



The Return of John Israel McWayizeni Shaka

by

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John Shaka -- John Israel McWayizenia Shaka -- and his trooper pair, Alyoysius Bridges, called Frenchy, were resting. They were both standing at the natural barrier of the Bandiagara cliffs beyond which lived a quarter million Dogon in the formerly French Sudan, now called Mali.

Their satellite monitor had ordered them south to join with other fighting pairs in the attack of an important military installation, and while passing through this ancient land, they'd struck up a friendship with Yerima, a young boy of Nombori whose finger-paintings made with charcoal and saliva depicted Dogon dancers on a sandy cliffside.

Yerima was speaking, saying, "We Dogon have not always dwelt here. More than six hundred years ago we came from the southwest of Mali and retreated to the cliffs to protect our crops from Fulani. Before us were the Tellem, dwarfs. They had special medicine that made their hands sticky so they could easily climb cliffs, and they also strung fiber bridges across steep gorges."

In the telling young Yerima's face brightened, muscles passing quickly back and forth like startled birds, and his hands waved back and forth at least the equal of any from the Northern Mediterranean regions.

Gleaming in the splendor of their most modern battle suits, John and Frenchy appeared to listen attentively and with a full acceptance of the spun tale. John, however, sub-vocalized his request, and his equipment responded instantly, sending through the following data by means of bone conduction: "Archeological findings suggest Tellem of normal proportions. Sticky fingers and suspension bridges are probably myths."

Two Yenndouma women, bare of breast, each with one hand to spherical water jars atop dark black, well coiffured hairdresses, appeared suddenly from between the rock face of the Bandiagara escarpment and the smooth mud walls of a straw-hatted granary.

Frenchy started to leer, when their satellite monitor, Two-Kay-One-Kay-Three blasted in their ears the command, "Dive!"

Micro-electronics embedded as part of the weave in both trooper's specialized clothing had acquired the order almost instantly, decoding the message, and transmitting it to not just their ears, but also across a multiplicity of circuits weaved up and down their battle clothing.

Unable to respond with the speed demanded by the satellite's overpowering directive, normally inactive reflex plates at their knees tightened with a sudden surge, spilling both troopers flat against the dust-powdered ground.

Simultaneously a roving seeker missile that had apparently sensed their presence despite the clothing's efficient insulation and variable response reflective surfaces, exploded nearby, geysering up a fountain of straw, adobe, rocks, grasses, and innocent Yenndoumas.

Dogon cliff villages seemed to defy gravity, as their mud houses and straw-hatted graneries clung recklessly amongst cave-pocked sandstone. John Shaka and Frenchy had been standing close to a 600 foot drop. Frenchy skidded over the declivity, despite his desperate clutch at hard packed earth.

Though their battle clothing was slightly short of miraculous, representing some of the world's highest technology, it was not all impervious. Such was the shock wave that John Shaka lost consciousness and his nose bled profusely.

At once his suit -- sensing both conditions -- inflated, ballooning air pressure so that he now resembled a fat sausage-like spaceman.

Second stage hallucinations began for John Shaka. They consisted of realistic but unusual visual perspec-



tives that seemed to be drawn from earlier memories and experiences.

In one of six small projections occurring simultaneously inside his “mind’s eye” he was again a small baby. Two large, smooth black hands held him high. He smiled and also gurgled, a small bubble forming at his own dark, thick lips. Smoke from a glowing fire at the hut’s exact geometric center lazied upward toward a round hole in the straw-covered dome.

What was unusual about this fast-moving inner cinema was that John Shaka seemed to view the whole from mere meters above the participants’ heads.

And likewise for the other five simultaneously running viewscreens:

Sitting in hard seats, London, England, lower form, Private School, meaning “public.” The perspective was somewhere near his own big feet, encased with strange and worrisome coverings.

Slurping red-running spaghetti that was virtually tasteless, surrounded by dozens of others in the basementway of a cheap cafeteria. Perspective: high overhead and above all patrons.

Skating with long glides and fancy whirls over firm ice, something he’d never actually done. Perspective: inches from his own dark eyes.

Kissing and holding tight a warm and bare body. Perspective: from his eyes into hers. His long eyelashes actually blinked, and then his eyes looked away as he kissed her.

Chasing a younger sister through muddy streets. She cackled with pleasure, and pushed water back at him. He grinned showing straight, white teeth. Perspective: atop a towering and lonely tree.

John Shaka at last regained consciousness when awareness rose to first stage hallucinations, with its zig-zag patterns and tunnelling stars. Slowly exploding lights and colorful geometrical arrays receded.

He blinked as he opened his eyes to a glaring sunlight filtered to soft tones by his battle suit.

He mumbled, “Doctah kit! You save me again!”

Almost unsensed the nutrient needles -- actually compressed propelled jets -- had probed, flushing toxins from his circulatory system. The golden fluids also satiated a welling appetite and stimulated his central nervous system while monitoring and thrusting more oxygen to his brain via specially chosen drugs. John’s thought patterns matured. He clearly enunciated: “Frenchy?”

