

WHERE THE LEOPARDS DREAM

By Fernando Paez

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FADE IN

EXT. PRESIDENTIAL SUMMER PALACE - NIGHT

SUPER: LAKE KIVU, ZAIRE, 1993

The sodium lights cut through the thick fog over the lake. Two heavily armed REBELS in combat fatigues squat behind a parked truck in an adjacent alley.

A GUARD on patrol walks past them. One of the rebels turns and signals and ten more REBEL SOLDIERS appear from the shadows, stealthily jogging past the perimeter. The men quickly and efficiently scramble up and over the wall.

The team spreads out, running in a semi-crouch through the wooded field and lawns, towards the white colonial mansion. They skirt the well-lighted entrance portico, where two other GUARDS are standing, talking and laughing quietly.

At a signal from their leader, the young and handsome KENSHE ENTOBI, the rebels stop and crouch down in the bushes.

Entobi's face is glistening with sweat as he stares up at the windows. He whispers to his comrade, the tall, scarred, heavily muscled Lieutenant KEESHATA.

ENTOBI

He's done his job well... so far.

KEESHATA

So it seems. He will be properly rewarded.

In one of the second floor windows, a light appears and the BUTLER looks out furtively, scanning from side to side. He goes back in and flips the lights several times.

EXT. PRESIDENTIAL SUMMER PALACE - NIGHT

A long nylon rope snakes out the open window and hits the ground below. One of the rebels secures the end of the rope around a thick drainage pipe.

ENTOBI

Let's move.

Keeshata leads his men, running across the lawn. One by one, they climb up. As the last man enters the room, the rope is brought up smoothly and the window closes.

INT. PRESIDENTIAL SUMMER PALACE - NIGHT

One of the rebels switches on his flashlight. The butler is frozen with fear, sweating and shaking.

ENTOBI

Where are the guards?

BUTLER

In the kitchen, sleeping. I made them a special snack. They will not awaken any time soon.

ENTOBI

How many?

BUTLER

Just two. Most of the guards are outside. Understand, to be attacked here, it is unthinkable.

KEESHATA

Where is she?

BUTLER

Down the hall, third door to the right. She will not be hurt?

Entobi walks up to the man and pats him on the back.

ENTOBI

You have done well.

The butler lets out a sigh of relief.

Entobi opens the door a crack and peers outside. The bright hallway is clear and he motions the men to follow him. Single file, they walk briskly down the hall, automatic rifles cradled in their arms.

The butler stays behind, watching anxiously from the doorway. Suddenly, a hand comes around from behind and gags him. His eyes bulge and his body convulses.

Gradually, the butler's face sags, the body relaxes and drops smoothly to the floor. The corpse is dragged back into the room, out of the hall light. A moment later, Keeshata emerges from the shadows, wiping his blade.

INT. KYANA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door silently opens and the men slide in. Entobi walks up to the canopy bed, his features stark in the moonlight.

He smiles as he looks down on the sleeping figure of the President's beautiful daughter, KYANA.

Suddenly, Kyana turns over and gasps, pulling the blanket up around her chin.

KYANA

Who is it?

There is a brief pause as she adjusts her vision. She lunges out of bed and smothers Entobi. He draws her to him and kisses her fiercely. She draws back and looks at his face with tears in her eyes.

KYANA (CONT'D)

Kenshe! You have come, my love.
Just as you promised.

ENTOBI

Shhhh, little one. We don't want to
wake the whole palace. Are you
ready?

Kyana reaches under the bed and grabs a duffel bag. Already dressed in her bed, she pulls on some boots. One of the men gives her a hooded camouflage jacket.

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - NIGHT

A MAID pushes a cart down the hallway and stops abruptly. She notices a stream of blood coming from under the closed door of one of the rooms. The woman pulls the door open, looks inside then SCREAMS.

INT. KYANA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the bedroom, the scream of the maid pierces the air. Kyana turns to look at Keeshata suspiciously. She sees the blood on his clothes and lets out a gasp.

KYANA

You promised no one would get hurt!

ENTOBI

Come! We have to get out of here!

Keeshata moves to the window and looks down carefully, scanning for any guards.

KEESHATA

Quickly, out the window!

