

4118 - 15th Avenue
Vernon, B.C.
V1T 8H1

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Rodney C. Power

Tel: 250-542-7640
Email: rod@rodpower.com

DEADLY COMES THE DAWN

A NOVEL

by

Rodney Christian Power

I do not wish to seem overdramatic, but I can only conclude from the information that is available to me as Secretary General, that the Members of the United Nations have perhaps ten years left in which to subordinate their ancient quarrels and launch a global partnership to curb the arms race, to improve the human environment, to defuse the population explosion, and to supply the required momentum to development efforts. If such a global partnership is not forged within the next decade, then I very much fear that the problems I have mentioned will have reached such staggering proportions that they will be beyond our capacity to control.

U THANT, 1969 from the introduction to THE LIMITS OF GROWTH

PROLOGUE

In the early darkness Yosef Azzara shuffled his deformed body away from the huts and set out toward the cavernous gorge that bordered his village. He could wait no longer. There was excruciating pain in every movement of his tortured limbs. When he reached there, he turned around for one final look. The burial mounds caught his attention first, his good eye drawn to the smaller rock piles as if by a magnet. His two sons had been among the first to die. Moonlight gave the pale chunks of limestone a ghostly sheen, and though he could not see them, he knew other bodies lay nearby on the surface covered with blankets.

The handful of survivors had neither the strength nor the desire to dig more holes or to pile more boulders.

No dogs barked, not a single donkey roamed the night. Not one sheep remained on the nearby slopes. The deathly silence was broken only by the women's mournful wailing, the men's agonizing groans. Azzara sensed that few would last till dawn. A beautiful white moon allowed the young man to see as far as Mount Batu in the west. For over three hundred years his tiny clan of the Oromo had occupied this small alpine plateau located deep in the high mountain ranges of central Ethiopia. Constant fighting down in the valleys rarely affected them. Even with their few meager possessions and often little to eat, they did not complain.

Now, their isolation had turned against them, for all had been condemned to die hideous deaths with limbs and organs racing out of control.

Some weeks ago one of the shepherds had discovered a rich harvest of unfamiliar grain on a nearby slope amidst the sparse mountain grasses eaten by the sheep. As it was still early in the year, the villagers considered the grain a gift from God in this time of little nourishment, like manna in the desert to Moses. They had reveled in it; they had praised God for it. One of the elders made up a poem and recited it around the fire while his people fed upon the succulent loaves.

Soon enough the first symptoms began to appear: stretched limbs, enlarged heads, bones that protruded, and pain. Pain the like of which no one could have believed possible.

Azzara's left eye socket had expanded so that the eye itself was but a glazed-over shell behind which insects had laid their eggs in the warm liquidy mucus. From his left hip an obscene blob of bone and flesh had sprouted forth until it dragged upon the earth. His left hand had swelled to such proportions that only the tips of his fingers were visible. Even this could not compare to the pain inflicted upon every nerve in his body. He could scarcely breathe because of it.

As a Coptic Christian the notion of suicide was foreign to him, but many had chosen this way out, including his own wife. Yosef Azzara was now ready to join her.

His brain felt as if it was boiling over, yet he became aware of an unnatural sound slashing across the mountain's face. He was certain he had heard it before. Was it an aircraft? Several seconds went by before the intermittent drone was smothered by a harsh wind surging up from the valley floor. Within the agony inside his head a strange notion began to take root, but he had no time to nurture it.

Yosef Azzara had run out of time.

He turned away from his village, from his people, his children. His life. With tears in his eyes, he tilted his face toward the heavens, again wondering why God had decided to inflict such severe punishment upon the Oromo.

With great effort the young man dragged himself to the very edge of the precipice and peered down into the inky darkness. Death held out its arms to receive him. He glanced up at the stars one last time, still bewildered, then jumped.

Population control ... must be moved to the top of the human agenda if our children and grandchildren are to enjoy the fruits of humanity's dominance of earth.

Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich.

From the National Geographic. December, 1988.

There is much of the primitive and barbarian in every civilized society today, as there has been throughout history, and it may very well be an unjustified optimism to think that this state can be materially altered.

The Dawn of Civilization

from the Epilogue by Stuart Piggott.

Intelligence ... has been given to us as instinct to a bee, to direct our conduct.

Henri Bergson.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

The meeting between General Alain Bercot, French Minister of Defense, and Julian Simonet, his counterpart in Justice, took place early on a foggy March morning in a modest hotel room located on the Rue du Strand in downtown Geneva. It did not take long for the exchange to grow heated. The Minister of Defense rubbed his eyes with the heel of his right hand. He'd had little sleep these last several nights, dreading the outcome of their meeting. As feared, Simonet was proving difficult.

Alain Bercot squinted at the little man he had invited to this secret rendezvous. How could Simonet know he was their last hope? But all other rational avenues had been explored. The entire African program and all it stood for had come down to this single moment in time. If Simonet refused, one alternative remained, a desperate one.

“Julian, in all the years we have known each other, I have never asked you for anything, but I am asking now. I must have your support! Believe me, this program is more crucial than you can possibly imagine. Without it ... well, you already know the answer.”

The Justice Minister occupied the single chair in the room. Bercot had planked his substantial mass down on the end of the bed, which sagged under his weight. Simonet leaned forward, his arms outstretched, palms up. “In the name of the good Lord, Alain, what choice do I

have? Eighty-seven transport aircraft—*Mon Dieu!* You ask for *carte blanche*, yet refuse to show me proper documentation.”

“But the official announcement was forwarded to you last Wednesday. You know it has been approved.”

“Ha! As if an editorial in the *Match* means anything. If this matter is as critical as you say, why is the United Nations not taking it on?”