“Over the edge. Caught an overhang! Mon Dui,” Frenchy swore -- or thought he swore. “Get me off, Queekly.”

John peered over the edge on hands and knees. Two narrow ridges served as anchors for the frozen clutch of Frenchy’s fingers.

John pressed a button at his side. A tough, resilient and thin fiber spun outward. When he had enough, he twined it about a nearby rock and thrust a loop downward, catching Frenchy’s suit by its head. Commanding appropriately, his own suit began multiplying his efforts tenfold, and Frenchy, shaken but whole, at last stood beside him.

Neither shouted with laughter, nor congratulated the other. As they moved away South, by common consent, both averted eyes from the ghastly stare of the small Yeriamia head lying amidst rubble of logs and straw and mud and boulders, sans torso.

Of the two Yenndouma women, there was no sign.

Several hundred miles further south, and late one evening, they feasted on a pink flamingo that had drifted far from its home-waters, the desolate alkaline lakes of the Great Rift Valley, or possibly from the shallows of Lake Elmenteita.

John Shaka was profoundly quiet, a mood that Frenchy usually misunderstood, thinking it meant that his partner’s stomach was full. Later, when the broad equatorial sun had appeared to saucer below the horizon, Shaka began to hum, a small, almost soundless tune that somehow came out with words. He sang: “Thou who art great as mountains! Cleaver of the heads of enemies! Thou whose wounds emit gunsmoke!



Thou of the elephant! Thou who art black! *Bayete!* -- All hail!

What ees that you sing?" Frenchy asked, turning on his side to better view the tall Shaka.

John blinked, as though only now coming back to awareness of the times. "It is *Izibongo*, a song in praise of the Zulu king."

"Ha! I, Frenchy, have all along known that you are Zulu. Like me, you have come from far lands to fight in these Britisher wars. Take me, for instance. I have the long, wide nose, like the Frenchy. No?"

John Shaka did not answer, though his eyes danced across the others' face.

"And like my eyes, which is brown, you have the dark ones, too. Heh?"

"And I have the bushy mustache. But also take you. Tall, even stalwart like a native. Not like the average Britisher who has not been invaded by the Roman or Gaul. You have the curly hair. No?"

"You have the strong chin, the big muscles and body of the lands that we now walk. These is your lands. No?"

Frenchy waved his arms about, as he spoke, with great exaggeration. From long association together, and habit, John quietly listened, while Frenchy rumbled vividly, saying, "While I, Frenchy," -- he shrugged as though with humility, which was never his true nature -- "I be at other times, other places." His voice rose to a higher pitch. "I leeve. I survive. No?"

He poked John with his gloved hand. "You, my friend. Heh! You are survivor, too. No?"

When John still did not speak, he said, "I am Frenchy. I am French. So I come from France. No?"

John finally laughed, his dancing eyes crinkling magically. "No," he answered. "You aren't French."

"Hah! You've found me out. Mon dui. So. But Frenchy must have a place. Look at yourself, John Shaka. You have home. You have good education. No? But Frenchy? He is get by through wits. No home, no education, just theese military training. He is kicked about from this end of earth to another, and all the time Britisher, he tell Frenchy what to do. So, Frenchy, he theenk, why not have place? Why not call himself Frenchy? And I cannot help but theenk of Paris, with the ladies, and their wonderful ways. La! La! And mon dui. So, Frenchy become French. Wala?"

"Wala," John agreed, turning to study spooked zebras flashing past an uruffled ibis in shallows near them.

"But yourself, John. From where you come? Tell Frenchy before the next missile destroys heem."

John's sensitive eyes, with their long, black, silken lashes, opened wide as he thought back along to an early childhood: It had been so long, so terribly long, so very, very long ago. She was Princess Magogo, Mother of Chief Buthelezi, and she had insisted that he go to the strange land of Britishers when he was but five years of age. He could yet view her as he'd last seen her, trilling the old songs of her people accompanying herself on the ugubu. She tapped the instrument's one string with a slender reed. A gourd attached to the upright stick amplified the sound. She wore a leopard skin, her badge of Zulu royalty, but she was subservient to her husband, with only limited rights and authority.

"I come from a kraal," John said, at last.

"And what is these kraal?"

"A compound of huts that sit in a circle about a blue cinder-block house that stares openly at the mountains near Nongoma in northern Zululand.

"There is a dirt road that winds from the kraal and which plunges into a valley where we graze cattle. From the kraal those animals look no bigger than small pebbles that one collects from the nearby mountain streams."

"Ah! You are Zulu, a fierce fighter. Perhaps a chief or chief's son?"

"I descend from King Shaka, he who forged an empire of clans during the nineteenth century. He swept them across southeast Africa. My name, they declared, was Prince John Israel Mcwayizeni Shaka."

"Ah! And ah! again. Then you are indeed royalty. But tell me thees, my friend. If King Shaka swept his



combined forces across southern Africa, how did the Britishers and Afrikaners get their foothold. How do the beasts cling to your lands?”

