely, they are tracking us.

Rand grins and pulls the bolt of his M-16.

RAND

*Lekker. Kom kitty kitty kitty.*

Elsbeth defers to Meynard, he pauses for effect and turns to the camera.

MEYNARD

Let's check it out.

Elsbeth nods. Schalk's irritated, but shoves Wilson to again lead off. He heads North.

Blessing squats to re-examine the tracks. Meynard stands above her.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

(To Camera)

My expert trackers have discovered fresh tracks and despite the clear and present danger, I've decided to investigate. Because when lion are this close, if we're not tracking them then likely, they-

Bakkies saunters right behind Meynard.

BAKKIES

- Twat! Nutsack. Vulva. Syphilis.

Dante and Suzie chuckle, then follow the group Northward.

Blessing pushes off Eastbound instead.

Petra, the rear guard, whistles. Others turn.

Meynard, Suzie, Dante and Elspeth hurry after Blessing.

Schalk shakes his head at Wilson and follows Blessing. The other Mercs mock Wilson as they also change course.

Arriving at a dense tree line, Blessing stops and readies her rifle, the mercenaries likewise.

Blessing's about to step through but Schalk holds her back and takes her place.

EXT. BUFFALO FIELD - DAY

Schalk emerges in a field at the base of a rocky outcrop.

SCHALK

(Loudly)

What the hell?

The others join him and see carnage. Dozens of dead buffalo litter the grass.

Vultures, jackal and hyena swarm the largely uneaten remains.

BLESSING

These lion, are not lion.

Meynard's team keeps filming. Meynard asks for Blessing's rifle. He fires shots into the air, the scavengers scatter.

ELSPETH

I gather this isn't normal?

MEYNARD

Normal would be one buffalo, a small one.

ELSPETH

So, it's a massive pride of lions?

MEYNARD

Or a pride of massive lions.

BLESSING

Or both.

Blessing points to the body of bull elephant. Its throat ripped out, huge chunks of flesh missing.

DANTE

What. The. Fuck. Did. That?

RAND

And people wonder why I hate *fokin'* animals.

Blessing stands in an enormous paw print.

MEYNARD

(To Dante's camera)

In all my years - decades - in the bush, I've never seen anything like this: complex geographical awareness, foresight, teamwork.

(MORE)

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

This wasteful massacre wasn't about food or territory, something or someone has antagonized the pride, really pissed them off and-

BANG. Schalk shoots dead a hyena who'd snuck back to feed.

SCHALK

You're talking bullshit. Lions kill things, it's what they do.

(To Meynard)

You done with your little field trip or must we sing some hymns and bury them?

Schalk slaps Dante's camera to the ground.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

In single file, they follow the drag marks through thick forest. Meynard pulls over and prepares to address Dante's camera. Schalk stops as well.

SCHALK

(Re: The filming)

You must know this will never see the light of day, ja?

MEYNARD

Stay in your lane, G.I. Jerk.

SCHALK

Let me put it another way - if you keep shooting us, we'll start shooting you. Understand?

Dante lowers his camera, fast.

EXT. SHALLOW RIVER - DAY

They arrive at a creek - rocky and ankle deep.

The sole of a boot sticks out from the mud. Wilson pulls it out and stumbles back in horror.

There's a chewed-off foot inside. The mercenaries fall-to.

Schalk throws it to Petra who laces the boot to their pack.

DANTE

Souvenir huh? I'm more of a fridge magnet kinda guy.

A massive ROAR echoes out. Answered by another, then a third.

SCHALK

Here we go. Anything moves, blow  
its head off.

EXT. THE LAIR - DAY

The people creep in to a large semi-circular canyon, flanked on three sides with high rocky cliffs.

A tall, steady waterfall beats into a pool below which laps a small sandy beach.

Blessing and Suzie find tree trunks leaning up against the rock wall. The trunks are all scratched up.

SUZIE

My cat had one made of carpet.

BLESSING

Yes, but did she make it herself?

Across the clearing:

DANTE

Since when do lion eat rhino?

Dante's standing in a huge pile of animal bones. He holds up a rhino's skull, then a elephant's.

Blessing follows a drip trail of blood leading to the water.

MEYNARD

Blessing what are you doing?

She cocks her rifle and steps into the pool, wading through the knee deep water to the base of the waterfall.

She steps through the water and disappears.

SCHALK

Shit. Mamba come.

Schalk and Mamba rush into the pool. Meynard gives Dante the 'roll camera' signal, then follows.

EXT. WATERFALL CAVE - DAY

Meynard steps through the cascade to find Blessing, Mamba and Schalk on a beach in front of grotesque stack of human and animal corpses.

Jaco, Mzisi and their guests are there, in various states of decomposition. Meynard covers his nose and gags.

A low, threatening GROWL sounds out from the shadows. Schalk readies his rifle, but Blessing gestures for the exit.

EXT. THE LAIR - DAY

Meynard's the first to emerge, his face tells the story.

ELSPETH

My brothers? Are they there?

Elsbeth rushes for the pool but Petra holds her back.

SCHALK

Don't Elsie.

Meynard collapses on the beach, shaken. Blessing sits by him.

MEYNARD

What the hell was that?

BLESSING

A food stash of some sort?

MEYNARD

Lions don't do that.

BLESSING

But these lion, are not lion.

SCHALK

*Ja, Ja* or maybe Professor Expert here doesn't know as much as he thinks he does.

Meynard glares at Schalk, then turns to Dante.

MEYNARD

How big is this goddamn pride?

Dante whips off his backpack and pulls out a mini-drone.

ELSPETH

Was Schalk not clear about your filming?

Schalk snatches the drone.

MEYNARD

You prefer to climb up tough guy? Have at it.

The drone starts to buzz. Schalk begrudgingly lets it fly. Meynard holds the phone with the feed. Others gather around.

INSERT: The phone screen.

The drone rises up the rock wall and discovers a cave with scores of curious lion cubs guarded by ten crouching lioness. Cloudy, white eyes all fixated on the drone.

The drone sees a half eaten human- Peter- in their midst.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

It's the nursery.

BLESSING

That explains the food stash.

One of the lioness swipes at the drone, just missing.

The drone ascends, revealing a second ledge with another dozen lioness, all glaring at the flying intruder.

The drone spins to see more lioness and young males on a ledge on the opposite side of the canyon.

Reaching the top, the drone spots the three enormous males with their distinctly colored manes- BLACK, BROWN and GOLDEN, prowling the tall grass on the rim amidst yet more females.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

That's them.

ELSPETH

Christ. They're gigantic.

Behind the males, a large, dense thicket shudders and shakes. Something huge is moving.

MEYNARD

What was that!? Fly closer!

The drone tries to fly over the edge, past Black, but the big lion blocks its path.

Black lowers its head to the grass in what seems like submission. But with an easy flick of its huge jaws, it slings a human body from the grass toward the drone.

It's Charl.

The body misses the drone and plummets. Half rotten flesh splatters up on the people as it hits the ground.

Elspeth's SCREAMS are soon drowned out by the males who lead the pride in a deafening, echoing roar.

Elspeth can't handle it. She grabs Schalk's M-16 and opens fire, spraying bullets everywhere.

The roaring stops, then Elspeth's gunfire. The world is silent save for the waterfall and the buzz of the drone.

As the drone descends past the nursery, a lioness bounds towards it and leaps off the edge.

The lioness lands with a thud, the drone crushed below her.

People back up as it stalks toward them. Schalk takes aim.

SCHALK

(Yelling up the canyon)

You trying to play games? You fuck with us, we fuck with you.

He shoots her, which sets off a flurry of movement above.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Time to go.

ELSPETH

What? No. We need to get the bodies.

SCHALK

Now's not the time-

ELSPETH

(To Schalk)

-Do the job I paid you for! Go in there and get those-

She's cut off by three lionesses exploding out of the waterfall, bounding at them through the pool.

Elspeth screams and trips backwards. One lioness zeroes in. The air fills with gunfire and the three attackers fall.

Wilson helps Elspeth up. The roaring starts again as a few lioness and young males leap down from the cliffs.

The Mercs try to pick them off while beating a hasty retreat.

EXT. THE ATTACK CLEARING - DAY

It's late by the time they make it back to the trucks.

ELSPETH

What the hell do we do now?

SCHALK

Overnight and come back first thing. If this place was military, they'll have built digs somewhere.

MEYNARD

And you think they'll be safe, after all these years?

SCHALK

Stay here then, I'm sure the lions would enjoy the company.

Blessing pulls Elspeth aside. Schalk keeps within ear shot.

BLESSING

Which truck is going back to the gate? I've done my part.

ELSPETH

Your part was to help find and recover my brothers.

BLESSING

What else can I do? You have soldiers, you have Wilson. Drop me at the gate, please.

Elspeth is torn, she looks to Schalk who shakes his head, keen to keep their best tracker.

ELSPETH

No. A deal's a deal. You stay until we have them.

Schalk walks past them and readies his walkie talkie.

INT. THE GATE, TOWER - DAY

Davis and Gillets pause their poker game while Davis answers Schalk's call on the walkie.

DAVIS

(Listening)

*Ja.* We'll get on it. *Ja,* now-now.

He stands and cranks up the old army table radio.

DAVIS (CONT'D)

(Into radio)

Ja... *Howzit* chopper team. Ja,  
green light... Correct. Happy  
travels, we'll see you in the AM.

EXT. THE BASE - DAY

Evening. The trucks pull into the eerie courtyard of an abandoned military base, crumbling and overgrown after 25 years of neglect.

Startled baboons scurry into nearby trees.

On one side is a large, thatched roof building, that in its day would have resembled a three-star safari lodge.

To the other side is a row of barracks- two story concrete buildings with small windows and a corrugated iron roof.

In between, near an enormous fig tree are a few concrete picnic tables and a fire pit.

EXT. THE FIGTREE - NIGHT

Under a blazing full moon, the Mercs sit at one table, all rowdy drunk, having found some ancient brandy in the lodge.

The Americans, Elspeth, Blessing and Wilson sit at another.

SUZIE

-What if they evolved that way  
*because* they've had no contact with  
humans?

DANTE

So, without people to keep them in  
check the king of the jungle  
becomes a psychotic tyrant?

MEYNARD

I doubt that.

DANTE

- and do we really believe *no one's*  
been in here?

MEYNARD

Elspeth?

ELSPETH

As far as I know, when the apartheid government fell in '94, the army abandoned this place and haven't been back.

BLESSING

Yes, but what was the army doing here in the first place?

The question hangs in the air a moment.

WILSON

Blessing. Clear the plates, and make sure to clean the *braai*.

Blessing stares daggers at Wilson, who smiles and nods to the head ranger badge on his shirt. Blessing looks to Elspeth who only studies her food.

SLAP. Schalk slaps the table.

SCHALK

Chopper lands at dawn. We wipe that fucking lair off the map twenty minutes later. Me and the boys then drop in, tidy up the left overs and recover any human remains. 12 hours from now, the lion of Engaziwa are *fokin' braai* meat.

MEYNARD

You want to kill them!?! These lions are an evolutionary wonder! This could be a watershed moment in natural history.

SCHALK

It's not.

MEYNARD

(Ignoring Schalk)  
Elspeth, we could be looking at a whole new sub-species. The drone footage alone would secure funding for a comprehensive research program, likely in the millions. I still have contacts at Nat Geo and Animal Planet and-

SCHALK

-Not happening. The chopper's en route.

SUZIE  
We're not going to let you kill  
innocent animals.

SCHALK  
Innocent!? They're *fokin'*  
psychotic.

Blessing gets up to leave.

DANTE  
Blessing wait. What do you think?

Blessing, surprised to be asked, looks at the others in turn.

BLESSING  
For once, I agree with him  
(Schalk). These lion are not right,  
evolution would not make them like  
this. Something evil is at work.

SCHALK  
*Ach, ja*, you see Elsie. Hundred  
percent Blessing, Hundred percent.

SUZIE  
Evil?! C'mon Blessing, let's leave  
superstition to the witch doctors.

BLESSING  
So then what was it, up in the  
thicket?

No one has an answer.

BANG BANG BANG. Gun shots shatter the night. It's Rand.

Two baboons fall from the figtree, the rest of the troop  
SCREAM their indignation.

RAND  
(Aiming again)  
I *fokin'* hate animals. Especially  
these *okes*. Their assholes are  
inside out for *fok's* sakes.

BANG. Another falls. The other Mercs laugh and cheer.