“You joke, surely. The UN has to go to its member countries on bended knee. By the time the debate is over and the paperwork filled out, North Africa will be devastated. Those people need our help today—not tomorrow. Speed is the crucial element now.”

Bercot’s left eyebrow had been permanently lowered due to an auto accident in the fifties, which gave the impression one side of his face was aging faster than the other. The Justice Minister gazed at his old comrade-in-arms, attempting to get a handle on exactly what was taking place. Along with his other reservations about the notion of France handing over its entire fleet of transport aircraft to the WHO, Julian Simonet was having real difficulty buying the general’s uncharacteristic display of concern toward Africa’s native populations.

“Alain, we both know the World Health Organization operates through a direct chain of command. Such an enormous undertaking as you just described *must* be sanctioned by the Director General. So I must ask you: where is Dr. Nemari’s approval? At least then I would have something tangible to base my decision upon.” His voice hardened. “Either show me something official, or there is no point in our continuing this discussion.”

Grimacing, the Minister of Defense rubbed his eyes some more. Dr. Francois Lalange headed the WHO Division of Vector Biology and Control, responsible for pesticide development and its safe use. His current research project, a complex experiment three years in the making, was headquartered in the small coastal community of Brava in southern Somalia. Lalange was overseeing the development of a powerful new insecticide for locust control—at least that was the cover story. While Lalange had managed to convince the Assistant Deputy General of the terrible damage this next locust migration would cause, his efforts to convince Nemari had failed. *Au contraire*, the Director General had gone out of his way to distance himself from the dramatic conclusions outlined in Lalange’s report. Lalange had therefore been denied permission to approach the United Nations to solicit the necessary funds to carry out the project. Nemari’s

refusal to cooperate forced the sponsors of Operation Dawn to seek outside help, namely the government of France.

Frantic now, Bercot scoured his brain for another solution. At least three of the five-member War Council were required to give their signed consent to civilian use of military personnel and hardware. Guievere, the Minister of Agriculture, had willingly provided his signature. Locusts, after all, were his natural enemy. Whereas Simonet, the only other potential candidate, had turned into a brick wall.

In the terrible silence that developed between the two old warriors, France's Minister of Defense was forced to acknowledge that his formidable powers of persuasion had failed. Shuddering at the thought of what lay before him, Bercot moved along the bed and took up the telephone, but hesitated before dialing the four numbers. He could not stop his hands from trembling.

When the party answered the general sucked in a deep breath, let it out slowly, then said, "The Minister of Justice refuses to listen to reason. You may as well come up and tell him everything."

Julian Simonet stared at his colleague in surprise. They had known each other for fifty years, from the earliest days of Nazi occupation. He had always respected the older Bercot, and did trust him, up to a point, yet he could not help but notice Bercot's nervousness. Nor did he understand why Bercot had selected a squalid hotel in Geneva for a so-called "confidential" meeting between two friends who see each other every day in Paris. Simonet fished his pipe out of a side pocket and set about packing the bowl. He was beginning to feel apprehensive about the way matters were unfolding.

Minutes later the door opened and three men walked in. Simonet recognized only one—General Lucian Rochelle, Chairman of the African Arms Agency and darling of the munitions cartel. Rochelle, a big man with an even bigger ego, was responsible for virtually all sales of French weapons on the African continent. He was also on the Board of Directors of every non-government major arms manufacturer in France. The second man, possibly in his mid-fifties, was thin and austere and dressed in an unseasonable white linen suit with matching topcoat. The third was somewhat younger with a hard, flat face and close-set eyes. His deep tan indicated a life in the tropics. Simonet took him to be one of Rochelle's hired help.

After a brief introduction General Bercot asked Dr. Lalange of the World Health Organization, the one dressed in white, to outline the background to the operation. Lalange walked over to the single window in the room and leaned back against a flower box filled with budding red tulips and yellow daffodils. He had a haughty look about him, that veneer of arrogance the middle class so loved to don.

“Did you know, Monsieur Minister, that the birthrate is presently approaching the one hundred million per year mark? This next decade will see an extra *one billion* mouths to feed, and ninety percent of that number will live in the Third World. Make no mistake, Monsieur, the population bomb *has* exploded.”

Simonet frowned as he removed his pipe. “What has this to do with insect control?”

His question was greeted with an icy stare. The Minister of Justice did not know why, but a tiny finger of fear touched his heart.

Lalange seemed not to have heard the question. “As a scientist, I can assure you that no one with even superficial knowledge of population statistics would dare dispute the certain fact that North Africa has turned into a disaster of unprecedented proportions. As the refugee situation worsens with each passing day, experts in the field, like myself, know that chaos is inevitable. Allow me to provide you with a brief glimpse of what the future holds ... ”

Lalange went on, each statement growing more dramatic, each sentence edging closer to the truth, until the bare bones of a vast and terrible conspiracy were at last revealed. By this time Simonet’s face had grown pale. What was being described to him went so far beyond his ordinary range of experience that the Minister found himself struggling to keep up. When silence at last entered the room, he sensed that his will to resist might well collapse under the weight of this man’s unrelenting barrage of facts and postulations.

Julian Simonet had served eighteen years on the bench. His judicial sense of reason now pressured him to succumb to the unassailable logic that the world desperately needed what Bercot and his cohorts were proposing.

Lalange talked of war, disease, famine and death on a scale of inconceivable magnitude. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse were about to mount their charges and ride hell-bent through the heart of North Africa and straight across the Mediterranean into Europe, unless ... unless ...

While the others watched with almost breathless anticipation, Simonet could not deny that the proposition was sublime, and the benefits legion, almost beyond his comprehension.

But the cost. *Oh God, the cost ...*

Minutes went by, while wave after wave of indecision swept over the little Frenchman. Then, raising his head, he whispered, "I cannot do it."

