The last game of the season.... the last minutes of the last quarter... the championship game. I became the hero and a proud Tiger.

The ball came down the court on the right side. I heard and glimpsed it in my right eye’s peripheral vision, and heard a dribbling ball precision bounced with confidence by a fellow teammate I’d nicknamed named Michelangelo, a.k.a. Thelonius Walton Washington.

I new the drill, knew it by heart, as I personified the master of the mid-court shot and without looking I instinctively knew the ball was in mid-air flight, coming right towards me.

I looked at the man guarding me, provokingly eyed him directly in his evil eye using a mean, clicking, guttural snarl to put him off balance. Then I looked in the opposite direction, feigned movement in that direction, then jammed to the other side, the opposite direction… all the while anticipating success and Michelangelo’s artistic ball passing instincts. His pass accelerated like a swift and perfect spear zipping through the cheering, roaring exuberance of the crowd and the heavy hot, humid and over-excited air in the gymnasium.

Only then did I look towards the brown spinning orb, appreciating its perfect trajectory, recognizing Michelangelo’s unique rate of spin to velocity momentum. My brain clicked in geometries of flight and angles and I prepared to intercept the ball.

I was up high in the air, leaping, when my body told me to incorporate the balls momentum into my swinging arms, and then with my arm’s added strength, propel the basketball up the final ten yards to the hoop…. I envisioned the trajectories and then let my hours of practice; practice that incorporated the immutable laws of Newton and nature, take its course.

But then something happened… my mind went fuzzy, an unforeseen man, the center of the opposite team placed a huge, open palm directly into the velocity of my face and nose and I tumbled over a bubbling and violent waterfall.

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Going down the falls I gained a terrified momentum, and a profound realization I no longer existed in Kansas, on the court, I no longer lived with in the present world, the human race I knew, labored for and loved.

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Hunger.

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For days I existed alone by eating tubers, worms, small fry fish, mushrooms and flowers. Somehow I knew what to eat, knew how to live alone in the rough and had mystical and spiritual precognitions my team would somehow find me.

One day my team did find me. Joy. They spoke a different language spoke, but I understood it perfectly. Seeing my team—Oh, such joy! —Connected to my humanity, my tribe, and my people.

Happiness overwhelmed me as we made our way back to the grass huts on our savannah. We chattered in our clicking guttural language and shared a gourd of river water mixed with sweet honey and bitter flower stems.

A celebration around the tribal fire that night brought me back to a solid reality and my ancestral life, although I knew a new game was always on for the morrow. Tomorrow, tomorrow, always the game, always a fact of life... always the game, always a new tomorrow....

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We lost the game.

We lost again the next day.

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Two days later came the morning for the big game that would determine our fate. Our tribe’s survival was at stake. We assembled early, before dawn’s first light, rubbed still-wet rhino feces on our skin and chewed a locally grown stimulant, knowing the game would be long and laborious today… maybe even fatal for a few of us.

Men who could not go the distance would not survive today. We were down two men; two seasoned and good men had succumbed to the deadly bite of the Black Mambos that hid surreptitiously, slyly in our sylvan rimmed, always alive, savannah grasslanded life.

We took positions down wind, in absolute frozen body stances with spears, clubs and other bone or horn weapons in hand. We waited silently, stealthily, constantly communicating with subtle hand signals and knowing, but nervous eyes.

The last of many gazelles wandered through the meadow. At the moment, I had no concept of the chemical hormones plundering my amygdala, hypothalamus, prefrontal cortex, cingulate cortex, hippocampus, septal nuclei, and periaqueductal grey of my midbrain ... brainy places and things not to be understood for more years than I could ever imagine.

A surge of power coursed through my body. The correct moment for the shot approached the focal plane in my calculating mind. I instinctively welcomed it. ...

*I remembered my first hunts, my father in hunting finesse with profound admiration and reverence etched and now buried deep in my mind’s memories... all movements of men, of hunters actions absorbed, all muscles movements correlated to success in the hunt for game, subconsciously registered and stored*.

All recollections were held in reserve for this moment, for the time had come when I would be required to make the kill shot... survival, sweet nourishment, life, existence, praise and continuation of my kind depended upon it.

Reflexively my body was commandeered by powerful surges of hormones that provoked body focus and potent force. I pumped my will power and fortitude up to 299%, stanchioned my stance to my earth, planted myself deeper in my African soil, my arm drawing back slowly to the ready...

Tightening tendons, pulsing blood, and raw nerves controlling trained and twitchy muscles …

WHOOSH!