Outraged male baboons race down the tree, teeth bared.

RAND (CONT'D)  
You big boys want some *as-well*?

Bottle in one hand, gun the other, he stumbles toward them.

MEYNARD

Elsbeth, come on. Stop this.

ELSPETH

Schalk! This isn't what we're here for.

SCHALK

(Laughing)

I promise you, he's doing you a favor.

Rand shoots again.

Blessing's had enough. She grabs her rifle and gets between Rand and the baboons.

Rand turns the handgun on her. She fires over his head.

He charges at her until his chest is pressed to the business end of her rifle. His gun now pointed at her face.

RAND

*Ja*, typically I kill anyone who does that.

BLESSING

I am not afraid of you. Only a coward would shoot an animal like this.

Rand cocks his hammer. Schalk starts clapping. He walks between them, grabbing both muzzles.

SCHALK

(To Blessing)

I think I underestimated you.

RAND

Watch yourself, missy. Africa can be a dangerous place.

BLESSING

You, white boy, have no idea.

Rand spits, throws his bottle at the baboons and heads to the lodge to get more brandy.

The Americans cheer Blessing as she returns.

Wilson tries to stop her and give her his plate. She slaps it away and storms off, to the edge of the bush.

INT. THE LODGE - NIGHT

Rand rips open the door to the main lodge. A half dozen army cots are set up in front of a blazing fireplace. He heads to the bar and digs out another dusty bottle.

EXT. THE LODGE PATIO - NIGHT

Rand sings as he pisses off the half-collapsed lodge patio, overlooking a lake.

He turns and sees some baboons watching him from the roof. He pulls out his gun, they hide. He holsters it, they pop their heads out. He does this a few times and laughs.

RAND

Dumb *fokin'* monkeys.

He heads back inside, pulling the door behind him.

But it doesn't shut, a small, furry hand reaches down to catch it.

EXT. FIGTREE - NIGHT

Blessing, still clutching her rifle, stares out into the moonlit wilderness and tries to calm herself.

She hears something- the faint, agonized trumpeting of elephants.

She pulls out her binoculars. Far down the hill she sees the Matriarch elephant's herd in clear distress - one of their number is stuck.

INT. OFFICERS QUARTERS, ELSPETH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Elsbeth dusts off the mattress and unbuttons her shirt.

Feeling eyes on her, she looks up. Schalk is watching from the door, holding a bottle of brandy.

SCHALK

Johan's little girl, all grown up.  
How are the digs, everything  
*lekker?*

ELSPETH

Could be more private but otherwise  
fine.

He steps into the room. She re-does her top button.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)  
Anything else, Colonel?

SCHALK  
Actually *ja*, I'm curious. What happens after... the "glamping"?

Elsbeth sits on the bed.

Schalk notices a yellowed map on a cork board, he pulls it down, folds it up and pockets it.

ELSPETH  
That's something I need to ask you about.

SCHALK  
*Izit?*

Elsbeth reaches for the bottle and takes a swig. Schalk sits.

ELSPETH  
You know how dangerous the roads around here can be, don't you? The local roads?

It takes a second, but the penny drops. Schalk rocks back with a wry smile. She passes back the bottle.

SCHALK  
Oh *ja, ja*, hundred percent. I heard one time about a safari truck full of VIPs that flipped right over and caught fire. No survivors, very sad.

ELSPETH  
Devastating. Especially for those who lost a family member, or two.

Schalk takes a long drink.

SCHALK  
Expensive, a tragedy like that. To clean up I mean.

ELSPETH  
That wouldn't be an issue, for a job well done.

Beat.

SCHALK

What about your rangers, and those annoying *fokin'* yanks?

ELSPETH

*Ja* well, it's like your *oke* said, Africa's a dangerous place. People go missing all the time.

He takes a moment to process this. He's clearly conflicted.

SCHALK

*Ach*, they're not *that* annoying...

Elsbeth steps up to him.

ELSPETH

You know that our lodge, the Van Der Merwe name, they mean everything to me.

SCHALK

*Ja*, evidently.

ELSPETH

And with the boys now gone, I'll need help running it...

She hugs him close, her head on his chest.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

I'm so glad you're here.

INT. THE AMERICANS' ROOM - NIGHT

CLANG. The metal door swings open, waking the Americans. Blessing is standing in the door with a tool box from one of the trucks.

DANTE

SHIT! I just peed a little.

EXT. THE RIVERBANK - NIGHT

The Americans try to keep up with Blessing. The trumpeting continues.

SUZIE

Are we not like, total lion bait right now??

BLESSING

No. I heard them, they are far.

Blessing walks into a clearing populated by a half dozen distressed elephants, led by the Matriarch.

The Matriarch confronts Blessing in spectacular fashion: ears flapping, feet stamping, trunk up.

MEYNARD

Holy shit! Everybody back!

Blessing doesn't break stride and reaches for the elephant.

Matriarch rears up in anger but quickly responds to Blessing's confidence. She lets them through.

BLESSING

Come, there isn't much time.

The others scurry past and arrive at a younger female who has stepped through a rusted drainage grate. Her leg is gashed and bleeding badly.

A baby elephant whinnies in anguish as it circles its stuck mother, searching for access to a nipple.

Blessing looks into the female's eyes and strokes its trunk.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

Hang on Mama.

SUZIE

It's snagged like a fish hook. If we pull her up the bars will just dig in further.

DANTE

Why is there a drain out here?

Blessing uses a monkey wrench to lean on a rusted bolt holding down the grate. It doesn't budge.

MEYNARD

Dante, camera.

Meynard smooths his hair and is about to speak when a monkey wrench smacks into his chest.

Embarrassed, he and Dante help Blessing, the bolt starts to turn. Suzie films it with Dante's camera.

EXT. THE RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Under bright moonlight and covered in blood, Blessing and Dante pull the last rusty barb out of the elephant's leg.

Meynard wraps a bandage around the wound.

Matriarch strokes her daughter's face with her trunk as she labors to her feet. The baby dives in to nurse.

The people are exhausted but exhilarated, they hug.

DANTE

Woooo! Welcome to Africa bitches!

SUZIE

Blessing, you saved her, you saved them both.

BLESSING

Any mother would do the same.

Suzie, Meynard and Dante crowd around the camera to look at the footage. Blessing shakes her head and laughs.

SUZIE

What?

BLESSING

You guys. Looking at that (Camera) instead of this:

She nods at the full moon- bright and big and beautiful.

SUZIE

Don't be judgy. Someone needs to tell the story.

The Americans then scramble to get the best moonrise selfie.

BLESSING

Yes, but if you are only telling a story, you are not living it.

Something growls nearby. Blessing raises her rifle.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

You might not even survive it.

The others spin back around.

DANTE

Lions?

BLESSING  
 Just a scout. Our hefty friends  
 have kept it at bay.

The Matriarch charges at the rustling.

BLESSING (CONT'D)  
 Quick, we must stay close.

They follow the elephant back towards the lodge.

EXT. THE LAB HATCH - DAWN

Close to the compound, Matriarch turns back. All but Blessing start jogging toward the sound of drunken singing.

DANTE  
 Hey! You coming?

BLESSING  
*Ja*, just now.

Blessing chases down the Matriarch. She strokes its head and notices the scars - deep gashes from big lion claws.

BLESSING (CONT'D)  
 Thank you my brave friend.

The elephant nods and plods away. Thud. Thud. GONG. Thud.

Blessing hears the anomaly. She follows the elephant's path and discovers more metal in the earth.

It's a hatch, over grown and padlocked.

She aims her rifle at the lock, but reconsiders.

Using the monkey wrench she tries to break the rusty padlock.

EXT. THE FIGTREE - NIGHT

Dante, Suzie and Meynard step into the clearing.

SUZIE  
 Craziest. Day. Ever. I can't wait  
 to get online and tell everyone.

DANTE  
 Ain't over yet... Where's Blessing?

MEYNARD

She'll be fine. Let's get some rest.

Meynard and Suzie continue to the lodge. Dante doesn't budge.

SUZIE

Dante, let's go!

Dante thinks a moment, then disappears back into the bush.

Suzie and Meynard share a look before chasing after Dante.

EXT. THE BASECAMP - NIGHT

Schalk and the Mercs are still drinking. In the distance, Schalk spots the Americans heading back into the bush.

SCHALK

Petra, gun. Bakkies, with me.

PETRA

Afraid to piss alone now Boss?

SCHALK

Ha ha. Keep your radios close.

Petra passes their M-16. Schalk clips his radio on his belt.

EXT. THE LAB HATCH - NIGHT

Blessing, Meynard and Dante all lean into the wrench.

POP. The lock snaps off. Blessing heaves open the hatch, a long ladder leads down into darkness.

SUZIE

Seriously?

Dante readies his camera. Meynard smooths his hair with trembling hands.

MEYNARD

(To Camera)

It's the middle of the night, but I've discovered a secret hatch-

Blessing rolls her eyes and starts down the ladder. Dante follows her with the camera.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

Hey! Hey, stay on me-

Dante pushes past his boss and joins Blessing on the ladder.

INT. THE LAB, CAGES ROOM - NIGHT

Blessing leads the way down the gloomy concrete hallway.  
Dante filming as they go.

They come to a big open area. Their flashlights reveal dozens of menacing iron cages of various sizes.

Suzie nudges open a cage door. She holds up a huge bear trap.

DANTE

Former day spa maybe? It's got that  
relaxing, welcoming kinda vibe.

Blessing points to a door on the wall between cages.

INT. THE LAB - NIGHT

They push through the swing door into a long abandoned science lab with medical gear and examination tables.

Rats hiss at the intruders and scurry away.

Meynard bee-lines for a locked filing cabinet, Blessing whacks the rusty lock off with her rifle butt.

Meynard dives in and hands out folders, all labelled 'The Chimera Project - Top Secret'.

Meynard reads. Blessing watches his excitement grow.

MEYNARD

Genetic engineering!

BLESSING

What are you talking about?

MEYNARD

This place, it was some sort of primitive, genetic chop shop. Seems they were trying to splice genetic traits from one species into another.

(Pointing, laughing)

Like adding elephant genes to grow oversized buffalo.

Blessing and Suzie throw each other nervous looks.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

And here, enhancing leopard IQ with baboon DNA.

DANTE

What!? Why?

Meynard stops to consider.

MEYNARD

I... Have no idea.

SUZIE

(Going through files)

Primates... Pachyderms... Canines.  
Canines?

Blessing breaks the second drawer lock and reaches in.

BLESSING

Lion.

Meynard races over, Blessing hands him the heavy binder.

MEYNARD

It's incredible, they were cutting  
and pasting from everywhere.  
Hundreds of experiments.

(Flipping pages)

Chimps, baboons, rhinos, wolves,  
bears, Alsatians, pit-bulls,  
elephants, hyena, bats even.

DANTE

Bats? Don't tell me the lions can  
frickin' fly?

MEYNARD

No, they were experimenting with  
echolocation- unsuccessfully it  
looks like.

BLESSING

So what was 'successful'?

MEYNARD

I don't know, I'll have to go  
through it.

DANTE

But the Frankenlions out there  
could be, like, chimp smart, rhino  
big and pit-bull crazy?

MEYNARD

Yeah, maybe.

The thought resonates. Blessing lifts up an enormous leg shackle connected to an operating table.

BLESSING

Those poor animals. What kind of arrogance thinks it can improve on what nature has made? Or believes it has the right to even try?

MEYNARD

You could make that argument about a lot of science.

SUZIE

Except that motivation matters. These assholes weren't trying to cure cancer.

DANTE

-Or save endangered species.

BLESSING

Yes. It is not like normal lion struggle in the wild.

MEYNARD

(Mumbling, reading)

Fascinating. I mean Jaenisch made his GMO mouse in '74, and the sheep/goat hybrid thing popped up in what, the mid 80s? But this was really ahead of the curve.

Suzie slams the folder shut.

SUZIE

Because no one else was doing it! Because it's crazy illegal and crazy unethical.

DANTE

(Feigning outrage)

How dare the *apartheid* government do something unethical?

SUZIE

Ha ha.

Meynard grins, giddy with possibility. He re-opens the file.

MEYNARD

Ethical or not, some of it worked!  
If those super-lions are any guide.

DANTE

Frankenlions. Can we commit to  
Frankenlions?

MEYNARD

Be serious for once in your life  
and understand what we're looking  
at. This could be a game changer  
for me, ah, for all of us.

Meynard fist bumps Dante. Dante readies the camera.