One of the men lowers a rope just as the alarm sounds within the compound. Entobi, at the window with Kyana, looks back at the alarm, then reacts very quickly, rappelling down the side of the building.

EXT. PRESIDENTIAL SUMMER PALACE - NIGHT

The rebel group runs back through the compound, quickly reaching the wall they had scaled minutes earlier.

The security lights snap on and suddenly the dark, wooded fields are flooded with light. The alarm continues to wail, the dogs barking in the distance.

The men in the rebel group easily scale the outer wall in seconds. Several of the guards come running around the corner and crouch down, firing their weapons.

One of the rebels is hit in the face and falls back clutching his bleeding head. Keeshata runs straight at the guards and dispatches them quickly with several bursts from his automatic rifle.

A variety of heavily-armed, customized trucks and jeeps await at the curb, and they jump in with disciplined precision.

As they roar away, leaving an explosion of dust, the compound gates swing open and five of the drab military trucks and jeeps come bouncing out onto the pot-holed pavement.

The tires crunch, spinning through the corner onto the gravel road. The guards stand up in their vehicles and begin a barrage of heavy gunfire aimed at the fleeing rebels.

INT. REBEL TRUCK

The driver, LEMOO, remains cool behind the wheel. Recklessly, the vehicles bounce roughly at an accelerating rate of speed through the dimly-lit, narrow streets.

Keeshata sits in the passenger side with Entobi and a terrified Kyana in the back. Entobi looks back, and sees his men following closely. Behind them, the military trucks are slowly but gradually catching up.

EXT. STREETS OF LAKE KIVU - NIGHT

The lead military vehicle, a beige jeep, guns it and makes up the gap, closing dangerously. The machine-gun atop the cab comes alive, coughing up bullets, phosphorescent tracers rocketing through the dark night.

In the back seat of the truck being shot at, one of the rebels fires a small projectile from a portable launcher poised on his shoulder.

The mini-missile flies quickly, flames shooting out the back, and hits the pursuer.

With a ROAR, the military truck explodes, then flips over several times as it crashes into some parked cars. The rest of the convoy is momentarily stalled by the crash, slowly passing around the side.

INT. REBEL TRUCK - NIGHT

Entobi looks back at the damage.

ENTOBI

That should buy some time. Where are the helicopters?

KEESHATA

Just up ahead.

EXT. ABANDONED LOT - NIGHT

In the wide deserted parking lot the rebels bring their vehicles to a halt.

Entobi stands up in his seat and looks around with his binoculars. He spots the two helicopters heading down towards the landing site.

One rebel lights a flare and throws it down on the spot. The eight rebel trucks spin into the center of the lot, forming a protective half-circle.

All the men jump out as the first helicopter lands. Entobi and his group, including Kyana, board the chopper quickly.

The second helicopter is beginning to board the rest of the rebels when the pursuing soldiers arrive, crashing through the chain link fence, shooting steadily.

INT. FIRST HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Inside of the first helicopter, Kyana screams as a bullet rips into the fuselage above her head. Entobi has to yell over the rotor wash.

ENTOBI

Why are they shooting?

KEESHATA

They cannot know that she is with us! That's the only explanation!

ENTOBI

Get us out of here! Now!

EXT. ABANDONED LOT - NIGHT

A ring of soldiers on foot surround the landing site. One of them prepares a missile launcher and fires at the second helicopter as it is taking off, already twenty feet off the ground. The missile hits the tail, disintegrating it. The aircraft spins wildly in mid-air, falling at a crazy angle, spewing smoke and fire.

INT. FIRST HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Entobi sees that the wounded chopper is going to crash into theirs. He wastes no time, grabbing Kyana and jumping out.

All of the others manage to follow and they start running blindly away from the sitting chopper, blades still turning. The CHOPPER PILOT is trying desperately to free himself from his harness.

He looks up, too late, and is lit up in a flash as the crippled helicopter's blades swing through the cockpit, slicing it in half.

A piece of the rotor flies through the air and cuts one of the rebels in half right next to Entobi and Kyana.

Kyana screams.

The ruptured gas tank sends plumes of hot fuel spewing onto the asphalt as the first copter smashes into the second, sending both of them sliding rapidly over the slick, oily surface, right back in the shocked faces of the guards.