John pointed to his battle suit, a modern marvel exactly like Frenchy’s.

“Mon dui. Of course. The Britisher technology. Guns against spears, and all that.”

The food and the small talk and the memories of their combined experiences brought them closer. Frenchy slept while John watched. And it was Prince John Israel Mcwayizeni Shaka who hummed into the late morning, clutching at his knees and rocking slowly with his own rhythm, singing:

“Fill our hands with wives;

“Fill our hands with children;

“Fill our hands with millet;

“Fill our hands with sorghum;

“Fill our hands with our enemies. . . .”

When Two-Kay-One-Kay-Three flashed a signal of urgency, their suits spontaneously released emergency rations. The satellite monitor also transmitted: “Five point six degrees East of south. Ten point three kilometers. Functioning enemy missiles encysted. Destroy. Priority. Sacrifice.”

“Shall we turn and flee?” Frenchy jokingly asked.

“We Zulu do not flee from death.”

“Neither do we, who are French and civilized,” Frenchy half joked. “So now we are Britishers, and stubborn like the sow who protects her piglets. Shall we drive the hungry wolf away? Or shall we flee like sensible, human, intelligent survivors?”

Later, as they trudged dutifully toward the missile encystment, Frenchy sniffed the air through a quickly opened vent in his protective suit, and wrinkled his nose, saying, “Theese land, she is not home.”

When they did close on the site, John ordered: “Topography!”

By his signal both faceplates were overlaid with three colorful projections: One was an overhead view at zenith of about ten degrees, and covering the next twelve kilometer square. A second was a profile of the bearing he faced, and that profile changed as he moved his head from side to side. A third was the least-distance ground-path without regard to obstacles that might be along the line.

“Defenses!” John next ordered.

Each projection lit with minute and startling sparkles that flashed, the largest of all representing the geographical location of the buried missiles.

There were three rings of defensive units, and it seemed that no matter in which direction they faced, all potential gaps seemed well covered by the enemy.

Pairs of infantry like themselves were closing in from all directions.

John, conforming to his basic training conditioning, extended his arm outward in an arbitrary direction. Any decision was better than the irresolution of no decision at all.

Frenchy sighed, and whispered, “Mon dui.”

The hot, equatorial sun triggered their miniature units, whence a cooling breeze gently evaporated away tiny trickles of sweat.

Dust swirled upward and outward with each stubborn step, coating and recoating their military casement. Every so many steps an almost unsensed buzzing clicked or fluttered, whence polarities suddenly reversed, sweeping the dust away as though thousands of flies had suddenly determined to leave a moving carcass, and then buzzing about en masse as though momentarily confused, finally settling softly to ground behind their slow, plodding tracks.

They came to a wide, sluggish, dark brown stream, a natural opaque trap.

A hyena from a small pack of five dodged the horns of a mother wildebeest bent on protecting a newborn.



John paused, his trained jaw muscles unconsciously turning up volume so that each of the thousands of background noises became intensified. He heard the shrill trumpeting or squeeling of elephant far upwind, probably distorted by echoes and winds, or, more than likely, reconstructed slightly off-phase by his somewhat less than all-knowing micro-chips. He also heard the scratching of insect leg against leg, and the almost silent thrum of a bird's pulsating throat. The steady vibration of slithering snake across a roughened surface, probably a fallen tree branch, reminded of simple amplitude modulated radio frequency when bands are twisted to catch random frequencies.

Frenchy strained to hear and understand, also. He raised his hands, then whispered: "Eet is pop, pop, popping, like these popcorn exploding, one right after another."

The sound again was a reconstruction, perhaps of a frequency that could not be sensed unassisted. Both men knew that each pop was a transmission of perhaps a trillion pieces of information being sent outward to a defending enemy satellite.

"Translate!" John ordered.

In a neutral, almost feminine tone, their monitor beamed down the essence of the enemy's collector device, saying: "Fifty-three point six centigrade; wind two tenths kilometers per second at level K, North three point twenty-six East. . . ." and finally, that, ". . . all sounds are properly identified at 99.73 significance level."

"The monitor, she say not more than three hundred meters that way," Frenchy pointed alongside the muddy river.

John ordered Three-Kay-One-Kay-Three to neutralize transmissions, which should have meant that their more sophisticated satellite, backed by hundreds of thousands of data centers based deep within the earth's bowels, and all its associated logic components, would intercept the transmission, compute the nature of "safe" signals, and forward them on to the enemy as though sent by the enemy's own sensor.

Their monitor flashed back, "Negative. Unable to comply."

Jaw muscles twitched within John's battle gear, which signalled a sweeping display of nouns that flickered one by one before his eyes: names of birds, lizards, mammals, snakes. . . .

On his next twitch, the display stopped, simultaneously flashing a code and a filing number, which he at once recited.

Snarling a warning, a spotted hyena drove off interloping vultures. The hyena was joined by others. With noisy family coordination they were able to take over a meal of bones already picked clean.