Blessing's appalled at the thought.

EXT. BASECAMP - NIGHT

The Mercs are shit-faced. They finish up a song.

PETRA

What happened to the Colonel?

TOMMY

Probably trying to get one up  
Blondie.

RAND

Or Bakkies.

The group laugh and prepare to turn in.

INT. THE LAB - NIGHT

Meynard addresses Dante's camera. Suzie photographs pages.

MEYNARD

But, incredibly, it's not just  
lion. I've also discovered evidence  
of other species being engineered:  
leopard, buffalo, rhino, elephant,  
hyena, baboon even-

BAKKIES (O.S.)

Ball sack! Herpes! Seppo doess!

MEYNARD

Oh no.

Blessing reaches for her rifle. BOOM. A bullet ricochets off the desk near her hand.

SCHALK

Nay Blessing. Don't make me shoot you.

Schalk and Bakkies walk out of the shadows, M-16s up. Bakkies grabs Blessing's rifle.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

I told Elsie not to bring you lot.  
I told her I'd clean up her mess  
but, *ach*, dollar signs for eyes  
that one.

Bakkies starts hand-cuffing them with zip ties.

INT. THE LODGE - NIGHT

The drunk Mercs stumble into the fire light. Rand chucks some logs on the fire before collapsing on his cot.

RAND

Don't let the bed bugs bite, you  
worthless pricks.

The others, already half asleep, don't respond.

SPLAT. A splodge of brown slop hits Rand's chest, he sits up.

RAND (CONT'D)

*Ja* funny. Who the *fok* was that?

He checks the splat, it's shit. His looks up to the beams in the rafters.

RAND (CONT'D)

Oh *fok*.

Dozens of baboons, eyes afire, teeth bared.

The alpha male lets out an ear-piercing CRY and the monkeys rain down on the prone Mercenaries.

Three-inch, razor sharp canines rip through flesh. The people clamber for their weapons.

An occasional gunshot lights up the carnage. Petra stands and flings one of the baboons into the fire. It SCREAMS.

Mamba scrambles for the radio.

MAMBA  
 (Into Radio)  
 Mayday! Colonel! Baboons! Mayd-

Mamba's torn to shreds but the radio continues to transmit.

Tommy gets off a few rounds before the alpha male wrenches the gun off him and flings it into the raging fire.

INT. THE GATE, TOWER - NIGHT

Gillets and Davis are asleep on the floor of the guard tower when their radio explodes with Mamba's transmission.

GILLETS  
 (Into Radio)  
 Mamba?! What's going on? ... *Boet?*  
 You there?... Hello?

All they hear is screaming.

EXT. THE GATE - NIGHT

Gillets and Davis fly down the tower ladder.

Davis heaves open the gate. Gillets jumps behind the wheel. Davis leaps aboard and they speed into Engaziwa.

INT. THE LAB - NIGHT

The captives in a line, Schalk whacks his radio, he only hears screams as well. Bakkies is itching to go.

SCHALK  
 (To Hostages)  
*Fokin' march. Go, GO!*

Bakkies pushes them toward the door.

I/E. RIVER TRACK, SAFARI TRUCK 3 - NIGHT

Gillets and Davis thunder along the pot-holed track by the river.

DAVIS  
 You know where to go, right?

The two share a worried look.

DAVIS (CONT'D)

Watch it!

Rhino in the road. Gillets hits the brakes and they skid to a stop. Gillets slams the HORN.

GILLETS

Move it!

The rhino snorts but doesn't move. It's joined by its calf, who bumbles out from the thick jungle on the verge.

DAVIS

Go around.

GILLETS

How? There's a *fokin'* river.

Davis reaches to the back seat and pulls out his M-16. He sits on the window and takes aim. Gillets grabs him.

GILLETS (CONT'D)

You can't shoot a rhino.

DAVIS

Why not?

GILLETS

They are critically endangered.

DAVIS

*Ach* bunny hugger, who gives a shit?

Davis steps out, closes the door and takes aim.

Gillets points his handgun at Davis.

GILLETS

Don't shoot that rhino.

Davis swings his gun back towards Gillets. Neither man flinches until...

GILLETS (CONT'D)

Look out!

CRASH. A second massive rhino explodes out from the jungle.

Its horn plunges right through Davis's leg and pins him to the truck door.

The impact lifts the vehicle up on two wheels and the pachyderm pushes the truck toward the fast flowing river.

Gillets scrambles, managing to drop out of the driver's door as the truck barrels over the high river bank.

He clings to the bank, water laps at his feet. Helpless, he watches Davis get dragged under the sideways truck.

GILLETS (CONT'D)

Davis! Hang on *boet*.

About to jump in, Gillets sees a crocodile heading for the commotion. He aims at it, but it dives into the wreck.

The truck shakes and Gillets hears a final muffled scream.

Gillets freezes. Hot heavy breathing blows across the top of his head as the rhino leans out over the bank. Gillets steals a look up. Blood drips off its horn, onto his face.

Eventually the rhino trots away and Gillets exhales.

INT. THE LODGE - NIGHT

The bloodstained baboons screech and slap the bodies of the mercenaries, making sure of their revenge.

Satisfied, the biggest male HOOTS, signalling the others to leave. He grabs hold of a rifle strap and drags it along the blood wet floor.

He pitches it into the fire, now fueled by burning gun and EXPLODING bullets.

EXT. THE LODGE PATIO - NIGHT

Last out, the Alpha leads a chorus of SCREECHING. His troop clamber upon the roof and disappear into the moonlit night.

EXT. BASECAMP - NIGHT

Terrified by the noises, Elspeth yells out her window.

ELSPETH

Schalk! Hello!? Where is everyone!?

Wilson steps into the courtyard from his quarters.

INT. ELSPETH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Wilson locks the door behind him. Elspeth is panicking.

ELSPETH

I won't die here Wilson! This will not be the end of the Van Der Merwes.

WILSON

No ma'am. I will make sure of it. As your head ranger, it is my duty.  
(beat)  
My loyalty to you is absolute. I hope you will remember that.

The brief, awkward silence is broken by Schalk's yelling.

SCHALK (O.S.)

Hurry up. Move it!

EXT. BASECAMP - EARLY MORNING

It's getting light. Elspeth and Wilson run into the courtyard. Bakkies corrals Blessing and the Americans.

ELSPETH

Schalk, what the hell is going on?

BAKKIES

On your knees!

The captives drop. Bakkies hands Elspeth Blessing's rifle.

SCHALK

(To Elspeth)

Elspeth, I don't have time to explain but you need to trust me.

(To Wilson)

You. With me.

Schalk, Bakkies and Wilson take off for the lodge.

MEYNARD

Elspeth! Help us. That lunatic has totally lost the plot. The lions have been genetically engineered. Other animals too. It's not safe.

INT. THE LODGE - DAWN

Schalk kicks open the door. Bakkies and Wilson follow.

It's total carnage, blood and bodies everywhere. Wilson covers his mouth and runs back outside.

EXT. THE BASECAMP - EARLY MORNING

Wilson returns to the group.

WILSON  
Dead. All dead. Baboons.

MEYNARD  
You see Elspeth! We need to leave!

SCHALK (O.S.)  
No one's going anywhere.

Everyone talks at once, until they're drowned out by the THUMP THUMP of a low-flying Black Hawk helicopter.

ELSPETH  
Thank God! Get me the hell out of this place! Schalk, untie them.

SCHALK  
Elsie, I don't-

ELSPETH  
Do it! Whatever conversations have to happen can happen on the outside. Wilson, ready the trucks.

Bakkies, distraught, cuts the zip ties.

DANTE  
Um. What's he doing here?

He points at Gillets, running into basecamp, pistol drawn.

I/E. SAFARI TRUCK 1 - DAY

Blessing drives everyone except Wilson and Bakkies. Elspeth looks through phone photos from the lab.

ELSPETH  
What does this all mean?

MEYNARD  
It means we're driving through the most exciting genetic engineering experiment in history.

ELSPETH  
But now we must kill all of these animals?

SCHALK  
Ja. Hundred Percent.

In the rear view, Blessing nods at Schalk.

MEYNARD  
No! I mean, to experiment like this is absolutely abhorrent, totally unconscionable. But, what's done is done.

DANTE  
Can't un-crack the egg.

MEYNARD  
Elspeth, you now own a totally unique, totally pristine ecosystem, populated by numerous genetically enhanced sub-species.

ELSPETH  
So what? Spit it out.

MEYNARD  
Safari 2.0. Imagine what people would pay to see hyper-intelligent leopards hunting physically enhanced baboons, or to sit in an observation deck for that lion nursery. Guaranteed sightings, new behaviors seen daily. And that's just the start, zoologists, biologists, photographers, documentarians they'd be gagging for access.

Schalk rocks back, he doesn't like the sound of it.

DANTE  
Cover of *Science* here we come.

MEYNARD  
Cover of *Time* more like it.

Dante and Meynard fist bump. Suzie leaves Dante hanging.

ELSPETH  
But my father's reputation? The family name?

MEYNARD  
There's no denying he's a villain in this story.  
(MORE)

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

But that doesn't mean you can't be one of the heroes. And a very, very wealthy hero at that.

Blessing slams on the brakes and turns to Elspeth.

ELSPETH

What's wrong?

BLESSING

Do you not feel it? The evil here?  
Do you not all feel it?

(Beat)

What if these monsters escape? If they breed with normal animals they could corrupt the DNA of entire species, destroy whole ecosystems, all across Africa! You saw what they did to the buffalo herd.

MEYNARD

It's a great point and we'll have to be extremely careful, but I'm sure Schalk's men built the fence to last, right Colonel?

Gillets, listening from the back seat, interrupts.

GILLETS

-Ah, we might have a problem... Me and Davis, in our rush to help...

BLESSING

The gate is open!

The truck screams back onto the track.

EXT. FIELD NEAR THE HANGAR - DAY

The Black hawk descends over a clearing between the abandoned hangar and the gate. Waves ripple through the long grass.

RAJ (V.O.)

You sure this is the place? Not like the Colonel to be late.

TANYA (V.O.)

Ja, this is it.

RAJ (V.O.)

Right-o. Then I'm going for a piss.

As the blades come to a stop, the pilot, RAJ (40, Indian-African) hops out and wanders toward the hangar, humming 'A lion sleeps tonight'.

He heaves open the hangar door and sees an overgrown aircraft at the far end. It's a C-47 Skytrain, a military DC-3.

He steps back out and pulls up at the wall by the entrance.

RAJ  
(Singing)  
"In the jungle, the mighty jungle,  
the lion sleeps tonight... A-wheema-  
weh, a-wheema-weh".

INT. THE COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

The Copilot, TANYA (35, Xhosa), puts down the logbook and looks over.

TANYA  
Mary, mother of God...  
(Out window, yelling)  
RAJ! RUN!

EXT. THE HANGAR, ENTRANCE END - CONTINUOUS

Hearing her, Raj zips up and turns.

He's met by the hot, meaty breath of the ALPHA - a male lion the size of a small elephant, packed with rippling muscle.

Its enormous head is wrapped by a thick, dark mane, its mouth full of machete sized teeth.

One of its eyes is a bloodied mess - thanks to Blessing's rifle.

Raj backs up against the wall and scrambles for his sidearm but a huge paw slaps him down, pinning him on the ground. He squirms like a trapped mouse.

In the cockpit: Tanya, terrified, re-starts the engine.

On the wall: The Alpha turns to the engine noise.

RAJ  
Go! Go get it you bastard.

The Alpha looks down at his caught toy.

SWISH. The lion extends his foot long retractable claws and impales Raj.

In the cockpit: Tanya rushes through the take-off routine when something catches her eye: Raj's lifeless body flying straight at her, leaking blood.

Tanya braces for impact, but the body is minced by the chopper blades. A red mist blankets the windscreen.

TANYA

Holy Shit!

It takes the wipers a few goes to clear enough blood to see, but then all she sees is the Alpha, bounding toward her.

EXT. FIELD NEAR THE HANGAR - CONTINUOUS

The black hawk lifts off. The Alpha closes in and leaps. It whacks the tail and sends the aircraft into a spin.

Tanya somehow regains control and continue the ascent. The Alpha squats below, timing its pounce.

The helicopter is 30 feet up by the time the massive beast explodes upward, catching the front tire between its paws.

The black hawk fights, but the lion is too heavy. The aircraft dives nose first and crashes, its blades chewing into the earth in front.

The Alpha falls away unscathed.