Knowing what must follow, General Bercot cried, "*But you must!*"

Simonet's eyes were bleak and his mouth dry. Then he stood, the full extent of the horrifying deception now settling in fast, like a killer virus. "My answer is no, no, *no!*"

After emptying the charred residue of his pipe into a nearby ashtray, he straightened up and threw the Minister of Defense a contemptuous look. "The only action the government of France will be taking in this matter is to use all the resources at our command to bring this abominable scheme to an end. And I shall personally inform President Mitterrand within the hour."

General Bercot donned a sad little smile. It had finally come down to this. "Alas, old friend, if only I *could* allow you to walk away." He gave a helpless shrug. "As it is, I cannot." Matters were now beyond his control. The die had been cast.

The sudden appearance of a pistol in the mercenary's hand stopped Simonet cold. "What is the meaning of this? Do you not know who I am! You cannot detain ... detain ... "

He stopped talking when the man began to screw a silencer onto his weapon.

General Rochelle went over to the radio beside the bed and twisted the dial until Wagner's wild "Ride of the Valkyries" filled the room.

Francois Lalange, sensitive as always, turned to stare out the window, at the thick layer of fog shrouding the famous Rhône River where it flowed out of Lac Lemman. Two dull spurts made him jump.

Rochelle's lieutenant, Kurt Browdy, could not repress a harsh chuckle. Killing a blood-sucking politician gave him a nice warm feeling, not unlike squashing a roach.

A door to the adjoining room opened and a tall man in his late sixties walked over to stand beside the body. Senator Russell Napier Devon took a quick glance down, then turned away in disgust. The South African had chosen to demonstrate his skill with a pistol: one bullet in each eye. Chunks of brain and gore were splattered across the floral-patterned wallpaper.

The Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee took three steps to his left to get rid of Wagner. Although he wished the outcome had been different, this seemingly barbaric act represented something very personal for Russell Devon: the culmination of a lifetime dream that would see the balance of nature restored. Operation Dawn was indeed the perfect solution, beyond all expectations. But the effective use of such a tool would demand the utmost courage from everyone involved. The American was very aware that Simonet's cold-blooded execution was just one more step in a long and difficult process.

He adjusted his bronze-rimmed glasses, a stress-related habit. "I hope to God you're right about this, Bercot."

Alain Bercot had lived with the possibility for weeks. Even so, now that the moment had arrived, he felt sick. They had simply run out of time. Word of the experimental phase had come in three days ago: a complete success. The main event was to get underway at once, while the aftermath of the Gulf War still held world attention.

The clock was running.

France's Minister of Defense looked the American politician in the eye. His voice was harsh. "The National Assembly will take weeks to agree upon his replacement. Until then I shall administer his portfolio, *and* control his vote. I can assure you that the declaration will be signed before tomorrow noon. There shall be no more delays! Our aircraft can begin moving into Somalia immediately."

The big man himself stepped forward. General Lucian Rochelle's face was calm, almost reflective. He, more than the others, realized the last major hurdle had just been cleared. Operation Dawn would now proceed as planned. Staring across Simonet's corpse at a deeply troubled Bercot, he said, "We had no choice, Alain, so put it out of your mind. Attend to business."

Then he placed his hand on the American's shoulder and squeezed hard. "Never fear, *mon ami*, koba shall have its moment of glory."

CHAPTER TWO

The young warrior allowed his right thumb to caress the safety catch on the Kalashnikov AK-47 lying across his legs. Why, he wondered, were the camp mongrels growling so much. Their restlessness was not unusual, often caused by jackals or prowling hyenas, yet Jamal sensed that tonight something else was upsetting them.

The blanket fell from his narrow shoulders as he stood to monitor the pre-dawn darkness. The moon was silvery, almost three-quarters full. It took the youth a full minute to home in on several dark shapes inching their way toward the refugee camp. Shouldering his rifle, he dropped to his hands and knees and scurried across the rocks and sand until he reached the entrance to his father's *aqal*.

Inside, where the darkness was corrupted by the overpowering stench of gangrene, he found the colonel sitting up.

“Have they come?”

“It may be so, my father. Many men, perhaps soldiers. We must leave at once.”

“Go! Go without me. I cannot walk.”

“Then I will carry you!” Jamal said as he tore the blanket from the old man's weakened frame.

Colonel Muhaad Abu Hammel, former commander of the Western Somalia Liberation Front and survivor of thirty years of campaigning in the Ogaden, groaned as strong fingers dug into his flesh. His wounds had come from an unexpected source, a trusted friend he had known since the early years. From this betrayal in Mogadishu he and his son had fled north to familiar grounds, instead of south to Kenya, where most refugees from the fierce fighting in Somalia's capital city had gone in search of sanctuary. Unable to continue his predetermined route into the Ogaden, the old warrior had little choice but to throw himself at the mercy of the foreign medical team at Las Dhure. Both doctors at the refugee camp agreed his leg must be taken off above the knee. Surgery was to take place that very morning. If he moved on, the poison would continue to invade his body.

And he would surely die.

Jamal ripped through the thorn bush barriers erected to keep out wild animals, frantically seeking the cover of darkness before the soldiers spotted him. He'd just made it past the western perimeter of the camp when a long burst of automatic fire brought the young Somali and his precious bundle to the ground. His agonizing cry into the night came not from pain, but from the knowledge that he had failed his father. Then a terrible gurgling noise in the colonel's throat told Jamal that his father had also been struck.

"Go, my son, run for your life! Give me your weapon and I will hold them off."

"I cannot!" Jamal cried out. "My leg ..."

The sound that escaped the colonel's lips was born of utmost despair. With blood foaming in his mouth he managed to say, "Hear the prayer of this lowly one, O Allah. My time has come, and your will is my will. But my son, *my only son*—"

The words were barely uttered when he knew what he must do. "On your back, Jamal! You are dead. Stay dead, no matter what happens. I will spew blood upon you and you will be dead."