John's code activated a hitherto silent sound amplifier, sending forth the simulated sound of the steady plop, plop of a lumbering pachyderm, one that was apparently approaching the river through its wide, marshy bank.

Under that new noisy cover, John and Frenchy moved forward, John in the lead. When he reached the water's edge, the elephant apparently entered the water, drew some into its trunk, and thrashed it in a wide, rushing spray back and forth across its hot, fly-pestered hide.

Simultaneously John submerged himself and triggered his sonar beeps.

He was hardly aware of the explosion that shafted brown cubic meters of water upward and outward, to fall back again like thin, dirty rain.

When next he regained consciousness, he found his suit inflated, and he was bobbing and twisting back and forth, his right hand caught in the crotch of an ancient, gnarled tree root that extended nearly half-way across the water.

Frenchy was scrambling on slick mud beside the river, saying -- rather shouting through their private intercom -- "Mother of the Christian! what you leave Frenchy for?"

By the time he'd waded out and caught John's bulging suit, tears were dried in the fake Frenchman's eyes,



and he was smiling again, especially on seeing John's open eyes.

Frenchy ordered: "Medic!" Whence John's circuits presented physiological data before and after the explosion.

Frenchy also ordered that reports be sent to their monitor, but he was interrupted by a sudden almost garbled, "New identifier. Two-Kay-Two-Kay-Three. Override!" Then silence.

Forgetting his battle enclothment, Frenchy tried to spit, then said, "Mother of the Jew! They've killed Two-Kay-One-Kay!"

At the same time four pillars of light lanced upward. They converged high at a point. A bright blaze momentarily blinded them before protective polarization flicked on.

There was, of course, a follow-up shock wave behind the missile's lancement.

"Mother of the Muslim! They have caught ours."

Two-Kay-Two-Kay-Three ordered: "Reaffirm priority. Sacrifice!"

John deflated his suit while moving up the bank, and he again ordered a scan for sensors. They stood on the summit of a hillock. "Frenchy," he said sternly. "You've sworn to the Britishers, the French Foreign Legion, the Mother of the Christians, Mother of the Jew, and now the Mother of the Muslim." He talked softly, projecting in this crazy patchwork an image as sympathetic as his lowering voice. "Now tell the truth, Frenchy," he asked almost conspiratorially. "That long, thick nose is really Arabian. You are Sudanite? Or Egyptian? Or something African, are you not?"

Frenchy pretended to cross himself. He shook his head in the negative, exaggerating each motion. "The dog may know his own bitch -- but the father?"

The ground began to shake as the full-throated roar of an avenger rocket pulsated the heat-glazed atmosphere, shaking the thin stick-like trees and shrubs, quieting with a fearful dread the small and large animals about.

John watched helplessly as the cone of white funneled upward and then gently curved, now little by little aiming at the heart of some important city, probably London itself.

A stalking hyena lunged at the head of a baby rhino, helpless as a broken log, its huge parent appeared to graze unconcernedly, probably because it had already defended the youngster for twelve hours, and now must eat.

John wondered if the missile his equipment had tracked heading northerly was aimed at Sebastian Bridgit. Oh, how tiny and bewildered he'd been when arriving in that terribly foreign land so long ago. And the first to greet him had been Sebastian, the ugly one, the one with the pinched up nose, always beet red, and snagged teeth and a breath so heavy -- he'd called it "pub heavy."

He never could recall what the man had said, or how he'd responded. Silence. Always silence.

Or, what of lovely Sanu, she who'd also come from the land of Dogons, the very same where Yerima had been, and the two maidens of Yenndouma. She -- lovely Sanu! The Same who'd taken him from the snuffling Sebastian Bridgit.

Then there was his first conscious clash with cultural differences and values. She'd handed him a full glass of cow's milk, commanding to "Drink."

There was the cold, harsh metal dipper. He'd eyed her with rounded orbs, asking, "It is punu?" Punu was a mixture of thick porridge-like crushed millet with water.

"Fah! That is your past. Milk! Genuine milk for a growing lad."

He'd tasted it, but hadn't liked it.

"Drink more!" she'd ordered.

When he'd taken another polite sip, and also had bravely controlled the terrible lurch in his stomach, she'd protested, saying, "You're too thin. You can never walk the streets of this big city without being mistaken for a broken Cowrie shell."

John reflected that lovely sanu had become too acculturated, had never realized that perhaps fifty-four



percent of the Black race could not digest milk beyond their infancy.

Garmented with civilization's most marvelous, near miraculous technical weaponry, he could only stare helplessly as the magnitude of the tragedy of the escaping missile swelled into his also homeward veering thoughts.

When the megabomb burst both troopers instinctively attempted to protect their eyes with open palms. They dropped to their knees.

At first came dense photons, along with deadly hard radiation.

Semi-organic liquids entrapped between the first and second layers of their suits responded, making a covering mirror having a great efficiency.

Nevertheless other particles streamed through and through, even as they hugged the ground closely.