EXT. THE RIVER TRACK - DAY

Both trucks thunder toward the spot where Gillets' truck was pushed in the river.

SUZIE

- But she's right, if these animals do get out and inter-breed-

MEYNARD

- Catastrophic. I know Suzie. But it hasn't happened yet.

BLESSING

How do you know? The gate has been open all night.

DANTE

B, lookout!

Blessing jumps on the brakes. The fast flowing river, diverted around the submerged truck has washed away part of the track, it's now impassable by truck.

SUZIE

Oh God. What have we done?!

DANTE

We fuckin'... Ruined Africa.

MEYNARD

We have not ruined Africa! Everyone needs to stay calm.

BLESSING

And what of that nearby village? Those children. If the lions make it there-

SCHALK

-Total bloodbath. Kak! How far to the gate? Do you remember Blessing?

BLESSING

Fifteen clicks, maybe more.

SCHALK

Ach, too far to go on foot. Back in the trucks. We'll go back and find a way to signal the chopper.

All except Blessing clamber back in the vehicle.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Come on.

BLESSING

Someone has to shut the gate.

DANTE

Yeah, we'll find another way.

BLESSING

There is no other way.

Blessing grabs her rifle.

MEYNARD

It's suicide. Think of your boy.

BLESSING

I am. Constantly I think of him. But this...

(Gesturing around her)

(MORE)

BLESSING (CONT'D)  
 This is his birth right. And I  
 cannot be responsible for  
 destroying it.

ELSPETH  
 No, I need you here with us. Our  
 lives are at stake.

BLESSING  
 So are hundreds in the village. If  
 I go now I can make it before dark  
 when the lion become active.

MEYNARD  
 But these lion, they're not lion.

BLESSING  
 Exactly why I must shut that gate!

Blessing pulls the bolt on her rifle.

BLESSING (CONT'D)  
 The consequences of their escape  
 are too great. And all of us, we  
 are responsible.  
 (Beat)  
 If there's to be blood on my hands,  
 I want it to be my own.

The others are speechless. Blessing turns down the road.

Suzie leaps down and reaches for the rifle.

SUZIE  
 I'll go. I can run 15 clicks,  
 backwards, in my sleep.

MEYNARD  
 Suzie! Are you crazy?

SUZIE  
 Maybe. But I've spent a lot of my  
 life *talking* about making a  
 difference. Time for me to live the  
 story for once, not just tell it.

Dante jumps down from the truck, grabs Suzie's shoulders.

DANTE  
 Suze, no! We'll find another way.

SUZIE

It'll be OK. I got a feeling that maybe this is what I was meant to do.

They hug goodbye. Suzie then hugs Blessing and fumbles with the rifle, it's clear she's never held one.

Gillets jumps off the truck, M-16 in hand.

GILLETS

For my daughter. It is her birthright *as-well*.

Schalk throws him a radio. Suzie hugs Gillets with relief.

DANTE

Suzie, wait.

Dante takes a picture of Suzie and Gillets.

SUZIE

How do we look?

DANTE

Goddamn heroic.

Suzie and Gillets take off down the road.

EXT. BASECAMP - DAY

The trucks rumble back into the basecamp courtyard and see hyenas by the lodge door, snouts and paws bloodied from eating the Mercs.

BAKKIES

You *foking* bastards!

Bakkies jumps down and empties his clip. A few hyena fall.

But a dozen or so more file out of the lodge. Realizing their strength in numbers, they stalk toward the trucks.

Blessing stands on the hood, her rifle to her shoulder.

SCHALK

Bakkies, get back.

Bakkies leaps back in the vehicle.

A big hyena breaks ranks and runs at the truck. Blessing shoots it and the others scurry back a few yards.

After a cautious beat, they again move closer.

DANTE  
How many rounds you got?

BLESSING  
Not enough.

She shoots another hyena, which produces the same result - a short lived retreat.

Blessing again takes aim and the hyenas all freeze. Then they scatter, bolting into the surrounding bush.

DANTE  
Nice, B!

BLESSING  
They didn't run from me.

DANTE  
Then why?

The realization hits them like a brick.

BLESSING  
Quick, everyone inside!

They all rush from the trucks to the officers' quarters. Wilson slams the metal door behind them.

INT. ELSPETH'S ROOM - DAY

Blessing and Schalk look out the small window. Others sit on the bed and floor. Bakkies is still seething.

SCHALK  
They're here.

In the courtyard below, some lionesses and young males creep out to the trucks and start sniffing around.

BAKKIES  
Let me. Please.

Bakkies reaches for Blessing's rifle. She gives it to him.

THUMP. Something big lands on the roof, the ceiling bends above them.

SCHALK  
Come Bakkies, make your point.

Bakkies aims out the window. He's about to fire when a big paw swings down, its claws catching Bakkies' arm.

BAKKIES

*Fok!*

Hooked like a fish, Bakkies drops the gun and is flung out the window to the ground.

EXT. BASE CAMP, COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Bakkies lands on his back, dazed.

SCHALK

(From window)

Get up! Get up man!

He manages to stand but only for an instant. Brown leaps down from the roof and starts shredding Bakkies with his claws.

INT. ELSPETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Schalk recovers the rifle and fires. Brown gathers Bakkies in his huge jaws and bounds away.

Schalk shoots at the lions by the trucks. Three fall dead.

Those remaining turn and snarl, but a nearby ROAR calls them away and they scatter, Schalk shooting as they go.

SCHALK

*Ja. Run you fokin' cowards.*

BLESSING

Oh no!

Blessing turns from the window, reclaims her rifle and rushes out.

EXT. BASECAMP, COURTYARD - DAY

Blessing runs to the trucks and finds them trashed - tires all punctured, the seats and dash shredded. The coolers are ransacked, all their food now ruined.

The others follow her out in total disbelief.

DANTE

We're all gonna die.

SCHALK  
Not yet we're not.

Schalk pulls out his radio.

SCHALK (CONT'D)  
(Into Radio)  
Gillets, do you copy? ... Gillets?  
Suzie? Do you copy?

Nothing.

DANTE  
Ok now. Now we're all going to die.

Schalk throws him a dirty look.

GILLETS  
(From Radio)  
Boss? You there?

EXT. THE RIVER TRACK - DAY

Suzie and Gillets slow to a fast walk.

SCHALK  
(From Radio)  
We were attacked. The trucks are gone. We're going to bunker down and wait for you to send the chopper. Do you copy?

GILLETS  
(Into Radio)  
What do you mean attacked? What happened to the trucks?

SCHALK  
Do you copy?

GILLETS  
Yes sir. Copy.

Gillets and Suzie share a look, then run off down the track.

INT. THE LODGE - DAY

The scene inside is horrific, the dead bodies now half-eaten.

BLESSING  
Now do you feel it?

Elsbeth starts crying. Meynard leads her out to the patio.

Schalk starts searching the bodies of the mercenaries for their guns. He finds only a side arm in Rand's holster.

He can't understand where the weapons have gone.

WILSON

Colonel.

Wilson points to the fireplace, full of half-melted guns.

EXT. THE GATE - DAY

The open gate and guard tower are a hundred yards ahead. A lioness steps in front of Suzie and Gillets.

SUZIE

Here we go.

Gillets shoots the lioness and they sprint for it.

Suzie makes it to the base of the tower ladder. Gillets kills a second lioness coming at them from the left of the gate.

Suzie's halfway up when a young male leaps up to grab her. Gillets shoots it mid air.

He then heaves the gate but it takes both hands, he only moves it a yard when he's forced to shoot another attacker.

Suzie makes it to the top and kicks open the wooden door. She slams it behind her, gasping, shaking with relief.

Gillets continues heaving the gate shut. With his back turned he misses BLACK bound up the tower's wooden supports onto the cabin's wrap around walkway.

Suzie doesn't miss it. She sees Black prowl past the window, She stifles a scream and locks the dead bolt.

SLAM. Black swipes at the door. Again the tower shakes.

Suzie sees a hand gun on the floor next to Davis' sleep mat, but she can't abandon the door. Black tries to shove his way in.

On the ground, Gillets can see Black's tail on the tower balcony but can't get a clean shot.

GILLETS

Suzie!

He fires a few rounds up at the tower, but is distracted by a lioness bounding at him from the grass.

Inside the cabin: Suzie screams as Black continues to pound the door. The rotting tower legs start to crack.

Suzie sees a cross beam in the roof. SLAM.

On the ground: Gillets has the gate half closed. He looks up and sees one of the tower legs snap.

GILLETS (CONT'D)

Oh shit!

Inside: Feeling the tower give out, Suzie clings to the beam.

On the ground: Gillets jumps out of the way of the tower which CRASHES down across the gate line.

He manages to avoid the falling structure, but can't avoid Black's open jaws as it springs off the collapsing tower.

Inside: Suzie's beam grab saved her, but she's pinned under debris. The hand gun is just out of reach.

She hears Gillets SCREAM and the guttural sounds of a lion feeding.

Terrified, she quietens her breathing. She cranes her neck and spots Black carrying Gillets away like a rag doll.

His rifle and radio fall to the ground, ten feet away.

Wasting no time, Suzie tries to move the debris, shifting it a little.

A low GROWL makes her freeze. Through the wooden slats, she sees a lioness step out from the grass, followed by two cubs.

The lioness bee-lines for the collapsed tower and jumps on it. Suzie groans under the extra weight. The lioness spots her.

Suzie plays dead, hoping this lion won't scavenge. The cat digs through the debris, more out of curiosity than desperation.

The lioness loses interest and leaps away, shifting the wreckage in the process, she saunters back down the road. Her cubs follow.

Suzie exhales. She manages to free her upper body and sets about trying to clear her waist and legs.

Then her heart sinks.

SCHALK  
 (From Gillets' Radio)  
 Gillets. Do you copy? What the hell  
 is taking so long?

The lioness turns to the noise and starts running back.

SCHALK (CONT'D)  
 (From Radio)  
 Gillets? Do you copy?

SUZIE  
 No no no!

Fingers finally find the handgun and she aims through the wood at the lioness, charging full speed.

She shoots, but misses.

SUZIE (CONT'D)  
 Oh fuck.

She shoots again. The bullet knocks the animal off balance but doesn't stop it. The lioness leaps toward the debris.

Suzie fires again and again.

The lioness, finally dead, crashes down on the tower and knocks Suzie back, leaving only her head and gun hand free.

Her eyes search for a solution. Instead, they see the lion cubs waddle toward their fallen mother.

The cubs clamber up and nuzzle their mother, they start to whimper. Suzie almost feels sorry for them.

The dead lioness rolls off the debris, shifting the rubble. A gap opens up by Suzie's body, but she's still stuck.

After a moment, the uncertain cubs leap off the pile and head for the open gate.

SUZIE (CONT'D)  
 No no no! Not that way.

The cubs reach the threshold. Suzie has to make a decision.

SUZIE (CONT'D)  
 (To Herself)  
 Fuck it.  
 (Yelling)  
 Hey! Babies! Over here!

The cubs turn and canter back towards the noise. Suzie readies the gun.

SUZIE (CONT'D)  
Come on Simba, down here.

One of the cubs scrambles down into the gap. Inches from Suzie's face, it looks at her with curious eyes. She aims the gun up at its stomach.

The cub licks her face.

SUZIE (CONT'D)  
Sorry little guy.

Suzie pulls the trigger. CLICK. Empty.

SUZIE (CONT'D)  
Oh no.

The cub flashes its teeth, its innocence disappears.

SUZIE (CONT'D)  
GO! SCRAM. GET AWAY. GET AWAY!

The cub doesn't run. It starts to feed.

A soft breeze carries Suzie's SCREAMS through the long grass.

EXT. THE LODGE PATIO - DAY

Schalk looks at his silent radio.

DANTE  
Maybe they closed the gate and  
forgot to tell us? Or they're out  
of range? Or they lost the walkie?

Schalk turns out to face the water. Blessing consoles Dante with a hug.

CRASH. A chunk of the decaying roof crashes onto the deck by Elspeth. She jumps.

ELSPETH  
CHRIST! Is nowhere safe in this  
Godforsaken place?

Blessing and Schalk share a knowing look.

INT. THE LAB - DAY

Lit up with lanterns, the group bunkers down. Meynard is lost in the research files, muttering in amazement.

Blessing and Schalk pore over the map.

BLESSING

-And here, this is not a back road?

SCHALK

*Ach nay*, one way in, one way out.

Wilson approaches, he steps between Blessing and Schalk.