The youth did as instructed, and as the searching lights closed upon the two desperate warriors, the colonel struck his chest a powerful blow and vomited forth blood over Jamal's face. Seconds later, when the soldiers came running up, the older Somali was bemoaning his son's death.

When they seized his shoulders and pulled him to his feet, he thrashed out in a desperate attempt to distract them.

Kurt Browdy twisted his head away from the odor of rotting flesh. “Fucking gangrene!”

General Rochelle’s nephew, Henri Monsarrat, angled his light beam across the bandages wrapped around the victim’s leg. Yellow pus was seeping out. He studied the intelligent eyes, the imposing profile. This was no desert scum. Then recognition set in. “For sure, I have seen this one before.”

Browdy spun the old man around to face him. “You speak Swahili, shithead?”

Colonel Abu Hammel coughed up a mouthful of blood and blew it in the attacker’s face. Browdy released his hold and stepped back in shock. AIDS flashed through his mind.

Two Americans joined them, oblivious to the steady bursts of automatic rifle fire going on inside the perimeter. All four men wore the same style desert fatigues used by the troops in Operation Desert Storm. Their faces were darkened with camouflage paint. “Found Bannister and Jolly in the small trailer,” Bud Gilmore said, puffing hard. “Real bad shape. Told us the others caught it.”

Monsarrat asked, “Can they travel?”

The second American, Eric Shannon, shook his head. “Not a chance.”

The Frenchman shrugged. His uncle’s orders were clear. *Bring them back, if possible. If not, make sure they never talk again.*

Then he recalled where he had met this old Somali: in General Rochelle’s Nairobi office. “By God, I am certain this one used to command the entire Western Somali Liberation Front. What could he be doing holed up in a refugee camp?”

Kurt Browdy, maintaining a respectful distance, aimed his pistol at the colonel’s forehead. “Speak up, big man. What the fuck you doing up here?”

A bullet had punctured the colonel’s chest. The rasping sound made by his lungs told him only minutes remained. Confused, he realized by now that the soldiers were not after him at all, but had come for the victims of a helicopter that crashed near the Ethiopian border. A WSLF border patrol had shot it down, but when they found that the helicopter belonged to the World Health Organization, the two survivors were taken to Las Dhure.

The South African stared into the defiant eyes a few seconds longer, then pulled the trigger. Colonel Abu Hammel collapsed beside the body of his son.

Without bothering to check if the other one was dead or alive, Browdy reached down and fired twice into Jamal’s chest.

Monsarrat shone his light on the younger victim's bloodied face. The resemblance told him it was Abu Hammel's son. "Would it not have been wise to question them first?"

Kurt Browdy snorted. "Be a waste of time to play games. In any case, the dead don't talk."

General Rochelle's four mercenaries and their Mobulu counterparts were on an urgent mission of damage control. The MAYDAY had been picked up six days ago, meaning the surviving members of the observation team had been at Las Dhure as long as four days. It had therefore become necessary to silence the whole camp. Even then, there were no guarantees.

A sharp scream made the Americans turn toward the refugee camp, an enclosure of some ninety *aqals*. Eric Shannon, big, fit, mean, thirty years knocking about Africa, said, "Caught a quick look on the way through. Two blondes, a bonus. Gonna bring 'em back?"

The Frenchman cracked a nervous smile. "Naturally, provided they are up to my uncle's standards." An attractive white woman merited a substantial finder's fee. At thirty-two years of age, he was still new to the business, and at times like this wished he had not given up his accounting practice in Marseille to come and work for the general.

The four men began to walk back toward the thorn bush barrier surrounding the camp, where the night air was filled with cries of the dying. After lighting up a plump Malindi cigar, Shannon glanced at Monsarrat, his eyes squinting to see in the dark. "What if Bannister or Jolly became delirious and said something? Hell of a gamble at this stage of the game, just for a couple of broads."

Shannon's partner, Bud Gilmore, hailed from Fargo, North Dakota. Sent up for murder one at the age of nineteen, he was now fifty and killing still came natural to him. Chuckling away to himself, he said, "Fucking Frenchmen. Every one I ever met's got pussy on the brain. No wonder Hitler walked all over you guys—your attention span's so fucking limited."

Henri Monsarrat's grandfather had died fighting the Boche. He bristled under the insult, but accepted it in silence. For whatever reason, his uncle held these two American barbarians in high regard.

A skinny old woman carrying a bundle had managed to break through the perimeter. Running as fast as she could, she did not see the men until it was too late. Gilmore cut her down with a short burst from his German MP-44, then went over to silence the bawling brat that fell from her arms.

Another fine example to Henri Monsarrat that bloodlust, once whetted, holds no bounds. Back inside the enclosure, the mercenaries stepped around the bodies with some care, their light beams picking up sights that Monsarrat preferred not to see. The shooting had all but died away by now, and with it the four hundred or so refugees and their foreign medical team. Many of the three dozen Mobulus could be seen darting in and out of the *aqals* to finish off any survivors. For this task they used their *parangs*.

The men walked toward the larger trailer where the blondes were being held by the Mobulus. Both women, clad in white night shifts, struggled in vain against their captors.

Monsarrat had no wish to see Bannister and Jolly, two Brits who had worked for his uncle for several years. He asked the South African to take care of it.

Kurt Browdy grunted, then coughed up a wad of phlegm and let it fall to the ground. The Somali's stink was still in his nostrils. He directed his light beam toward the two terrified faces and instantly felt a warm rush in his loins. "Well, lookee here! By the sweet dying Jesus, we got us a real filly."

Big Shannon nodded in agreement. One of the gals was a looker, with a body to match. The other resembled a cow, especially her face, even though her hair was long and blond.