I’d made the shot, a tranquility of mind remained after the release of my concentrated power. I absorbed the rebounding counterforce and searched for the new reality in my rapidly elapsing timescape. I then watched in anticipation, as my single spear vectored downward to its target. I subconsciously reached back for my second chance spear... knowing in my heart and mind Mother Nature rarely allowed a second chance in this game.

All my tribe-mates eyes and minds and hungers surveyed my spear sail though the hot and humid air, eyes panning as if in a slow motion hope, for an impact into hide and flesh and red-flowing blood. The sun’s first light reflected quick sparky flashes off the chipped obsidian spear point. We all triangulated trigonometries before the figures and facts of trigonometry existed. A surge of collective inhales, quick beating hearts boomed internally, but all still remained in hesitant and silent breathing mode. Then came a collective knowing, a triumphant welling up in all of us… for we would soon be onto the real hunt, on the run and we might eat well tonight... was the chase afoot?

Then again we might not taste this success. With success we survive, with failure we would starve to death. Starvation is not an option.

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Hunger is death, food is life, and a man must kill to live. These facts were celebrated in songs, in our chants since the beginning of time immemorial.

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The spear struck, puncturing deep into the gazelle hindquarters, a bleeding wound that damaged a set of tensing muscles controlling its propulsion and traction on its left side.

The look in the gazelles’ eyes revealed instinctive fear and surprise, a black-eyed distressed terror provoking automatic flight from an unperceived danger... flight reflex propelled her, as her pain was now her motivator and spiritual guidance.

Her instincts activated instantly, and she ran, ran hard, a zigzagging run for her very being, going in the direction of a group of Gum Arica tree’s camouflage and shade in the far distance.

The hunger inside me changed to a mouth-watering desire to consume her flesh. I smelled and imagined the sizzling of her body fats on an open fire and savored the flavored of her flesh on my tongues’ taste bud memories.

As the team ran in a well-coordinated and knowing pursuit, all I could think about was tonight’s meal. Smell memories to be satisfied, a full stomach would be in my future, a rescue from this deathly persistent gnawing hunger... perhaps a heroic metamorphosis from desperation to success, a raging fire, a dance of celebration. For to eat until full, immediately after the kill was the demon that invaded my soul, but all decent men knew that to share was the first commandment of the successful tribe.

Then a primal mean, aggressive and vicious force redoubled, emerged like an enraged creature, from a cave deep in my mind... but a calming father memory told me to control it, to channel raw aggression, to focus in on the long run, to act in unison with the tribe.

Oh, I tell you, hunger hurts! It drives one on in utter desperation or a grudging sacrifice. The plateaus and platitudes of the heroic melt in the face of real hunger.

My body began to adapt to my hunger; it had to. I asked the deities of wind and water to toughen me for the long run I knew was coming. The sun’s shadows began our survival countdown... and we ran, and we ran, and ran for her life.

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The score: Hometown Homo sapiens - 1, Mother Nature’s fleet of foot gazelle - 0

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*As a boy, I’d run for miles, far behind the main team, but always with them in view.... the big men of the tribe, so use to the running miles in the pursuit of game, so knowing in the knowledge of... running. For the hunter must be aware of the miles made of more miles, compounded by even more miles in the hot sun of our equatorial existence.*

*Oh father, please teach me how to run the course and let me fling the killing spear...*

*A boy must dream, a boy must always run and dream. Dream and run and defeat the sun*.

Running the savannah for hours, barefoot over sharp thorns and jagged rocks and splintery piercing wood was now no longer of conscious concern. Eyes on the prize in well-regulated muscle coordination, in synchronized forward bipedal movement, always forward movement, in rhythmic arms swinging at a steady pace, breath conserved, eyes on the prize... running, always running for the prize.

Thoughts of exhausting the wounded beast played exultant in all the team’s collective eyes and minds. Clicking tongues, hoots, yells... but all was strategic and seemingly of an a priori hand-me -down genius, for all focus was on the game, in an all for all, all for one, of a focus in our tried and true survival methodology.

Black bodies moving over golden-grained grassland, a mountain of a snow-capped majestic... someday to be called Kilimanjaro... in the far distance.... not a cloud in the sky... a merciless sun draining precious body fluids... and still we ran. And we ran. And then we ran some more.

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You know when the quarry is weakening. You see the signs. You adapt a new game plan that is immediately and somehow miraculously known to all. Win at all costs, men hard-trained to rely on past successes must run for eons to permeate the the tribe’s genes and bloodlines.