WILSON

Colonel, may I offer my expertise-

SCHALK

-Far as I can tell, you have no expertise. If you're bored, go count the ammunition.

Wilson goes to speak again, but Schalk nudges him back from the map table.

Wilson stares jealous daggers at Blessing then slinks away.

Schalk sits, defeated. He picks up a big leg shackle.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

What a *fokin'* mess. I can't believe they- we- were doing this shit. Honestly, it makes me sick. A lot about that time makes me sick.

BLESSING

We must not wallow in what has been but keep our heads towards the sun, our feet moving forward... This fight is not yet lost.

Blessing and Schalk share a tender moment.

SCHALK

You are something else, you know that?

Elsbeth sits head in hands. Dante paces in front of her.

DANTE

Glamping huh!? "Just like regular camping but with more terrifying massacres!". And what, too cool for a contingency plan?

ELSPETH

A platoon of mercenaries and expert zoologists was my contingency plan. But it turns out NONE OF YOU COULD DO YOUR FUCKING JOBS!

DANTE

Nah, not like daddy huh? Cause he did his job great, him and his racist goons did a stellar job cooking up psycho-fucking-mutant-lions.

SCHALK

Quiet! For *fok's* sake.

The room goes quiet.

ELSPETH

Someone will come. We just have to wait.

BLESSING

Are we really going to just cower like rats and hope for a miracle?

ELSPETH

What are our options? Out run them? It's 20k's to the gate and we're low on ammo.

BLESSING

I don't know, but I am not giving up! We cannot let this evil escape, and my son will not grow up without his mother! We must keep looking.

Blessing grabs her rifle and a lantern.

INT. THE LAB, CAGES ROOM - DAY

Blessing creeps along a row of cages and shudders as she passes a busy rats' nest. They hiss at her.

She doesn't see the Gaboon viper hunting the rats from the adjacent cage. The snake slithers after her.

She sees something - another door, it's open.

INT. THE LAB, BRIGADIER'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is dank. The floor and rotting desk are littered with mouldy documents. Blessing scans the files: useless.

She opens the desk drawers, finds another folder with only a symbol on it - the greek "Alpha". She tucks it under her arm.

A cork board catches her eye. Specifically, a caricature cartoon of a fat, bearded man, BRIGADIER VENTER (Afrikaans, 60s) with a lion, on a leash.

On the floor behind her, papers start to shift.

She pockets the sketch and looks over the other yellow documents and photographs on the board.

The Brigadier features often; in an official army photograph; with a team of lab coated scientists; smiling with despised apartheid leader PW Botha.

Blessing smacks Botha's likeness with the butt of her rifle, knocking the picture down and revealing a photo of Venter holding up a big caught fish.

Blessing pulls it off the board and grins.

She thinks she hears something, her smile disappears.

HHHSSSSS. Fear streaks her face as she places the sound.

She slams the butt of her rifle to the ground behind her feet, just intercepting the viper's strike.

Fangs dig into the wood and the snake whips itself around the firearm. Venom trickles down.

Blessing exhales. She grabs the viper at the back of the head and dangles it in front of her.

BLESSING

Sorry to waste your venom friend,  
let's find you a rat for supper.

INT. THE LAB - DAY

Blessing barges back into the sombre room. She hands off the new folder to Meynard en route to Schalk, whittling a chair leg with his bowie knife.

BLESSING  
Colonel, look at this.

She shows the photo of the man and his fish.

SCHALK  
Brigadier Venter, he was in charge here. Nasty piece of work.

DANTE  
Wow, did the pot just call the kettle racist?

BLESSING  
No, look closer.

SCHALK  
An impressive tiger fish? I don't understand.

BLESSING  
The boat!

She points to a tin fishing boat far in the background.

Blessing bounds over to the map table.

BLESSING (CONT'D)  
From the lake we can take the river to here, then it's only a click to the gate.

I/E. LAB HATCH - DAY

They stumble out the hatch. 20 yards away, a white-eyed lioness sits up, yawns and bounds off into the bush.

I/E. PUMP SHED - DAY

Doors are wrenched open to reveal a flat bottomed, tin boat. A small, rusty outboard motor is clipped to a nearby brace.

EXT. THE LAKE SHORE - DAY

Meynard and Elspeth stand guard with the rifles. The others push the boat into the water, engine now attached.

Schalk steps in and grabs the pull cord.

He yanks it. It snaps. Schalk stumbles back, almost over the side. The engine doesn't kick, so Schalk kicks it.

DANTE

What about oars? Or sails?

MEYNARD

Against the current? We're too heavy.

DANTE

Right. Back to hopelessness and despair then.

BLESSING

No. Wilson is a fine mechanic. He must try and fix the motor.

WILSON

Blessing, you are so naive, we have no spare parts, no oil or fuel.

BLESSING

Not for this engine, but two brand new Land Rovers are just over there.

DANTE

Alright! Let's A-team this shit.

Dante and Blessing rush out. Elspeth and Schalk follow and pointedly ignore Wilson as they pass, leaving him seething.

EXT. BASECAMP, COURTYARD - DAY

Wilson works under the hood of a safari truck. Dante guards. Behind him, Schalk's digging a massive hole.

EXT. THE LAKE SHORE - DAY

Wilson works on the engine in the shade. Dante helps. Blessing wraps strips of cloth around the end of wood stakes. Meynard reads lab files. Elspeth keeps watch.

EXT. BASECAMP, OPEN SPACE NEAR COURTYARD - DAY

The shadows are longer. Schalk, having buried his men, pays his respects at the grave marked by a make-shift crucifix.

Blessing, Dante and Wilson walk past, carrying a tool box and jerry cans of fuel and water from the trucks.

Blessing stops next to Schalk, fighting back his emotions.

She reaches up and hugs him. The human contact breaks the emotional dam and Schalk gives in to the embrace.

After a while, Blessing steps back. She smiles and leaves Schalk to finish mourning.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The loaded boat is cramped and low, water almost breaching the gunwale. Wilson drives from the stern.

They come around a bend. A crocodile swims past.

EXT. HIPPO POOL - DAY

Blessing spots them first. She stands and points to dozens of wet, grey mounds littering the water up ahead.

BLESSING

Hippo.

ELSPETH

There! A way through.

BLESSING

Not a chance. Hippo are very territorial, they kill more people than lion.

Right on cue, two huge males lock jaws in combat.

DANTE

Now what? Fair to assume that swimming ain't the best idea?

Blessing sees a tree branch sticking out of the water near the river bend, under a 15' cliff.

BLESSING

We wait. They will leave the water at night to feed.

EXT. THE RIVER, TREE BRANCH - EVENING

Bow tied to the branch, the boat swings in the current under the cliff. Elspeth is lying back, trying to sleep.

The sunset is stunning but the mood is dark. A zebra family comes down to drink.

DANTE

I dreamed of this my whole life.  
African sunset surrounded by  
wildlife-  
(gesturing)  
Hippo, zebra -

ELSPETH

Lion!

Elspeth looks straight up at BROWN, peering down from the cliff. She scrambles back to sitting.

Schalk fires his rifle. He misses, Brown takes off.

MEYNARD

Don't shoot. Save ammo for when  
they're an actual threat.

SCHALK

But it's a male, take him out maybe  
the rest of the pride back off.

ELSPETH

Except we've seen at least three  
big males, so there must be more  
than one pride.

MEYNARD

Not necessarily. Not if they're  
brothers. Fraternal males often  
work together.

Meynard digs a research folder out of his bag.

BLESSING

That would explain the size of the  
pride.

MEYNARD

Pack.

ELSPETH

What?

MEYNARD

Pack, not pride. Johan spliced in  
wolf DNA to alter the group  
dynamic. These males are not  
programmed to compete like regular  
lions, but cooperate.

BLESSING

Even so, one of them must still be the alpha. Maybe that was him?

MEYNARD

It's not... This is.

Meynard pulls out the "Alpha" folder Blessing found. He digs out a photo of a giant young male lion shackled in the lab, looming over a dead buffalo.

BLESSING

It's bigger than the buffalo!

MEYNARD

And it's only a year old.

They pass the picture around.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

Seems they got it right with this one; increased size and muscle mass, obviously, but also enhanced intelligence and heightened senses: sight, smell and hearing.

ELSPETH

But why?

MEYNARD

Once again, we're back to the question of motivation.

He looks to Schalk.

SCHALK

Don't look at me. That stuff was way above my pay grade.

DANTE

Maybe they were trying to make some kinda Hunger Games style super-jungle? Frankenlion versus Mega Rhino.

(Beat)

Actually sounds pretty cool.

Blessing, looking away, enters the conversation.

BLESSING

The lion were not for the jungle. They were for the townships.

She pulls out the cartoon sketch of the Brigadier with the lion on the leash. She hands it to Meynard.

BLESSING (CONT'D)  
 They were making weapons.  
 Instruments of fear, to turn Africa  
 itself against the Africans.

Blessing lets the idea resonate.

BLESSING (CONT'D)  
 Imagine it: lion on the streets,  
 controlled by the police, being  
 unleashed on a crowd of protesters.  
 Leopards patrolling prison grounds  
 at night. Mounted cops on elephants  
 instead of horses.  
 (Grabs Alpha picture)  
 This thing as the President's pet.

ELSPETH  
 But who needs animals when you have  
 tanks and tear gas?

BLESSING  
 It was symbolic, meant to crush our  
 spirit. If the white man could  
 conquer even the mighty lion, then  
 what hope did we have?

Dante shoves Schalk.

DANTE  
 Assholes.

SCHALK  
*Ja*, hundred percent.

DANTE  
 At least they didn't succeed.

BLESSING  
 Not yet. But if these lion get out,  
 the damage to Africa will be worse  
 than even the most evil of these  
 men could have hoped.

SCHALK  
 We need to shut that *foking* gate.

WILSON  
 Look. The hippo are moving.

Hippos shuffle up the bank and disappear into the bush.

BLESSING

He's the dominant male, once he has-

She's interrupted by the horrific wheezes, grunts and screams of a hippo being savaged.

The noises, from the cliff above, end abruptly.

DANTE

Ok, I vote we go now.

Wilson pulls the rip cord and the motor starts.

Blessing reaches for the bow line, but dirt and dust get in her eyes, she coughs. More dirt falls from the sky.

SCHALK

Blessing *pas op!*

Blessing steps back, just avoiding the dead hippo, pushed from the cliff above, that crashes onto the bow, then into the water.

The boat heaves forward, almost capsizing. People and provisions get thrown overboard.

Everyone scrambles to climb back in. Schalk makes it first, he helps Blessing then Wilson.

Downstream, a big crocodile slides in from the bank.

Schalk reaches down for Meynard and yanks him out, causing Meynard's shoulder to dislocate, he HOWLS in pain.

Elsbeth, thrown the furthest, SCREAMS as she reaches up for help. Wilson helps Schalk bring her in.

ELSPETH

(To Schalk and Wilson)

First. You help me FIRST!

Dante has been caught in the current. Blessing throws him a rope. Blessing and Schalk start to haul him in.

BLESSING

SWIM!

Dante turns and sees the croc closing in. He starts pulling himself up the rope.

On the boat, Wilson and Meynard join the pulling. Elspeth stays seated.

The croc's snout nears Dante's trailing legs and he kicks it away, just before the others heave him back onboard.

DANTE  
FUCK. THAT.

BLESSING  
The fuel!

The cannisters are gone.

SCHALK  
Kak. We'll barely make it half way.

ELSPETH  
Someone needs to go back in.

The surrounding water is turning red.

BLESSING  
Don't be mad. Crocs will feed for days on that hippo.

They undo the line and Wilson drives them up river. From the cliff, some lion watch them go.

EXT. RIVER, BEACH LANDING - DAWN

The pre-dawn sky is ominous, streaked with red. Wilson steers the boat ashore on a long sand spit at a fork in the river.

Exhausted and defeated, they stumble onto the beach.

Wilson shakes the fuel can attached to the motor.

WILSON  
Hour left, maybe two.

DANTE  
Cool, so we're back to being totally screwed?

SCHALK  
Ja. Hundred percent.

Schalk pulls the soggy map from his shirt pocket, carefully opens it and lays it out to dry.

Dante wanders up stream and starts peeing in the river.

DANTE  
 (To himself, sarcastic)  
 Push yourself Dante. Get out in the  
 field Dante, Africa's so beautiful-

He hears something - the TINK TINK of metal.

Dante returns to the boat, swinging a metal canteen around on  
 its strap like nunchucks.