They have no time to react before the whirling, grinding, mass of metal destruction comes barreling down on top of them. With a massive, bone-jarring roar, the multi-tons of hot metal explode, leaving most of the soldiers vaporized, dismembered or running around trying to extinguish the flames on their bodies.

Entobi and his remaining men quickly scamper into their vehicles and gun the engines, firing back into the crowd of dying soldiers.

INT. REBEL TRUCK - NIGHT

KEESHATA

I know a safe house in the next township. We could issue ransom demands from there.

ENTOBI

No! We'll be killed before we get there. I believe that the President's men attacked us on purpose. Either he considers his daughter a traitor or he just doesn't care. Either way, we are dead men!

KYANA

My father would never do that. You do not know him!

ENTOBI

(ignoring her)

Where to then? If he does not care about his own daughter then we cannot hide anywhere.

KEESHATA

How far is it to the border?

ENTOBI

It is about twenty clicks northeast to Uganda. The road passes over the mountains.

KEESHATA

That is where we must go. By the time they figure out we've crossed it'll be too late. They'll have to get permission from Uganda and by that time we'll double back across the border.

CUT TO:

EXT. U.C. BERKELEY CAMPUS - DAY

Hundreds of students mill about the central square of the college, some running, late for classes. Some of the students are just hanging around, talking and laughing. Others are sitting near the fountain, studying or asleep on the grassy slopes between buildings.

TAYLOR PHILLIPS, a buttoned-up, middle-aged white man, walks through the square, carrying a leather briefcase.

INT. SCIENCES BUILDING - DAY

Taylor walks through the narrow corridors, intently studying the notes in his hand.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Taylor erases the blackboard and turns to face the class.

TAYLOR

Thanks for being so patient. I know its hard to sit through a lecture on the last day before summer vacation.

The class erupts in hoots and applause.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Yes, yes... I need a break too, believe me.

A MALE STUDENT in the third row raises his hand.

MALE STUDENT

Still going to Africa, Mr. Phillips?

TAYLOR

Affirmative. Three days from now I'll be in one of the last remaining wild animal habitats in the world. The Ruwenzori Mountains of Uganda.

A MALE STUDENT raises his hand.

MALE STUDENT

Weren't you going to do this trip a few years ago, sir?

TAYLOR

That's right. As most of you know, I've been writing a book on the history of colonial Africa for some time now. I just felt that I had to do some first hand research. I had planned to go with my wife but, yeah, well, you know.

MALE STUDENT

Sorry.

TAYLOR

Thank you. I'm taking my daughter
so that should be a lot of fun.

A FEMALE STUDENT comments.

FEMALE STUDENT

Gonna shoot some lions, sir?

Taylor takes a new camera out of his bag.

TAYLOR

With my trusty Nikon.

MALE STUDENT

And here I thought *I* was being
adventurous.

TAYLOR

Oh? And where are you headed?

MALE STUDENT

Malibu.

They all laugh and a few throw papers at the student.

TAYLOR

Okay. Calm down, guys. Calm down.
And now, if there's nothing else?
I've been waiting all day to say
this... class dismissed!

EXT. BAY BRIDGE - DAY

Taylor drives home in his 1979 Mercedes convertible.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO EMBARCADERO - DAY

He passes the Ferry building on the Embarcadero.

EXT. BROADWAY STREET SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

In the Cow Hollow neighborhood near Divisadero, the car slows
to a halt halfway up the steep grade.

The garage door swings open on the beautifully preserved
Victorian and he pulls his car into the driveway.

INT. TAYLOR HOUSE - DAY

Taylor walks in through the foyer and climbs the narrow stairs to the main living room of the four story house. His daughter, KIPLING, 14, is sitting on the hardwood floor of the living room, packing a large suitcase. Piles of clothing are everywhere, and Kipling sits in the middle, looking down.

KIPLING

Dad, we have to talk.

TAYLOR

No.

KIPLING

But you didn't even hear what I had to say!

TAYLOR

Whatever it is, the answer is still no.

KIPLING

But, dad, I can't go to Africa! You can't make me go!

TAYLOR

Kipling, I'm in too good a mood to argue with you, so I won't.