Heat withered dry vegetation. Simultaneous crackling fires exploded, as if rising spontaneously from an unseen magical command.

Their shared hillock rose and shuddered violently, shaking at their hard clutched ground as if each rode atop a furious she-cat who wanted rid of pests.

Muted, rumbling vibrations pressed through their bones, thus by-passing their newly protected ear channels.

Already each automatic suit medic was inserting pressured sprays which would flush anti-hormones to every body part, thereby counteracting the predictable swift surge of bacterial hormones that were sure to trigger every kind of cancerous condition.

Both were put to emergency sleep while the process continued.

Specific self-donor cells -- cellular templates of themselves taken earlier from their own healthy organs and stored for this eventuality -- were released into their blood streams, where macrophages carried them to respective organs. Other pre-coded biological instructions obtained during basic training guided the predictable battles between anabolism and catabolism, regulating essential heightened metabolism.

Their blood, too, was also intercepted and shunted into special chambers that cleansed and restored and rebalanced before returning each red drop.

Frenchy's mind tilted and touted with ladies from many nations.

John's, meanwhile, played a small trick, clouding his emotions and feelings behind that of a small child, perhaps no more than six years old, and one who stood lonely at the busiest of London streets, signs aglitter, vehicles wheeling like scurrying mice, the cold Icelandic wind whipping inward with long gusts that carried finely divided ice-petals. . . . He looked upward with saucerish eyes:

A passing lady, all dressed with heavy clothing, said, "Good morning!" her voice as wavering as an ugubu.

A bearded gent, with tiny white sparkles wetting his chin, said, "Peace stay with you today," and touched him with long, delicate, black fingers.

"How are you?" another asked.

"Have a good day! another suggested.

Little John replied: "How is your skin?" which figuratively meant, *How is your Health?* or so lovely Sanu had told him. But then she was not Zulu.

They were awakened at about the same time by an urgent summons: "Identifier: Two-Kay-Three-Kay-Three. Priority! Sacrifice!"

"Mother of an ape, they have caught two of our monitors," swore Frenchy, weakly pushing himself erect.

With the satellite's urgent command had also come an automatic flashing on and off in brilliant red, showing the missile's site, also their target.



John again ordered topography be displayed.

Gaps could now be identified in the enemy's protective rings. They headed for one of the gaps, coming at first upon a pile of large, whitish boulders surrounded by darker ones, obviously of a different composition and structure.

John's sense of déjà vu nearly overwhelmed him, and Frenchy stopped their advance to ask what was his trouble.

"It was like this a long time ago," John Shaka mutely explained. "I see the British defending Rorke's Drift in 1879, when they barely withstood the might of 4,000 Zulu warriors. Isandhlawana has already taken place, a mixed contingent of 1,770 Britons and Africans were encamped near the hillock -- one like this -- when 20,000 Zulus appeared, swooped down and washed their spears in the blood of the strangers. These white stones are like the whitewash marking where the Britons fell. . . ."

As John recited his feelings, he also began to sway, nearly falling.

Frenchy jumped forward and steadied his parthner, saying quietly: "Mon dui. It is the chemicals they drip in our blood."

"A year later the British broke our back," John explained, still entranced.

"Here, sit for a bit. We will rest, no matter the urgency."

The satellite again thrust its priority commands, this time in a tone calculated to irritate and annoy.

Frenchy waved his hand. "Pay no attention. These computers! What do they know? They only know what man has told them. Not what man feels and must do. Here. Sit, my friend."

Hyenas snarled at a young lion muscling in on their feast.

John continued with, "My great-great-great grandfather's power had come so great, he had become so vain, that he condemned members of his court to instant execution for the smallest social infraction, such as sneezing or making him laugh when he does not want to laugh."

"Pah! All kings, they are arrogant and misuse power."

"When his mother, Nandi, died in 1827, Shaka killed 7,000 of his own people with spear thrusts, and banned the planting of crops."

Frenchy remained quiet, but nodded his head.

A second lion joined the first. Snarling together, they chased off the hyena pack.

After a bit, John further explained, "They revolted against him. Threw him to the bottom of a grain pit. His bones lie there under a street in the village of Stranger, 45 miles north of Durban."

"Theese kind should be killed and thrown to pits."

"My name is his!" John cried.

Frenchy shook him. "You are also named after others. Tell me. What are theese names. Geeve them to Frenchy. Tell me what is theese whole name? Heh?"

As though awakening from a long sleep, John recited, "Prince John Israel Mcwayizeni Shaka."

Frenchy was delighted. "There. See. Frenchy knows. You are home again. Heh? Home again with Frenchy?"

Blinking rapidly, and shaking his head, John ordered, "Topography!"

Now defense gaps were widening, and they headed for one.

Here and there a twitching, tiny corpse pecked, or wiggled, or thumped, or fluttered, or sighed, or scratched, or slithered against the blistered ground. A harsh and damaged ecology had become suddenly an impossible ecological niche for all except those who, like John and Frenchy, were sheathed in the most modern garments constructed for offensive and defensive warfare.