DANTE (CONT'D)  
 Check this. Found it in the river.

Schalk leaps up, grabs the canteen and compares it to his  
 canteen - identical. The others gather around.

SCHALK  
 How the hell did it get there?

The question hangs in the air. Blessing rushes to the map.

BLESSING  
 Here!

EXT. THE RIVER, NEAR THE SUBMERGED TRUCK - DAY

The boat splutters round a bend and they see Gillets' truck,  
 attacked by the rhino. It lies on its side in the river,  
 pointing into the current.

ELSPETH  
 It's there! Thank God.

There's an unsettling silence as the boat approaches.

DANTE  
 Just so we're all clear, I'm not  
 going in that water again. I will  
 sit here and motherfuckin' starve  
 before I get back in there.

ELSPETH  
 Wilson then.

SCHALK  
 No, we need him for the motor.

ELSPETH  
 Well you're not going in Colonel, I  
 want you here with me. Professor?

Meynard nods at his arm, in a makeshift sling. Elspeth goes  
 to speak-

MEYNARD

-Don't even think about Blessing.

BLESSING

It seems there is an obvious choice.

Everyone turns to Elspeth.

DANTE

Yeah, couldn't help notice you sitting out the rescue last night.

Now at the truck, they tie up to an exposed canopy support.

ELSPETH

Me? Are you kidding?

MEYNARD

Why not you?

ELSPETH

Because, it's me... I'm in charge.

DANTE

You're *in charge*?

ELSPETH

*Ja.* I own this boat, I own that truck, I own the whole fucking river and you will all do as I say.

DANTE

Oh, so because you're rich...

ELSPETH

Wilson! Get in the water. Now-now!

Wilson doesn't react.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

Do it. Or I'll make Blessing head ranger, I promise I will.

BLESSING

That is a promise you have already made and the only reason I came back to this terrible place.

ELSPETH

Fine, whichever of you gets the fuel can be head ranger.

Neither Wilson nor Blessing move. Elspeth is desperate.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

I swear it. With a bonus - half a million rands... Schalk, fix this and I'll add an extra million to the transfer.

SCHALK

Ja, but the money has already been transferred.

ELSPETH

Yes. As soon as I'm back.

SCHALK

What!? That money is for the families of my men. My dead men.

ELSPETH

Then you'd better make sure I make it back alive!

DANTE

(Laughing)

Damn girl. You done fucked up.

BLESSING

You lied to us all.

ELSPETH

Oh who gives a shit! You're all useless bloody-

Elspeth catches herself, but the damage is done. Blessing stands.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

What I meant to say-

Blessing pushes Elspeth into the water. Elspeth SCREAMS and tries to scramble back aboard.

ELSPETH (CONT'D)

Schalk. Help me!

SCHALK

Best just get the fuel Elsie.

Wilson hands Schalk a rope. He passes it to Elspeth.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Best you get it quick.

She takes a few deep breaths. She grabs a canopy bar and hauls herself across to the truck. The truck CREAKS.

She stands on a submerged tree trunk that's supporting the truck's back end. She disappears underwater.

Underwater: Elspeth ties the rope to the handle of the fuel cannister, latched to the back of the truck.

The Surface: Elspeth bursts back up, gulping air. She throws the rope's bitter end.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Now unclip the latches.

She nods. The truck, being pulled by the boat, the current and Elspeth's weight, shudders down along the tree trunk.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

You have to hurry.

She dives back down.

MEYNARD

Hey!

Meynard points to a crocodile, sliding in from the bank, 30 yards downstream. Wilson points the hand gun at it.

BLESSING

Wait for your shot.

WILSON

Woman, don't tell me what to do!

Underwater: Elspeth finds the fuel's top latch and manages to flick it open. She goes back up for air.

The surface: Elspeth pops up and sees the others looking down river, Wilson aiming the pistol.

SCHALK

Croc. We got it covered.

Elspeth freezes.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Go. Hurry!

She dives down. The croc's fifteen feet away and closing.

Underwater: The bottom latch won't open. Elspeth kicks the tank. The whole truck shakes. The supporting tree trunk starts to crack.

The surface: The crocodile is ten feet away.

BLESSING

Come on Wilson. Make it count.

Wilson lines it up...

SNAP. The tree trunk breaks. The truck crashes down into the sand a few feet below.

The bow of the boat, tied to the truck, dips into the river.

BANG. Wilson stumbles as he fires. He misses. The croc dives.

SCHALK

Shit!

Underwater: Elspeth's foot gets caught under the vehicle as it drops. She hears the gunshot and SCREAMS.

But she really SCREAMS when the bloated, half-eaten face of Davis floats past her, now freed from the croc's stash.

The surface: Dante loosens the line. Meynard bails water.

Wilson fires again and again.

BLESSING

Wilson no!

SCHALK

Ah, fuck it.

Schalk jumps into the water.

Blessing sees Davis' boot break the surface. She strips off her rifle.

DANTE

B, what are you doing!?

She too dives in the river.

Underwater: Elspeth yanks at her leg, trying to free it.

Schalk plunges in and helps. Elspeth points downstream to the crocodile. Schalk pulls out his knife.

The surface: Blessing, swims over and grabs Davis' boot. She runs her hands along his dead leg.

Underwater: The croc cracks opens its jaws, like a smile.

Knife in his right hand, Schalk waves the croc in with his left.

Crazy fast, the croc latches down on Schalk's left forearm.

The croc starts to twist Schalk's arm and with it, his whole body.

PZZT. PZZT. PZZT.

Three bullets zip through the water and hit the croc. It goes still, wisps of blood rise from its skin.

Schalk wrenches its jaws off his arm. He sees Blessing swimming towards him, holding Davis' handgun.

Elspeth has passed out. Blessing and Schalk both drop to the sand and together manage to free her leg.

The surface: Blessing and Schalk guide Elspeth's unconscious body to the boat, then dive back under.

Meynard and Dante heave her in. Meynard starts CPR.

Underwater: Schalk's arm is spouting blood, but still he and Blessing manage to free the fuel tank.

The surface: Wilson feels the tug of the rope and hauls in the fuel.

Dante helps Blessing and Schalk back on board.

EXT. RIVERBANK, LUNCH BEACH - DAY

Wilson runs the boat ashore. Meynard and Dante rush Elspeth to the sand. Meynard, despite his injury, continues CPR.

Schalk stumbles to shore, his belt around his arm as a tourniquet. He grabs Meynard.

SCHALK

You save her! Save her or my boys  
all died for nothing.

Meynard re-doubles his effort. Eventually Elspeth coughs, and splutters back to life. Meynard falls back in relief.

BLESSING

Well done. Come, we must keep  
going, we must get to that gate.

SCHALK

Ja, hundred perc-

Schalk collapses on the sand. Everyone is spent. Blessing sees something floating past in the river.

BLESSING

Fine. First lunch. And then we go.

She jogs over with Dante and they pull the dead crocodile onto the sand.

DANTE

Lunch! Girl, you gotta be the best damn game ranger on the planet.

Blessing smiles. Wilson, on the outer, spits in the sand.

EXT. RIVERBANK, LUNCH BEACH - DAY

The croc cooks on a makeshift spit. The dying fire is 6' long and thin to match the croc's body.

They eat in silence. Elspeth sits apart.

SCHALK

I will admit, eating this bastard is extremely satisfying.

DANTE

Yeah, little hot sauce and some slaw, it wouldn't be half bad.

Wilson uses Schalk's knife to carve off more roasted croc and offers it to Elspeth, she takes it.

WILSON

Blessing, we need more wood.

DANTE

(To Wilson)

Yo man, something wrong with your legs? B's done enough.

Wilson's about to clap back when Blessing stands, grabs her rifle and turns to the bank.

BLESSING

It's ok. I don't mind.

ELSPETH

Blessing wait. We need to talk, about what happened. I need to apologize. I lied to you all. I risked your lives and still, you saved mine. I'll make it right for all of you as soon as we get back. I promise.

They hear a faraway lion's ROAR.

BLESSING

Let's hope you stay alive long  
enough to keep that promise.

Blessing, with her gun, starts to climb the bank. Wilson also stands and wipes the knife.

WILSON

Yes, who knows what might happen?

Meynard hands him the pistol and he follows Blessing.

EXT. THE FIREWOOD THICKET - DAY

Blessing leads Wilson toward a thicket of dead trees.

WILSON

Your husband must be very worried.

BLESSING

I am not married. The father of my  
son did not deserve that privilege.

WILSON

Shame. Mothers should be with their  
babies.

BLESSING

Just as much as fathers.

WILSON

There you are wrong. Some jobs are  
best left for men.

They arrive at the thicket. Blessing turns, looking incredulous.

BLESSING

Collecting firewood for example.

She waits for Wilson to get the hint. Instead he sits on a log. She hands him her rifle and starts to collect wood.

WILSON

My wife, she so wanted to move to  
the lodge, to raise our children in  
the head ranger house. So long she  
has waited, so long have I worked.

Blessing ignores his chatter, she SNAPS off a branch.

WILSON (CONT'D)

But now she will make you head ranger. She thinks you are smarter than me.

Facing away, Blessing gets nervous.

WILSON (CONT'D)

But can you imagine: a grown man like me, working for you, for a girl... Every one will laugh at me. My brothers, my friends, even my sons. You will make me a joke.

Wilson flashes Schalk's knife in one hand, the pistol in the other.

Blessing turns, sees the knife. She drops her bundle.

BLESSING

Don't do anything stupid. You heard her *just-now*, she will reward all of us.

WILSON

But you most of all.

He stalks towards her, she backs into the long grass.

BLESSING

Take the job man, and the house. I don't care. All I want is to see my baby.

He cocks the trigger, she puts her hands in the air.

WILSON

I'm sorry girly. I just don't believe you.

Wilson spins the knife in his hand as he builds his resolve.

He lunges with the knife...

CRUNCH.

A lioness launches from the grass to intercept his attack.

The gun is knocked from his hand. He SCREAMS and stabs at the lion in vain. Her jaws lock on his neck.

Blessing scoops up the gun and sprints back to the thicket.

Another lioness is bounding toward her. She takes aim and FIRES twice, the cat falls.

EXT. RIVERBANK, LUNCH BEACH - DAY

Dante and Schalk are re-fueling the boat when they hear the gun shots.

EXT. THE FIREWOOD THICKET - CONTINUOUS

Blessing gets to her rifle and shoots the lion eating Wilson. A nearby ROAR is deafening, she decides to run for it.

EXT. RIVERBANK, LUNCH BEACH - CONTINUOUS

They hear her before they see her.

BLESSING (O.S.)  
(Yelling)  
The fire! Hurry!

Blessing races toward them through the grass. Behind her, closing fast, is GOLDEN.

SCHALK  
Christ. Run Blessing!

Dante runs the fuel can over and splashes it on the fire.

SCHALK (CONT'D)  
More!

Dante pours fuel along the fire, igniting a wall of flame.

Everyone else jumps back in the boat, they start it up.

Golden bounds towards Blessing, closing in...

From the boat, Schalk readies his M-16, but his view is obscured by the raging fire.

SCHALK (CONT'D)  
Come on girl...

Blessing leaps through the wall of fire, shadowed by the enormous lion, who recoils as the flames lick its fur.

Blessing rolls on the sand, gets to her feet and dives in the boat which Dante drives off shore.

ELSPETH

Wait, where's Wilson?

Blessing shakes her head, her sense of betrayal evident.

Golden watches through the flames and ROARS his displeasure.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

As the sun moves across the sky, they motor through a broken Africa, corrupted by such dominant predators:

A half eaten giraffe body, dead in the shallows.

Troops of scared monkeys howling warnings from the treetops.

Skittish zebra, bolting as they pass.

The people watch it all in silent dread.

EXT. RIVER, FINAL BEACH LANDING - DAY

It's getting late when they run the boat ashore.

Schalk's arm is infected. He's feverish.

Blessing unstraps the torches. Dante soaks them in fuel and gives them to Elspeth and Meynard.

Schalk hands the M-16 to Dante, then readies the pistol in his good hand. Blessing checks her rifle.

DANTE

We traveled a ways today, maybe the  
pride lost interest-

He's cut-off by a loud, close ROAR.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Scratch that, they sound more  
interested.

SCHALK

Stay close, keep your eyes open and  
only shoot if you're sure.

BLESSING

Good luck everyone.

In the dying light, they head into the bush.