Slinging his assault rifle, Gilmore dug out a handful of pistachios. He dropped a few into Monsarrat's cupped palm. "Want to dump the big one?"

"For sure. If I were to show up in Nairobi with this creature, the general would put a bullet in my brain."

Shannon barked a few sentences in Swahili at the two Mobulus holding the big blonde. "Your boys want some jigajiga with this one, go ahead. Then put her away. Understand?"

The two nodded with enthusiasm, then dragged the screaming woman back inside the trailer. The good-looking one was down on her knees, held in place by four powerful hands. Twenty feet to her left lay the corpses of three white men.

The woman finally looked up into the sharp beams, her eyes wild. "Why? Why? Why? Why? Why—"

Shannon removed his cigar and leaned close. "Where you from, sweetheart?"

"I am an American citizen," the quavering voice replied. "Why—"

"Thought so. This is your lucky night, honey. You get to come home with us."

By now Kurt Browdy had achieved full erection. Well-shaped breasts capped by thick nipples were visible through the flimsy outfit she wore. His mouth went dry. “Listen guys, how about me trying out the product first, on the general’s behalf, naturally, make sure he’s getting the proper goods.”

Bud Gilmore whistled softly. “Now there’s one real brave dude. Whole country full of AIDS, old Kurt here wants to go flopping his dick around in a stinking refugee camp.”

“Betcha he’s gonna haul on a good old Trojan, keep an eye out for the enemy,” Shannon commented. “That right, Browdy?”

“On second thought,” Gilmore added, studying the woman, “this one probably washes her tush three times a day.”

If his boss found out, the South African knew, there’d be hell to pay, but Henri Monsarrat’s silence told him the nephew wasn’t about to snitch. Browdy gave the Mobulus their orders. At that moment the first few hovels behind the men were set ablaze. Tinder-dry acacia branches exploded into flames. Shadows danced across the trailer’s white exterior as the executioners spun the woman around and pushed her face into the dirt.

CHAPTER THREE

The ancient Air Italia 727 veered right, shuddered a few times when the wheels came down, then aligned itself with the runway. Looking out his porthole window, Andrew McDougal noticed several tanks crowded together near the entrance to the terminal building. Closer inspection revealed what appeared to be hastily-repaired shell craters in the runway. When the aircraft touched down, several machine-gun bunkers came into view.

As far as countries went, Somalia wasn't so big, about the size of Texas, but it happened to be in the midst of a fierce civil war at the moment, the reason for his impromptu visit. They hadn't heard from Jennifer in months. Repeated telephone calls to the State Department and the embassy in Mogadishu had resulted in nothing but frustration. They'd told him that up north, in Hargeisa, the former capital of British Somaliland, the takeover of Siad Barre's regime was still in progress. No investigation could be carried out until the hostilities subsided. With his parents sick from worry, Andrew agreed to go to Africa, find his twin sister, and convince her to come home.

But even before he left Kennedy a nagging sense of foreboding had grabbed hold of him, and now that he had arrived in Africa, that feeling was more intense than ever.

The shell craters had been so poorly repaired it was a tribute to Boeing that the wings stayed on during the worst landing McDougal had ever experienced.

Some thirty passengers were aboard the aircraft, all men. And all, except for the single American, native to Africa. Or so it seemed. The stewardess, who like the 727 had seen better days, cautioned them in three languages to stay put. A few minutes after the engines wound down a little man, not unlike a minor gangster in some Mafia movie, emerged from the flight deck.

Unlike the stewardess, the captain chose English first. “The latest news tells us the Somali Congress still controls the city. By now they will have dismissed, or executed, all officials employed by the former government, so your passport cannot be stamped. You must be careful with the soldiers, as their mood will depend upon the amount of *qat* they have chewed.”

He scratched his long sideburns and paused to examine something he found there before continuing. Glancing at the lone American, he added, “Tell them you carry no money, just credit cards. Sometimes this will work. Sometimes ... well, anyway, I wish you luck.”

Andrew McDougal lowered his head again to look out his window. Sure enough, a dozen soldiers were ambling across the cratered Tarmac, seemingly in good spirits and chattering away in highly animated movements. All were armed. McDougal swallowed a few times. He didn’t care for guns. He scorned all things military. He and Jennifer were genuine pacifists. They had been raised that way, and they lived that way.

The American knew conditions in Somalia had deteriorated, but accurate, up-to-date news was nonexistent. Along with other international incidents, this nasty little squabble had become lost inside the giant shadow cast by the Gulf War, which ended two weeks ago. The mighty U.S. war machine had successfully pounded Saddam Hussein’s troops into oblivion. George Bush’s one hundred hour ground offensive had put the German Blitzkrieg to shame. In the wake of such great events the world community had little or no interest in the minor rumblings of some two-bit African country. Somalia was not news. Not yet.

Upon exiting the aircraft, the furnace-like blast of heat forced the American to shed his light tan seersucker and throw it over his arm. Several donkeys scattered about the edges of the runway were munching upon clumps of bunch grass that had somehow pushed up through the sizzling asphalt. A sharp odor of raw sewage blew in from the north. McDougal took in the damaged buildings in the near distance, the barren hills to the west, dancing like gray mummies in the shimmering heat. He knew this part of Africa offered little of tectonic significance—his particular field of expertise. The only major fault ran down the Great Rift Valley, through

Ethiopia and into Kenya, being the line of demarcation between the African plate and the smaller Somali one. Geologically speaking, Somalia was one of the most stable countries in the world.

A sudden gust of wind began to drive sand and dust across the single strip of Tarmac.

“American papers! Where your papers?”