According to their present, surviving satellite, the first defensive ring consisted of a series of old fashioned armored tanks capable of speeds in surges no greater than 150 kilometers per hour. Placed at intervals of every other kilometer about the missile site, they appeared to represent a more formidable barrier than they



actually were.

Frenchy threw out waves of simulators, each creating the impression of a stalking trooper, so that it appeared that dozens approached, converging on this first defensive line.

“Let me also tie the wire on these,” Frenchy said after they’d made literal visual contact with one of the tanks. He shrugged, “After all, eet is no worse than tieing up with a woman. No?”

“I once knew an old man who could describe the hair on each of his two hundred and twelve cows, but could not tell you the name of his wife,” John answered.

Frenchy pressed a button at his elbow. Lying on a hillock so that he could peer at the tank, he pointed with his hand, and the tiny hairline he’d placed along his arm pushed lazily outward.

Frenchy’s eyes, locked into the fire control system inside his battle armor, did not waver from the target, except to follow the silhouette of the rocket as it projected on his screen. “It is a misfortune when a man cannot tell the importance between woman and cow.” He blinked, and the miniature rocket took off, zapping the tank, piercing it, and leaving a hollow shell after the condensed explosion.

John shuddered. There were live people inside, and now they were gone, just like his family, his clan, his tribe. . . . He slid downslope onto a solidly packed animal trail made centuries earlier by a population that swarmed from coven to crest of this bleak land. Something else bothered John. An instinct for self-preservation wanted to force knowledge of some sort to his awareness, and he could not quite reach it.

Acids and bacterial waste products had built up to some triggering limit on his skin, and soft, cool breezes pulsed inside his suit.

As his shod feet pounded up and down the eroded gullies, he could not but think of the hard turfs of London: playgrounds sheathed in man-made surfaces, hard, so hard they would not grow even the rugged cactus, had the climate permitted.

Again the satellite urged: “Priority! Sacrifice!”

John halted Frenchy with an upheld hand. He twitched his nose, which turned on the visual intensifier. Like swelling balloons the neutral, twisted trees and shrubbery expanded -- and there it was!

Beneath a shelter of dark green, cultivated vegetation -- a camouflage -- was a new, modern, armored, moving command post. Crystal hard sensors surrounded the crest of its turret. Gaping maws for a variety of destructive devices faced every direction. Its motor, as silent as a whispering spring breeze, was powered by sunlight accumulated with great efficiency in a variety of ways, including auxiliary spread outs, and also covering its own skin. Additional power supplemented it through atomic packs which were likewise protective layers arranged about vulnerables. What steel-jacketed bullet could possibly penetrate such mass?

Its speed was that of a hovering jet, or twice that of a traditional rollagon vehicle, where the wheels flattened and followed the land’s contour, yet scarcely lost an erg of energy.

They were trapped, and both knew it.

This most modern and singular device had waited patiently for their arrival.

“Two-Kay-Three-Kay-Three.” John barely enunciated.

“Identifier: Two-Kay-Four-Kay-Three,” came the surprising response.

“Sacre Bleu!” Frenchy swore. “Another monitor down.”

That made three monitors destroyed since they’d begun their trek inward. How many other personal monitors were likewise destroyed? For this installation? This nation? This continent? The whole world? How many other infantry, like themselves, were trapped or destroyed during the interim? How many cities were already vacuous, glowing sockets? And how many minutes did they have to live?

“Priority: Sacrifice!” they were again commanded, nay, prodded by a most nerve-grating voice.

John imagined the giant vision screens inside this hulking, mobile command center. They were yet alive because of their enemy’s cool sureness.



Speaking aloud, as if no enemy were about, John said: "They wait for more infantry, Frenchy. There is no escape."

"There was no escape for us anyway, after the radiation we take. Heh? Do they think Frenchy not know we are dead men anyway?"

Slowly, and as unobtrusively as possible, John closed his right arm against his side, so that as it completed its slow movement against the baked ground his right forearm and hand were beside his upper thigh. Pressing gently, he felt rather than heard the click of releasing missile, a pencil-line agent of destruction not more than one hundred and twenty millimeters long. At its end was a small uranium bulb sheathed with protective lead, and inside the uranium was a deuterium pellet machined and refined as the product of a very complex society.

If the surge -- the acceleration of acceleration -- was just so, of the right magnitude, when and if this small tipped missile struck the command center's protective barriers, compressive forces could vaporize the equally dense protective layers of the enemy unit. The encased deuterium would be simultaneously raised to a temperature that would compel fusion. Small though the energy output, confined within that behemoth, it would create havoc against onlookers and machinery and weaponry.

Too late for sophisticated estimations based on calculations and probability gathering, John overrode the satellite monitor with his tongue, said tongue also licking at thick, roughened, drying lips.

Harsh African sunlight glittered briefly as the command center moved and stopped.