EXT. THE BUSH - EVENING

The bush is alive as they jog through the long grass, past acacia trees. They can feel lion everywhere.

MEYNARD

What are they waiting for?

(Yelling)

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR!?

He sees movement in a shrub and runs at it with his torch.

BLESSING

No don't!

Seeing him separate from the pack, a lioness breaks cover.

BANG. BANG. BANG. Schalk shoots her dead. Meynard stumbles back. Schalk grabs him.

SCHALK

Do that again, you do it alone.

Blessing hurries them through a gap in the trees.

EXT. THE DITCH - LATE AFTERNOON

Running flat out now, they arrive at a larger clearing.

DANTE

Look!

He points at the flashing red light on top of the gate, it's a quarter mile away.

ELSPETH

Come on!

A dry riverbed comes into view, 10' across and 10' deep with steep banks on both sides. It U-bends around the clearing, isolating the people.

On the far bank, two lioness step out from the trees and leap down to the riverbed. Two others take their place at the top.

BLESSING

That's what they were waiting for.

They look back the way they came. 40 yards away, at least a dozen lions emerge, led by Brown and Golden.

MEYNARD

God help us all.

The lions, aware of the guns, approach with caution.

BLESSING  
Do you feel something?

CRACK. The loud snap of a tree breaking makes them turn.

On the far bank, elephants stampede out from the trees, crash down the far bank and scatter the lionesses below.

The huge, trumpeting pachyderms kick up a massive dust cloud.

SCHALK  
(To Blessing)  
Go. Get them to the gate.

Elsbeth leads Meynard and Dante down the bank.

BLESSING  
What about you?

SCHALK  
I'll hold them as long as I can.

BLESSING  
We're not leaving you.

SCHALK  
(Re: his arm)  
I'm *kak*. I'd only slow you down. Go get your boy. Go!

BLESSING  
I won't forget this.

SCHALK  
(Gestures around)  
*Shew*. I'd like to see you try.

Schalk starts shooting at the incoming lions. Blessing slides down the bank, and into the forest of elephant legs.

She grabs Dante and leads the others up the far bank where the Matriarch greets them.

She lets out a deafening TRUMPET and the world stands still.

On the near bank:

Some lions, including Golden, by-pass Schalk and leap onto the backs of elephants, bounding across the ditch.

The chase is on. Elephants shepherd the people forward.

A lioness tries to cut them off, the Matriarch impales it with her broken tusk and flicks it away.

EXT. ROAD NEAR THE GATE - CONTINUOUS

The people and elephants emerge from the long grass and onto the road, the gate's a hundred yards ahead.

Golden launches onto the Matriarch, making her stumble.

Three other lioness also attack and the Matriarch slows, struggling under their weight. Blessing turns to her.

DANTE

B, come on!

Matriarch is getting ripped apart by Golden and the lionesses, barely staying on her feet.

Blessing takes aim. BOOM. One of the lioness falls off.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Blessing!

She waves Dante to go on.

BOOM. Another lioness falls away.

The Matriarch falls to ground, Golden's jaws locked on the back of her neck.

BOOM. The bullet hits Golden in the back flank. He turns, snarls and leaps off the Matriarch toward Blessing.

She lines up again. He closes in. She takes a deep breath...

BOOM. Golden's head kicks back. He stops and topples over.

One attacker left, Matriarch gets back to her feet, grabs the lioness with her trunk and slings the cat to the ground.

The Matriarch TRUMPETS, rears up on her back legs and crashes down on it, gloriously.

She looks at Blessing and bows her huge head before yet more lion demand her attention.

Blessing fires her rifle - CLICK. She throws it away and runs for the gate.

AHEAD: Dante, Meynard, Elspeth and their elephant escorts, stop 60 yards out.

Lying in wait on the collapsed guard tower is Black. He prowls towards them, untroubled by the elephants.

BLESSING (O.S.)

This way!

They turn back toward Blessing, she points to the hangar.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - NIGHT

Blessing runs for the hanger, past the still smouldering Black Hawk. She gets to the hangar door, still open.

BLESSING

Here! Over here!

The others race towards her, Black in hot pursuit.

Meynard's last in and they heave the door shut just as the lion SLAMS into it. The sheet metal bends but doesn't break.

INT. THE HANGAR, ENTRANCE END - NIGHT

Black ROARS. The people catch their breath amidst shafts of moonlight bursting through the damaged roof.

MEYNARD

What happened to that helicopter!?

SLAM. Black hits again.

ELSPETH

That door won't hold long.

Outside, the snarling stops, replaced by a gentle purring.

DANTE

Is that... good for us?

MEYNARD

Sounds like a social purr, for showing deference.

DANTE

Deference? To what?

BLESSING

RUN!

They all sprint towards the wrecked plane at the far end.

The door EXPLODES open revealing the ALPHA. He shakes his mane, enormous and glorious in the moonlight.

The gigantic beast charges.

The people arrive at the plane's rear door. Dante pulls the handle and the whole door comes away.

Meynard stares transfixed by the Alpha. Blessing pulls him into the fuselage just before Alpha crashes into the plane's tail. The whole aircraft shifts.

INT. THE C47 SKYTRAIN, FUSELAGE/COCKPIT - NIGHT

A huge paw reaches through the door, searching for flesh. The people scurry toward the cockpit.

Alpha's paw makes way for Black who squeezes in, almost filling the tubular fuselage.

Elsbeth SCREAMS. Blessing opens the cockpit door and they again find refuge, just in time.

DANTE

What the fuck was that!?

BLESSING

The word you liked so much... A...  
Frankenlion.

The Alpha pads to the front of the plane. One huge white eye surveys the dumbstruck people through the cracked windshield, the other eye missing, caked in blood.

It swings its paw onto the plane's nose, claws pierce the rusted metal.

ELSPETH

We're safe in here right, until  
help arrives?

DANTE

What help?

ELSPETH

The chopper. Surely someone's going  
to miss it.

BOOM. Black slams into the cockpit door. It cracks.

The Alpha settles, Sphinx-like, at the front.

MEYNARD

Yeah, but when? Hours? Days?

BLESSING

We cannot sit and wait, the gate is still open!

ELSPETH

So what? Lions could be out already.

BLESSING

But not this lion.

MEYNARD

This... this is not a lion.

BLESSING

But it is their Alpha, the pride won't go anywhere without him.

Blessing tests the handle on the port side pilot hatch.

MEYNARD

Maybe. We don't know-

BLESSING

-Maybe's enough. If we can create a diversion, I can make it to those oil drums and-

MEYNARD

-And what?

BLESSING

I don't know, start a fire, or sneak away or-

ELSPETH

STOP IT! For heaven's sake Blessing. Let's look after ourselves, for once.

BLESSING

And risk the lives of that entire village? And the next one?

ELSPETH

Ja! I don't care about them, I care about me, about us. Is it so bad, to want to stay alive?

BLESSING

At the cost of thousands of others?

ELSPETH

Yes. Some lives are just... worth  
more than others.

The implied racism stops the conversation in its tracks.

BLESSING

Sadly, you are right. The villagers  
are loved and would probably be  
missed.

DANTE

Ooooooh snap.

Dante and Blessing fist bump.

MEYNARD

Out there is suicide. That animal  
is a bespoke killing machine.

BOOM. Black rams the door again and the crack grows.

MEYNARD (CONT'D)

It took down a Gunship for Christ's  
sake!

DANTE

And how we gonna magic up a  
diversion? Ain't like one's going  
to walk in off the street.

CLANG. A metal door swings open.

It's Schalk, bloodied but standing, swinging a flaming torch.

He stands in the doorway to the concrete, bunker-like  
building that serves as the far wall of the hangar.

ELSPETH

Oh don't lie!

INT. THE HANGAR, BUNKER END - CONTINUOUS

Schalk can't see past the light of his flame.

SCHALK

Come on you *fokin'* pussies! I'm  
still here.

The Alpha rises and prowls toward Schalk.

SCHALK (CONT'D)  
I'm not afraid of you test tube  
bastards!

The Alpha steps into his light. Schalk becomes afraid. Very.

SCHALK (CONT'D)  
What the fuck are you?!

The huge cat snarls and Schalk bolts back through the door.

INT. THE C47 SKYTRAIN, COCKPIT - INTERCUT

Blessing springs into action. She grabs Dante's camera, opens the pilot hatch, leaps out and sprints for the cache of fuel drums, fifty feet away, toward the hangar entrance.

INT. THE HANGAR, BUNKER END - INTERCUT

The instant Blessing hits the ground, the Alpha turns to her.

INT. THE C47 SKYTRAIN, COCKPIT - INTERCUT

BOOM. Black's almost through. Dante leans on the broken door, trying to keep it out.

DANTE  
Time to go!

BOOM. The door comes off its hinges. Elspeth drops out the pilot's hatch, followed by Meynard.

Black squeezes into the cockpit, Dante wields the door as a shield as he backs to the hatch and drops down. Black's claw chases him out.

INT. THE HANGER, FRONT OF PLANE - CONTINUOUS

Elspeth and Meynard freeze as the Alpha pads towards them.

Incredibly, it by-passes them completely, its focus solely on the fuel drums, and Blessing.

Meynard can't believe it. Dante arrives.

DANTE  
Come on!

MEYNARD

No, it's fine. It's only after  
Blessing.

DANTE

For. Now. Let's go!

MEYNARD

No, look. It's fixated. It must  
have some kind of vendetta against  
her. I guess because she challenged  
its dominance...

DANTE

Yeah, and shot it in the face.

Dante's had enough, he runs for the bunker entrance.

A dumb grin on his face, Meynard floats toward the drums.

MEYNARD

It's incredible. Such intelligence.

ELSPETH

Doc, come on!

Elsbeth runs after Dante.

MEYNARD

It's fine, he's not interested in  
us, it'll-

CRUNCH. Black leaps from the shadows, its tilted jaws  
engulfing Meynard. Blood flies as the cat shakes his prey  
back and forth, before settling down to eat.

At the bunker, Dante, Elspeth and Schalk look on with horror.

INT. THE HANGAR, BUNKER END, FUEL STACK - CONTINUOUS

Inside the stack: Blessing searches for solutions as she  
crawls between the barrels. She jumps at Meynard's screams.

She sees the Alpha approach. She covers her mouth.

Outside the stack: The Alpha drops into stalk mode. He  
smells her. His good eye peers between the drums.

With one huge swipe, the Alpha slaps away a half-dozen empty  
barrels, they CRASH and CLATTER across the floor.

He sniffs again. He takes a barrel in his jaws and flicks it  
away, sending it flying.

He jaws another, but this time crushes it with his teeth.

INT. THE BUNKER COMPLEX, ROOM ONE - CONTINUOUS

A former office, Room One has back wall windows that let moonlight in. They can hear the Alpha's noisy hunting.

DANTE

We should go help her.

Dante grabs Schalk's torch and opens the door. Schalk holds him back, just as blood soaked Black steps into the light.

DANTE (CONT'D)

You know, this motherfucker is my least favorite.

Dante slams the door shut but Black knocks the whole door frame down. It then squeezes into the room.

Dante swings the fire, trying to keep Black at bay.

Schalk manages to kick open a second door, near the front.

SCHALK

Through here.

The people scramble through and get it shut.

Bunker Room Two:

Empty. Dante and Elspeth throw their weight against the bulging door while Schalk kicks at the next one.

Elspeth points to a third door.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Nope. That leads outside and we don't want to be outside.

DANTE

Uh-huh, 'cos inside is working out great.

INT. THE HANGAR, BUNKER END, FUEL STACK - INTERCUT

Curled up in a drum, Blessing silently slides the lid back on, leaving her in total darkness.

CRASH. More barrels get swatted away like empty soda cans.

She hears a long, close SNIFF.

INT. THE BUNKER COMPLEX - INTERCUT

Schalk breaks through and they flock into Room Three.

Except it's not a room, it's a cleaning closet.

Squashed in, Schalk and Elspeth lock their legs on the back wall to try and keep the rampaging Black out.

Dante digs through some ancient cleaning supplies. He holds up two tins of chlorine.

DANTE

I've got something!

Black's huge head bursts into the closet.

Dante throws the chlorine in its eyes. The animal HOWLS and reels back, the chemical burns fast.

Dante splashes the second can into Black's mouth, which is enough to force it back, and away.

SCHALK

Look at you being all useful.

DANTE

Yay science!

INT. THE HANGAR, BUNKER END - CONTINUOUS

Contact. Blessing's barrel teeters back and forth.