McDougal was startled when three soldiers grabbed his arms and hauled him away from the other passengers. Dark green teeth and extended cheek pouches signified their addiction to *qat*. He hoped the pilot was right about the credit cards. After walking some thirty paces with a rifle barrel jammed in his ribcage, he decided he'd better find out.

Bringing the entourage to a sudden halt, he said, “You fellows are wasting your time, all I carry are credit cards. Honest.”

The soldiers, all lanky jumbles of bones and guns, did not like those words. Three deep scowls told Andrew as much. Cracking a weak grin, he added, “Plus a few bucks.”

McDougal started to reach inside his jacket pocket, but a rifle butt applied forcefully to the base of his skull drove him to his knees.

Seeing stars, he struggled to remain conscious. His seersucker was torn from his arm, and the soldiers, having confirmed that his billfold was inside the garment, removed it and wandered off. McDougal's hands, flat on the Tarmac, felt as if they were on fire. He rolled back on his heels, doing his best to fight off increasing waves of nausea.

The American gently fingered the back of his head. The lump was already forming. And his wallet, complete with credit cards, passport and money, was gone.

His rescue mission was off to a roaring start.

“Welcome to Somalia,” a voice said in his ear. Two hands grasped him under the arms and helped him to his feet. Turning about, he was greeted by a crooked smile, more of a smirk, which raised one corner of a most attractive mouth.

Holding him steady, the woman said, “Your soldier lads went off congratulating themselves on their rich plunder.”

In the act of trading nausea for pain, McDougal eyed his good Samaritan: about five five, short-chopped straw-colored hair all over the place, slender nose, dark glasses covering her eyes.

“Where on earth did you come from?”

“I caught the whole extortion play from the terminal. Nothing unusual around here.”

The American extended his hand. “Appreciate your coming over. Andrew McDougal. You are ... ?”

“Elizabeth Worthington-Kent, fondly known in the trade as Maggie.”

Her hand was soft, which belied the tomboy appearance projected by her jeans and aviator jacket. “What trade might that be?”

She had recovered his seersucker on the way and gave it a good shake before handing it back. “The Saudis had a whole list of names for us, none of which can be repeated to a stranger. If given a choice I prefer to be known as a journalist, second stringer or not. How bloody tall are you, anyway?”

“Six three and change.”

“Ten full inches over me. Fascinating. How’s the head?”

“I’ll live,” he replied as they set out toward the terminal building. Besides his aching skull, the new arrival could feel patches of dampness at his back and in his armpits. In this hellish climate Maggie’s heavy leather jacket seemed more than a little crazy. “How come you’re wearing a coat?”

“Because, my lad, what keeps the heat in, also keeps it out.”

The air inside the terminal building was stifling, the odors punishing, the colors wild. Three to four hundred men, women and children were milling about in a minor frenzy, shouting at each other for no apparent reason. Perhaps a third of this rabble were military personnel who appeared to have no purpose other than to contribute to the dreadful clamor.

The exit doors were riddled with bullet holes. Pieces of glass crunched underfoot. How long since those shots were fired, McDougal wondered. Outside again, standing in the scorching sun, he noticed most everything in sight was military: tanks, trucks, armored personnel carriers, a few odd-shaped mobile artillery pieces. Small clutches of soldiers lolled about the perimeter.

The British journalist deposited her charge on a concrete bench in the shade of a huge flamboyant tree adorned with brilliant red flowers. “Stay here and I’ll see if I can’t locate someone in authority. With a little luck we might have your billfold returned.”

The American thought that unlikely. “My passport was inside. Get it back, and you’re my friend for life.”

Maggie removed her dark glasses and bent close to Andrew. “That just happens to be the best offer I’ve had all week.”

McDougal was swept up in the color of her eyes: a deep malachite, the exact brilliant hue he had once seen on a tiny fish in the Caribbean—a color capable of placing a man in a trance. Even her eyebrows were thick and luscious, a delightful change from the pencil lines that dominated his part of the world. Far as he could see, she wore neither makeup nor jewelry.

Replacing her glasses, Maggie set off along the walkway that rounded the terminal building. The footing was tricky. One or more tanks had driven onto it recently, leaving steel rods and sharp-edged slabs of concrete sticking up at random. A few moments later she vanished inside a small green trailer parked beside a damaged armored personnel carrier. Across the road a clutch of bronze-hued beauties were partly hidden behind the trunk of a majestic tamarind tree. They appeared to grow out of the profusion of blue and white flowers surrounding them. Girlish twitters and seductive smiles indicated more than a passing interest in the tall foreigner. McDougal returned their smiles before turning his attention back to the tanks.

So these are the instruments of war, he thought, pushing aside his anxiety about Jenny and concern over his lost passport to momentarily experience the sensation of landing in the middle of a war zone.

The nearest of eight tanks stood about twenty paces distant, its turret open and apparently deserted. Curious, McDougal stood up and walked toward it, the sharp tang of oil and rust and gunpowder invading his nostrils as he drew closer. A battered old thing, probably of Soviet make, McDougal could sense the power inside the great steel beast. To him, nothing on the face of the earth represented the true horror of human conflict more than a tank.

His grandfather had won the Victoria Cross in the Great War, his great-grandfather five medals of valor in the Boer War. One or more of his ancestors had participated in every major British campaign over the last three hundred years. The McDougals were a warlike clan, their military heritage a mile long. His father had made a clean break by immigrating to America just after the outbreak of World War Two. He had no intention of serving in the army; and, so the story goes, left Scotland under a cloud of shame. Jamie McDougal ended up on a chicken farm in Iowa, married Andrew's mother six years later, after gathering up enough money to start up his own operation, and the twins came along within the year.

Andrew's mother, a Missouri girl, lost all three brothers during the Italian campaign. She thought fighting addictive, like drugs, and swore early on that her only children, Andrew and

Jennifer, would never participate in a war. It was through her efforts that McDougal managed to avoid the draft.