John slowly drew the missile upward, permitting it to snuggle against the grooves along his straightened arm.

Another imperceptible click followed through pathways of his battle clothing. The missile was now attached to gossamer, ultra-strong wire fibers coming out of his elbow from storage at his shoulder pad. Frenchy's coded intercom was quiet for once. He twitched a finger, a veritable arm wave under the present circumstances.

We are sangoma and inyanga -- diviner and medicine man, John silently exhorted himself. But which is sangoma? Which is inyanga?

When John suddenly pointed his finger at the bulking threat ahead, a banshee shriek nearly deafened the two men.

At once three things had happened: Someone or something had lobed an explosive charge at the command unit. It was a near miss, with dirt geysering and splattering. But this explosion caught the tank at just the moment it had fired at John and Frenchy. The slight jar had either raised or lowered the aim just sufficiently to make for a miss that swept far behind them. Had the explosion come slightly sooner or later or the ground less rigid, compensating gyros would have kept John and Frenchy on target, especially with the help of the missile's proximity sensors.

Secondly, when John straightened out his finger, making a line with his arm and finger, his own miniature missile erupted, trailing behind an ever so fine wire.

At once John's eyes beheld the intensified view of his own missile slowly zeroing in on the tank. Pulses along the ultra-fine wire corrected again and again the slow flight.

John's finger twitched. This signaled the missile to accelerate, breaking its finely tied control.

It smashed the outward barrier and, considering its velocity and mass, must have pierced the outer barrier at about the same time that the fusion took place, or at least within a nanosecond of the same time.

The command module ruptured, sending parts and pieces flying haphazardly.

When the dust had settled, Frenchy rose up, shouting French obscenities. John interrupted, saying, "Frenchy, you know that the French never speak English, saying 'these', but rather 'thees'."

Frenchy's mouth opened cavernously, for he could not think of a proper rebut to this non-sequitor.

Their celebration was halted by the next stringent order from Two-Kay-Five-Kay-Three, saying, "All



troops are to sacrifice.”

All about came the whistle and screech of overwhelming firepower, and thunderous explosions that more than rivaled the explosion at the command post, whence came showers of organic and inorganic particles and debris.

Flying tanks seemed to hop toward their breach, followed by flick after flick of hellish red, blue, green and sheer white lights that fused and melted and exploded further.

Such a concussion followed that the ground lifted, changing contours that were ancient when a thousand years earlier John’s forefathers had wandered into coastal strips between the Drakensberg range and the Indian Ocean, having come a long way from Central Africa, drifting at the pace of their cattle.

Aloysius Bridges and Prince John Israel Mcwayizena Shaka could do no more than lose consciousness again, their suits billowing out like giant balloons, and their medics probing and patching.

Frenchy’s last thought was a memory and a feeling: His had been a long, fruitless search for home, and he seemed to stand on a cold, windy Christmas morning, aloof as he was alone, rooted to an empty corner of a street in London. Somewhere he vaguely heard the jingle of some kind of bell, a tinkle, as if it rode on a snow sled. . . .

John thought: *Poor climate in Zululand. Just continuing droughts now, followed by heavy thunderstorms and floods.*

How that makes our women work!

Frenchy’s resilience was slightly better, or John’s punishment worse, for Frenchy regained consciousness first, thereafter helping John’s medic to administer to him. Frenchy said, “I’ve killed a *Crocuta Crocuta*, a spotted hyena. Would you like a taste?”

John had to shake his head at the complex and surprising Frenchy. Would the clown ever expose his true nature? *Crocuta Crocuta* indeed! How could Frenchy even come close to knowing the scientific label for the Tanzania hyena? -- If he were the dunce he pretended?

“Ah well!” John Shaka sighed, leaning weakly back against the bola of a black-charred and leafless tree as he reached for a long strip also seared black from an open fire.

He was unable to chew the stringy meat, so tough was it, but he did manage to swallow the long spaghetti-like strings.

Light was fast fading from a dusky, war-torn sky. John asked, “How comes the *Crocuta Crocuta* here?”

“Ah, that ees Frenchy’s leetle secret.” He placed fingers to lips. “I whistle -- so! Lo! Comes this little chap.”

John looked at the hyena’s head and nodded. “The ear. See. It is banded.”

Frenchy looked away and shrugged. “I could not take time to read the banding when hungry. Heh?”

“From Ngorongoro in Tanzania -- either the Serengeti Plain or at least from their park.”

“Gah! The little fellow, he ees garbage collector. He come to collect us as garbage. Frenchy not garbage.”

John reached for another blackened string. “Even we who are the walking dead must eat. Can you tell me why that is, Frenchy?”

Just then a stately giraffe came lolloping along the dry stretches, swaying among treetops. John grabbed Frenchy’s arm and pointed, his smooth silken voice expressing a near religious awe when he said, “It is far from home! That belongs in Kenya, the Marsabit Game Reserve.”

“It is the war,” Frenchy shrugged. “Who knows? Maybe they tire of the leetle gardens that man has given them, and now want to know more of the whole world. Heh?”