The team compensates to the gazelles changes in directions as a corporeal body towards one glorious harmonious action; of runs and movements slightly faster, keener, with thoughts of determined success closer now, the quarry closer, the distance between anticipated moments of the kill closer... creating a frantic horrific panic, a peril perceived in the weakening and frightened quarry.

Noonday sun blazing and we still run. The gazelle was more of a challenge than we anticipated. We lost her...

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The score: Hometown Homo sapiens - 1, Mother Nature’s fleet of foot gazelle – 1.

The game proceeds, or we die.

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For an hour she eluded us until I picked up her scent... a scent of fear and blood and urine and feces about a half a mile distant. How I discerned her scent was not known to me, it just was. That is why I was captain of our team. I have a nose for sporting game, for the killing game, for the pay-off.

My son, his son and his son’s son will inherit my nose, my visual acuity and his mother’s mother, mother will always pass on these genes of success and maybe an expanded tendency for compensating neuron connections to alleviate the hungers that will always plague and frighten us... our team must win at all costs, as starvation is never an option.

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Under a spread of shade of the Gum Acacia, the defeated and mortally wounded gazelle stood in noble resignation to defeat; exhausted, sad eyed, panting last snorts ... inhalations of resounding desolate echoes of her plight and fight penetrated the vast expanse of the savannah silence. All around I sensed the eyes of my teammates looking to me to take the last shot, the kill shot.

The gazelle looked at me. I saw orange highlights on a white and tan fur tapestry, bold black stripes, like painted art depicted in caves of the future and spiraling horns that would become our tools and weapons to keep us victorious.

Her small black eyes were of misty liquid life peering into an unknown future... but she knew the score, perhaps she knew this was her final minute of a life, a life where she only existed as prey in the bigger scheme of thing. Perhaps she realized she was vanquished by one man’s prowess, his refined luck and his team’s well practiced and soon to be celebrated position at the top of the food chain.

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I took careful aim, suffered my opponent’s hand hitting my nose, but shook it off and quickly recovered from a falling sensation to see the white woven material of the net in the mid-distance. I discerned the bright caution-orange roundness of the hoop and let the basketball leave the tips of my fingers with confidence....

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Oh, I tell you, those moments when the ball is in an arch, floating up as if by magic, seemingly endowed from a distant past, from a deserved inheritance of ancestors or of a magic never to be known or understood. Oh, my brothers I knew I would make the shot. It always amazes me that I can shoot the important shots under such pressure and with such accuracy. From where did this talent really come from?

I kept my eye on the ball as my body contacted the wooden polished court floor once again. The ball was still suspended in game time air, time stretched over seconds so long, time so fleeting in the realm of luck and chance.

That spinning orb, like an ancient rock seeking its target, a kill shot viewed by all and then the anticipated swoosh through a hoop that always represented tangible realities and possibilities in my life and in the lives of my teammates. And yet at the same time it was a goal suffused in the mystical and realm of ancient magic... as all eyes marveled at its trajectory... coming closer and closer and closer... with my fellow human being witnessing and somehow emotionally involved in the physicality before the actuality, before the time of arrival, before the one moment of victory that defeats a worthy opponent.

The basketball slipped through the netting without a sound. The crowd erupted. The ending buzzer blasted. My kill shot won the game.

Oh the cheers, the jubilation and the victory!!! We won the big game. The elders, my teammates, the crowd celebrated me and a certain sparkle appeared in the cheerleaders’ eyes when I looked towards them. I was hoisted up upon the shoulders of my teammates... oh, I tell you, we were a tribe of real men in the moment of victory.

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We would all eat well tonight. Wine, women and song... for we will live to play the game again! Next season, twelve moons, 364 days to go and we’ll do it again.

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Nevertheless, tomorrow is always another day, another game, a different game, for sports, ball games are a reality so real that it seems to have been passed down to me from some unknowable and very talented ancestor, a presence of memory, of sport exists in me going back decades, eons, millenniums.... going back further than all the days I might imagine ever existed.

I often wonder what happened to me in the split second during the final game when my mind time-travelled and I saw life in a different light.

I told coach.

He only laughed and told me to pay it no mind, that I should keep my eye on the ball at all times and always do what comes natural. Aim towards the big leagues and you’ll never regret it son. It was his standard response to all imponderables in life.

Oh, but I tell you, I love these games called basketball, football and soccer and my teammates can’t be beat. It is as if my life depends on them and they depend on me to the end of time itself.

They even gave me a beautiful trophy plaque to hang on my wall with a big gold and roaring tiger emerging out of it, right above my name.