Maggie returned fifteen minutes later sporting a mischievous grin. She sat down beside the American and slowly extracted his wallet from deep inside her heavy jacket. “Friends for life?”

Andrew could scarcely believe his eyes. He accepted the leather billfold, checked it out, then declared, “As long as I live.” His headache seemed to vanish. “How in hell’s name did you manage that?”

“I lied.”

He shook his head in disbelief. “Must have been a whopper.”

“It was. I take it this is your first trip over.”

“Shows, doesn’t it?”

“Um, hum. I see the local entertainment giving you the eye. Ten dollars would probably buy you the lot.”

McDougal glanced across the road, saw the girls were still interested. “I thought they were just being friendly. Listen, I don’t suppose you have transportation?”

She half-turned and nodded toward the east. “They tell me a good battle is about to get underway near Berbera, out on the coast. Most everything usable has been commandeered by the military to ferry their troops there.”

At that moment a fair herd of Somalis were pouring out of the terminal. “How did all these people get to the airport?”

“This is Africa. They walked.”

“And you?”

“Lift, in a jeep. But it looks like the little bugger has moved on. What is it you do for a living, McDougal?”

“I teach. Geography.”

“Sounds exciting. Who do you teach?”

“Anyone who wants to learn. I take it you’re British, by the way.”

“Jolly old England, right. Where, exactly, do you teach?”

McDougal couldn’t help but smile. “Columbia, New York City.”

“I see. So tell me, just what is a lone American doing in this topsy-turvy country, especially now, after the ship has gone down?”

“Visiting my sister.”

“Who doesn’t know you’ve come over.”

“True, because we were unable to get in touch with her. I assume the telephone lines are down.”

“They are. Where do you intend to spend the night?”

“There must be some place in town. Do you have a hotel?”

“The Reginald Hill, top o’ the line digs in this part of the world.”

McDougal noticed the wind had picked up again. “Name sounds familiar. Isn’t he a writer?”

“One of Britain’s finest. Hotel used to be the Ashworth, built just after the war, when Britannia still ruled the waves, and the sands. Higgins claimed to be one of Monty’s tank commanders, came to Hargeisa for a little R and R after the battle of El Alamein. Fell in love with the place. Reginald Hill is his nephew, he says. The old boy told me—”

Maggie stopped talking when the American began to tip forward. She half-caught him under the armpits but his weight pulled her down with him. “Jesus, McDougal, what is it?”

Eyes closed, Andrew whispered, “Weak ... very weak ... ”

Several people stopped to stare. A group of soldiers playing dominos in the shade of a nearby tank scrambled to their feet and forced their way through the gathering crowd to hover above the stricken foreigners.

“What is this behavior? Explain yourselves!”

Maggie disengaged herself from McDougal’s arm and stood up. “Watch your words!” she barked in Somali. “This man is the ambassador from America. He comes to open a consulate in Hargeisa. America is very rich and will bring much money for your people. He is sick from the heat and needs help. We must get him into town very fast. If you help, I will tell him and you will be his friends.”

Her tall tale worked its magic a second time. Forty-five minutes later an old Soviet T-34 tank lumbered up in front of the Reginald Hill. Under the surprised stares of local merchants along the street and the few guests who happened to be in the hotel lobby at the time, all seven crewmembers seized various parts of McDougal’s carcass and carried him through the archway

into the lobby. There they laid him flat out on the registration desk. As the startled desk clerk backed away from what he seemed to think was a corpse, the soldiers, in discordant harmony, yelled at the man that this was the ambassador from America, that he must be taken to the finest room in the hotel and a doctor summoned immediately.

They were all smiles as each soldier told Maggie his name and watched her write it down in English. By the time the tank refired its engines, McDougal, now born by firm but gentler hands, unknowingly made his way up the stairs to his destination at the northeast corner of the third floor. The desk clerk had already informed a shocked Syrian and his two wives they were to vacate the room at once. As this was the finest accommodation the Reginald Hill had to offer, it now belonged to the rich and powerful ambassador from America.

As it turned out, the same man who minutes earlier had been forcibly removed from his room, returned. A physician, he had been ordered to attend to the stricken American. His indignant look told Maggie he was in poor humor.

“What is this?” he hissed in broken English after looking McDougal over. “A little bump on the head, a little heat exhaustion. For this I am thrown from my room like a thief in the night.”

Maggie apologized, explaining that it had not been her idea. “Will he be all right?”

“Yes, yes. Have no worry, please. This I have seen before. The swelling has affected the supply of oxygen to the brain. Ice would be good, but alas, none is available. A few hours rest will do very well.”

The Syrian wore a bushy black mustache that must have been dyed, as his hair was the color of bleached bone. He stood up, about the same height as Maggie, and fixed a Cheshire grin.

Maggie got the message and reached into the nylon pouch tied to her waist. “I wish to pay you for your services. Will ten dollars be sufficient?”

The Syrian’s eyes lit up when he saw the bill. “Ten American dollars is generous payment, yes.”

She took the physician by the elbow to direct him toward the door. “If I need to call on you ... ?”

“Yes, lady, I am at your service, day or night.”

After closing the door, the British journalist walked over to the air conditioner stuck in the window and turned the temperature down a few degrees. Then she removed her bomber jacket,

beat the dust off, and hung it in the closet. She took hold of the only chair, a tattered wingback thing that had seen far too many years of service, and pulled it over beside the bed.

The call for evening prayer from the mosque on the corner made her yawn. War and famine notwithstanding, homage to Allah never ceased. Maggie slipped off her Rockport loafers and placed her bare feet on the bed, inches from McDougal's shoulder. She smiled at the thought of the U.S. Ambassador in Mogadishu being told he had mastered bilocation.