Later they discovered that no bands or frequencies acknowledged their calls, though all of their training and instrumentation told that they were indeed signalling properly.

“But we speak to one another, so we transmit,” reasoned Frenchy after their hundredth test. “Our power she is high, now that the sun has charged our batteries. Eet is they who do not answer, my friend.”

Day by day radio reception proved non-existent, as though they were the only two alive in the whole world -- which they might have been.

From time to time they removed their wonderous battle garments for cleansing, and to check them out. Once they'd trapped a small, bewildered dog, and eaten it after roasting, but for the most part they lived on snakes and lizards.

“Why do we not leeve these suits behind?” Frenchy asked one day.

But the question was not seriously intended. They could no more leave behind their battle garments then they could their battle training or its conditioning.

As various animals, large and small, scurried, or thundered, or crawled, or flew, Frenchy argued that their flight was in fright of man, that the war had stretched everywhere, even to these innocents, who naturally lived by fang and claw.

John's faith in the land and its natural inhabitants went unshaken until the day they came across bestraggled groups of mountain gorillas that could only have come from the misty wooded slopes of the Virunga range, eight lofty volcanoes shared by Rwanda, Uganda and Zaire.

They were patchy with sores and missing hair. Some were blind, being hand carried or led by others that were equally scabrous.

John shivered. “I've never seen the like, nor have I dreamed it.”

“It ees the war,” Frenchy shrugged.

Neither mentioned the small tufts of hair falling from their own roughened and patchy white skin.

John led them southward, ever searching for others. When they viewed their sixth empty “eye socket” -- a hole in the ground whence once had been tall, gleaming buildings -- Frenchy suggested that they disown the Britishers, Americans, French, and so on.

But again the thought was an idle one, for in a way Frenchy was all the things he named, while John was that which was in his blood combined with that which was in his life.

So they weakly drove themselves southward, until one day they stood at the base of hills that spread open into a fertile valley. As their eyes traveled along the valley floor, they also swept up, ever upward, until high atop the next plateau was the kraal, circular, concentric, about a cinder-block house.

John pointed. “It is my home, as I remember it from long ago.”

Now that his visor was open, he squinted beneath the sharp morning light, and his eyes watered. He said: “This is the land of Shaka. There are the Nongoma mountains and the dirt road that winds from the kraal.”

“But where are the people?” asked Frenchy, who also squinted with weakened and weary eyes.

“Many have gone to the city for work, to live.”

“And the cities are gone ---,” Frenchy needlessly commented.

They stared, searching for movement, any kind of life -- and both knew without question that what they'd find was emptiness. Then John said with renewed strength and volubility: “Do you know how King Shaka changed the face of this continent?”

“You have tell me so leettle.”

“Up there,” John pointed. “It is the White Umfolozi River.” He waved across brown and green rolling hills. “That hill. That's where it all started. It's called Gqnokli.”



“I can’t even pronounce eet. Frenchy never learned clicks and clacks.”

“I’ve a Zulu tongue,” John proudly answered. “It’s the most beautiful, the most expressive language of all.”

Cattle bones painted the hillsides with fine, white brushings. A gentle but persistent breeze washed them. John pointed again, saying: “Up there. Atop the hill. Clay forges. They used the skin of a goat for bellows. King Shaka used them to make his *assegai*. Before that time the tribes chased one another a ways, one throwing a wooden spear at another, sometimes carrying more spears, and throwing them until they were all used up. Then one army chased the other one home without too much harm being done on either side.

“King Shaka changed all that. He shortened the spears, put hefty shafts on them, and he taught his warriors a revolutionary battle tactic. They were to close with the enemy and then sink the blade right into their enemy’s chests.”

John waved again. “Over there. Right there on Gqokli Hill, he put his army to test, and before he was done he’d shaken the whole continent.

“He was born in 1787, you know. A bastard. Illegitimate by Nguni standards. That’s because his mother, Nandi and his father, Senzangakona were related. Nandi was driven away and she and her child found refuge in the Mtetwa clan. Over there.”

John was quiet for long minutes, and could not be raised by any of Frenchy’s sayings.

At last: “For kilometers in all directions his warriors, now called Zulus, sought women and cattle. In less than three years tens of thousands of kilometers were swept clean of men.

“A chain reaction consisting of death and terror swept southeast Africa. As Shaka’s power grew, so did his disregard for others’ lives.”

Later, after they’d traversed the crinkled green and brown hills that plunged toward the Nsuze River and that were so freckled with empty kraals, and after they’d forced themselves across that river, and had come to the skeleton-filled kraals themselves, and then had finally stared on the bleached bones of John’s kraal, his place of birth, Prince John Israel Mcwayizeni Shaka spoke a last time, with his ever-weakening voice. He explained to Frenchy that, “Zulu, you know, means ‘heaven.’ We Zulu are ‘The People of heaven.’”

Frenchy, the last to survive, also weakly mumbled, “Are we not all in hees image?”