BLESSING

Oh. Shit.

SMACK. Blessing's barrel is lifted high in the air, its lid flies off, so she sees the room spin. She braces herself.

As soon as the barrel SLAMS down, the Alpha swats it again, spinning it like a top.

The moonlit room spins around and around.

Then it stops. The open end lined up with the Alpha's gigantic, semi-opaque eye ball. They stare at each other.

FLASH. Blessing fires Dante's camera flash, momentarily blinding the Alpha's hyper-sensitive eyes.

She sneaks past and runs for the tail of the plane.

Alpha recovers quickly, and now he's pissed.

The others strain to watch from the bunker complex door.

Near the aircraft tail:

Blessing slides under the tail and acrobatically swings herself up onto the starboard stabilizer. She stands and clings to the tail fin.

The Alpha bounds at the aircraft, lowers its head and crashes into the tail. The whole aircraft swings on its axis, the rear spins toward the bunker complex.

The starboard wing SLAMS into the concrete bunker wall and cracks open. Liquid fuel leaks onto the floor.

DANTE

B, over here! Come on!

Blessing jumps off the tail and sprints along the bunker wall, under the wing and toward the door.

The Alpha jumps over the aircraft tail and then up onto the cracked wing. It snaps under his weight and more fuel spills.

Slipping and sliding in the liquid, the Alpha struggles to regain his footing.

Blessing makes it to the door. They all pull back.

INT. THE BUNKER, ROOM ONE - CONTINUOUS

The four people, backs flat against the far wall, watch in terror as the Alpha struggles to get in - teeth and claws ripping at the concrete around the ingress.

The Alpha's huge paws still reach deep into the room.

DANTE

And now this is happening! Oh what fun we're having!

ELSPETH

We need to get outside.

Schalk tosses a broken chair toward the second door.

The Alpha paw's smashes the chair to the ground, it then swipes at the second door, leaving deep gashes.

DANTE

Well we can't just stay here.

ELSPETH  
 (Re: Blessing)  
 You're right, only she needs to  
 stay.

As a test, Blessing backs along the wall away from the others. The Alpha's attention follows her.

DANTE  
 So what? We can't leave Blessing.

ELSPETH  
 Ja we can, we have to.

DANTE  
 Bitch, even for a white girl, you  
 are the most self-absorbed-

BLESSING  
 -No, she's right! You must go. You  
 must close the gate.

SCHALK  
 Nay, Blessing. We can't abandon  
 you, not after all you've-

BLESSING  
 -It is my life and my decision! So  
 please just shut up and go! Hurry!

Blessing grabs another chair and teases the Alpha like a circus lion tamer.

DANTE  
 Don't give up. We're coming back.

Blessing's distraction is enough. The others escape out the second door, which enrages the Alpha. It slashes wildly at the second door, making it impassable.

All alone with Blessing, the Alpha stops his frenzied attack.

Instead it begins clawing at the concrete by the entrance. Debris comes away with each heavy scratch.

EXT. THE HANGAR, BUNKER END - NIGHT

The outside door opens a crack, then all the way. Schalk steps out, not seeing any lions.

Dante pushes past him and he and Elspeth run down the outside of the hangar toward the gate. Schalk, struggling with the infection, can't keep up.

EXT. THE HANGER, ENTRANCE END - NIGHT

Dante and Elspeth arrive at the corner and peek around it - all clear. The pair then sneak across to the wrecked helicopter.

They turn to see Schalk arrive at the corner of the hangar. Schalk waves them on to the gate, they take off.

Schalk then hobbles out, heading for the chopper.

INT. THE BUNKER, ROOM ONE - NIGHT

The Alpha's methodical with his scratching, the ingress grows. Blessing shows no fear.

BLESSING

For what it's worth, I'm sorry  
about your eye. None of this is  
your fault, you are a victim of  
hatred, like so many of us. But  
Africa is stronger than hatred, we  
will rise above it.

EXT. THE CRASHED HELICOPTER - NIGHT

From the wreck, Schalk can see the Alpha working at the far end of the Hangar.

Schalk heaves the base of the chopper's starboard side door gun - the heavy caliber M134 "Vulcan". Mangled in the wreck, the gun is pointing straight up.

It doesn't shift. It's too stuck and Schalk's too injured.

SCHALK

*Kak!*

He works his way to the cockpit. He shuts Tanya's dead eyes. He pulls off her headset and tries the radio - nothing.

Then he spots a flare gun and single cartridge, buried deep.

EXT. THE GATE - NIGHT

Dante and Elspeth start clearing the fallen guard tower from the gate line.

Dante discovers Suzie's half eaten body. He reels back.

ELSPETH

Keep going, there's no time!

Dante throws her a look, but gets back to work.

INT. THE BUNKER, ROOM ONE - NIGHT

The Alpha tries squeezing a shoulder through the enlarged doorway and concrete crumbles under the force.

The lion pulls back and prepares to charge its way through.

Blessing stands strong and laughs, resigned to her fate.

Her confidence aggravates the Alpha yet more, it ROARS and charges.

CRUNCH. The Alpha's slams into the doorway. Chunks of wall come away but he doesn't get through.

He pulls back again for what will surely be the final time.

EXT. THE CRASHED HELICOPTER - INTERCUT

Schalk stumbles free with the flare gun, he aims to the sky.

SCHALK

Come on someone. Anyone.

About to pull the trigger, the Alpha's ROAR makes him stop.

INT. THE BUNKER, ROOM ONE - INTERCUT

The Alpha is back a good way from the doorway.

BLESSING

(Yelling)

I am not afraid of you. Africa is  
not afraid of you!

The Alpha lets out a monumental ROAR and starts to charge.

Through the door Blessing sees the beast thunder towards her.

She also sees a strange red back-light get closer and more intense.

The Alpha closes in and lowers its head....

WHOOSH. The flare connects and ignites the jet fuel on the lion's fur.

The Alpha HOWLS and skids into the concrete. It then tears around the hangar, desperate to put out the flames; bashing into walls and rolling on the ground.

Blessing rushes to the second door and starts to clear it.

In the hanger, fire starts to trace the fuel back toward the broken wing and ruptured fuel tanks.

EXT. THE GATE - NIGHT

Having cleared the threshold, Dante and Elspeth heave the gate. They get it to within a foot of being closed.

Elspeth steps outside, to safety.

ELSPETH

What are you waiting for?

DANTE

We can't just leave them. They wouldn't leave us.

ELSPETH

The priority was to seal the gate.  
(Off his hesitation)  
They're probably dead anyway, come on!

Dante looks back at the hangar.

EXT. THE CRASHED HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

Schalk watches the Alpha's agonizing efforts to extinguish the fire, it stumbles back over near the aircraft.

SCHALK

JA! Take that you bastard.

BOOM. Fire licks the fuel tanks and the plane explodes, engulfing the Alpha and filling the hangar with smoke.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Die, fucker!

For a moment, all is still. Then the Alpha steps out of the smoke, still on fire and horrifically disfigured.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

You've got to be kidding.

The Alpha turns to Schalk. It starts to run.

Schalk scrambles to the Black Hawk and tries again to free the Vulcan gun, but he can't shift it.

The Alpha is at full speed now.

Schalk gives it everything, struggling with every fibre...

Then hands appear. Dante's hands.

Dante heaves debris off the base allowing Schalk to swing the barrel down.

The Alpha closes in. Schalk's fingers find the trigger.

The Alpha launches...

Schalk opens fire. Bullets fill the creature at 4000 rounds a minute until finally, The Alpha is dead.

Schalk falls back on the wreckage, totally spent. He still manages a smile as relief washes over them.

BLESSING (O.S.)

What did I miss?

Blessing steps out of the bush.

DANTE

How are you still alive!?

As the sun begins to rise, Blessing embraces Dante. She leans down to hug what's left of Schalk.

SCHALK

You really are something else, you know that?

BLESSING

You are not so bad yourself.

SCHALK

Ach, bullshit.

Schalk takes Blessing's face in his bloody hands.

SCHALK (CONT'D)

Blessing, I'm sorry.

BLESSING

For what?

SCHALK

For this... For everything.

Blessing touches his hand on her face.

BLESSING

I forgive you. We... forgive you.

He manages a smile before his body tenses and he dies.

Blessing places his hands by his sides and shuts his eyes.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

Be at peace. You will have nothing  
to fear when this story is told.

Dante puts a hand on her shoulder.

DANTE

We're not out yet.

Blessing and Dante take one last look at the Alpha's colossal body and turn for the gate.

EXT. THE GATE - EARLY MORNING

From the outside, Blessing, Dante and Elspeth push the gate shut. Blessing grabs the lock bolt and slams it down. She exhales properly for the first time in days.

DANTE

Damn, I dropped my phone in there.

Blessing giggles.

BLESSING

No problem, let's go find it. I  
hear Engaziwa is beautiful at dawn.

DANTE

Hmm. You know what, I'm gonna pass.

They share a laugh and a hug.

Elspeth looks at them, totally distraught.

ELSPETH

(Mumbling)

I'm so sorry. I was so afraid, I  
wasn't thinking straight and -

Blessing steps forward and hugs her.

BLESSING

What's done is done, but never is  
it too late to do the right thing.  
Promises were made.

ELSPETH

-And I'll honor them all. With  
interest.

DANTE

Yeah OK, I'm calling bullshit. We  
heard this all before.

ELSPETH

It's different now. I want to make  
things right.

DANTE

Uh-huh, how? Exactly.

ELSPETH

With money. I still own a multi-  
million rand business, you know.

DANTE

Oh yeah, I forgot that you own  
literally everything: trucks,  
rivers, lions, people, blah blah  
blah.

ELSPETH

*Ja*, correct.

DANTE

Know what else you now own? You own  
the deaths of a dozen people. You  
own a botched attempt to cover up  
those deaths, which led to yet more  
death. And, you own the  
responsibility to sort out whatever  
Frankenlion, super-baboon or hyper-  
rhino are still left in that  
horrible, fucking nightmare of a  
place.

His words hit Elspeth like a bullet. Dante leans in to  
whisper to her.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Ain't no amount of pretty, rich,  
white girl privilege gonna get you  
out of that.

Blessing looks down the road, Elspeth grabs her in a panic.

ELSPETH

Blessing, please, help me. What do I do?

BLESSING

You know, I do have some ideas, but I wouldn't want to come across as 'sassy'.

Elspeth, totally broken, bursts into tears and falls to her knees.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

Do you really want my advice?

Elspeth looks up and nods, desperation in her eyes.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

Give it away, give it all away. The lodge, the money, Engaziwa, everything.

Elspeth stumbles to her feet. Blessing takes her hand.

BLESSING (CONT'D)

Give it away. And then run.

The trio push off toward town in silence.

EXT. CENTER DIRECTOR HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY

SUPER: One year later

In the doorway of the two-story house, Blessing cups Thando's face, strokes his nose and kisses his forehead before handing him to her Mom. He protests.

BLESSING

I've got to go, I'm already late.

She kisses Mom and hurries down the garden path.

EXT. MAIN DRIVE WAY - DAY

A handful of diverse RESEARCH STUDENTS(20s) chat by a safari truck.

Dante leads another few students down from the lodge entrance, all carrying cameras and lens bags.

They pass a prominent Memorial wall, adorned with photos of and tributes to, Schalk, Suzie, Meynard and Gillets.

DANTE

Remember, critters move quick, so  
keep an eye on your shutter speed.

Blessing hurries in from a side path.

BLESSING

Right. Let's go see some animals.

The happy students all pile into the truck. Blessing jumps in the drivers' side, Dante the passenger.

They pull away, revealing a new sign - 'The South African National Wildlife Research and Conservation Center'.

EXT. SAFARI TRUCK - DAY

Driving through the soft evening light, surrounded by savannah, Blessing can't help but smile.

The badge on her shirt reads 'Center Director'.

She looks over to Dante, sees the same silly expression on his face. He turns to her and they laugh.

Returning her attention to the road:

BLESSING

Oh, look! Everyone be very quiet.

The truck slows to a crawl. Some lion are crossing up ahead.

The excited students jostle to see and take photos.

Two bright-eyed lioness lead a half dozen cubs across, the youngsters playing and rolling around.

Blessing keeps her head on a swivel, checking all angles.

Last to cross is a bigger cub, it pauses mid-road and turns to them. It fixes its gaze on Blessing and snarls.

Before it turns away, it blinks and Blessing sees its eyes turn white... at least, she thinks she does...

FADE TO BLACK.