Maggie glanced at her watch: one hour since the American had lost consciousness. His limbs jerked slightly and his face twisted about as if he were experiencing a bad dream. She moved one foot along McDougal's arm while studying the man. He was big-boned, with big hands, but he had a gentle look about him, a face without sharp angles. Earlier, she had noticed the laugh wrinkles in the corners of dark blue eyes that angled down at the sides. His hair was the color of wet sand while his head seemed made for a cowboy hat. She had to admit that he seemed rather far removed from the brash and pushy Yanks she usually encountered.

That she was here, in a dingy hotel room in a war-torn African city with a perfect stranger, was nothing out of the ordinary. She had been in stranger places with stranger people, often under extreme conditions. After the Gulf thing had ended so abruptly, head office in Manchester had suggested Maggie might wish to return to the country where she had spent her early teenage years in order to get a firsthand look at the takeover of Siad Barre's regime. Compared to the recent activities in the Gulf, one of Africa's messy little dos held no appeal for her at the time. Her original plan had been to monitor the Kurdish problem, to see if the Americans had the guts to do the right thing. When it became apparent that they did not, at least in the short run, she'd had a change of heart and wound up in Mogadishu.

But things were so chaotic in the capital—even with the United Somali Congress supposedly in charge, several tribal factions were still vying for control—that Maggie soon gave up and caught a plane north, to Hargeisa, where she had once lived for four years. The day after her arrival rumors of a massacre began to filter in. So she'd hired a tired old jeep with its tired old driver and went south to see for herself.

There she found a sight more savage than anything she had ever encountered.

Nearly every single person shot *and* hacked up, like it had been done just for hell of it. Upon her return to town, Maggie was informed by a senior man in the military faction presently in control of the northern provinces, that he had no interest in the fate of a few hundred refugees.

Compared to the great events unfolding in the capital and out on the coast, it was insignificant. There wasn't even anyone to bury the bodies, so they lay there, the skin swelling and blistering in the scorching heat, engorged jackals and vultures and hyenas everywhere among them, as obscene as any battlefield anywhere.

Except it hadn't been a battle. It had been an all-out slaughter. A cold, deliberate, full-scale massacre!

Why?

Maggie choked back the bile that surged in her throat as the terrible sights and odors tumbled from her mind. Considering the many insurrections she had experienced over the years, the battlefields she had seen, the carnage she had witnessed firsthand in Angola, Las Dhure should not have come as such a shock. It was the children that did it, all those pitiful little bodies being ripped apart piece by piece even as she watched.

She gave her head a good shake, attempting to rid herself of those awful scenes. Most horrifying of all, to her at least, was the certain knowledge that no one would ever be held accountable.

CHAPTER FOUR

Alone in the main trophy room on the lower floor of his six story villa, a pensive Lucian Rochelle sat with a glass of fine cognac in his hand. His gaze rested upon a panoramic oil depicting construction of the Kenyan railroad at the turn of the century. A magnificent rendering, exquisitely detailed, right down to the expressions of pure terror intended to portray an imminent encounter between a handful of laborers and several approaching lions.

But today the general's favorite canvas hardly registered on his consciousness. His thoughts were elsewhere. Word had just come in by radio that a special visitor would be arriving by helicopter tomorrow afternoon. Rochelle smiled. There would be a little surprise waiting. He knew from experience that the King loved surprises, and he was sure to appreciate this one. Probably to the tune of about one hundred thousand American.

His Magnificence could be very generous.

Who would have believed that a miserable refugee camp might be harboring such a beauty? Yes, Las Dhure had been the general's doing. He had known it would be necessary even before the final meeting in Geneva with his business partner, Alain Bercot and the ill-fated Julian Simonet.

Coded radio transmissions back to headquarters over the previous weeks spoke of remarkable success. Rochelle understood all too well the significance of their downed helicopter:

unless all five members of the observation team had died in the crash, a major leak could be in the making. Leaks were expected, but had to be dealt with effectively and expeditiously. The general expected more would follow.

The logistics inherent in the rapid deployment of a band of armed men into the present chaos of northern Somalia had been formidable. But Lucian Rochelle was a past master of logistics. Others had been available to carry out the task. The King's compound was located in southern Somalia where a large contingent of black mercenaries served under him, but these were little more than armed tribesmen. The Americans had been assigned the task of plugging leaks, but Las Dhure was even beyond their capability. Besides, Rochelle's own men were the ones to be brought back. Or, as it turned out, silenced.

He removed his boot from its resting spot on a lion's head footstool and stood up. Three full-length mirrors occupied prominent locations in the midst of his many fine trophies, because the general liked to look at himself.

His crisp khaki safari shirt and matching trousers were as close to a military uniform as he could find. A big man, big in every way, yet as large as his head was—its squared-off shape bearing an unmistakable likeness to Benito Mussolini's—it had more flesh than needed to cover it, resulting in a heavy sagging of jowls and a thick overlap of skin at the bridge of his nose that appeared at first glance to be an abnormal growth.

In his early seventies, General Lucian Rochelle had never felt the need to tie himself to one particular woman, since so many were available to him. Over the years he had received many honors from his country, where he was still held in high esteem.

Commanding the Foreign Legion during the latter and decisive stages of the Algerian crisis had taught him several valuable lessons, including the efficient use of arms. So now, as he approached old age, his reputation was known and respected not only throughout Africa but across much of Europe.

The general was many things to many people. He was, above all, Africa's number one arms dealer. He had become the main pivot point, the hub around which nearly all of Africa's dirty wars reeled and whirled, as he and his associates in Paris who comprised Triple A saw fit to orchestrate them.

His initial foray into the lucrative business of selling weapons came about in nineteen seventy-five, his last year of military service, when he was instrumental in finalizing a huge