She throws a pillow at him as he sits down on the huge overstuffed sofa and puts his feet up.

KIPLING

Sometimes, dad, you just piss me off! I'm 14! I'm not a baby!

Taylor ignores her, reading the Wall Street Journal. She walks up behind him and massages his shoulders.

KIPLING (CONT'D)

What do you need me for, anyway?
I'll just get in your way.

TAYLOR

I know, I know. And I know you're not a baby. I know. But all the same, I can't leave you here. I won't get a wink of sleep worrying. And come on, Kip, think about me a little here. What would I do without my trusty sidekick?

Kipling turns away, pouting. He softens up a little.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Listen, honey, you know that this is my... our, first real time off in over three years. I haven't left the university since-

KIPLING

-since Mom.

Taylor gently turns her head so she has to look at him.

TAYLOR

I miss her every day, you know that. But honey, I got to get away for a little while. Everything here reminds me of Katherine. I just, I can't take it anymore.

KIPLING

I'm sorry, dad. It's just that, well... why Africa? Why not Hawaii? Or a Caribbean cruise?

TAYLOR

Believe me, Kipling, you're going to absolutely love it. You're not-

KIPLING

-going to want to come home. Yeah, yeah. So you keep saying.

TAYLOR

Wait right here, I have something for you.

Taylor pulls a box out of his jacket pocket and hands it to Kipling. She carefully opens it. Inside is a beautiful golden figurine in the shape of a leaping panther, two sparkling emeralds for eyes. The leopard hangs on the end of a golden chain. The letter "K" engraved on the back.

KIPLING

Oh, my God, dad, it's incredible. I've never seen anything so beautiful!

TAYLOR

It was your mother's... at least, it would have been. I had it custom made for her. I was going to give it to her right before our Africa trip... and then she got sick. You know how much she wanted to go.

(MORE)

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 More than I did, actually. I was
 never much of a traveler.

Kipling's eyes tear up and she slips it around her neck and
 looks in the mirror.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 She would have wanted you to have
 it.

She spins around and hugs him.

KIPLING
 I'm sorry, dad. I'll go with you!

TAYLOR
 Of course you will. You didn't
 really think you actually had a
 choice, did you?

KIPLING
 Ooooh! That's it!

She picks up a big pillow and slams it on his head. Taylor
 grabs her around the waist and wrestles her to the floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. A DUSTY ROAD IN UGANDA - DAY

Taylor sits with Kipling in the back seat of an open-topped
 Land Rover. They rumble across the rough road.

The DRIVER is a short black man with a friendly, smiling
 face. Taylor leans towards the front seat.

TAYLOR
 How long to Ntandi?

The driver just stares back at him, smiling.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 My map shows that Ntandi is two
 hundred twenty kilometers from the
 airstrip. So do you think, what,
 about three hours drive?

The driver shrugs and points at the distant horizon. They can
 just barely make out the peaks of what must be some very
 large mountains.

Taylor sinks back into the jostling back seat, where his
 daughter tries keep her hair from flying in her eyes.

EXT. BRITANIA LODGE - NIGHT

Taylor and Kipling get out of the truck, stretching their legs. Taylor groans in pain. Kipling admires the building.

KIPLING

Wow. This place is crazy!

As they walk towards the building, HELEN CONRAD, a tall, athletic looking white woman in her thirties approaches them from the doorway.

HELEN

Hello, we spoke on the phone. I'm Helen Conrad. You must be Professor Phillips and you must be Kipling! Let me help you with that.

TAYLOR

No need, really. I got it.

HELEN

Excellent. I'll show you to your rooms. Dinner's served at eight o'clock sharp so you'll have just enough time to freshen up. Poppa doesn't like to be kept waiting.

INT. BRITANIA LODGE - NIGHT

They walk in through the front doors and up a flight of stairs. As they walk they notice many black and white photos on the wall, all of them featuring the same man, standing near dead game animals. In others he is shaking hands with important dignitaries and celebrities.

Taylor pauses at one where the man is standing beside the hanging, upside-down corpse of a huge crocodile. After a second he continues up the stairs to the bedrooms.

INT. LODGE FOYER - NIGHT

Several people mill about, cocktails or coffee in hand. A short, middle-aged balding man, COWBOY SANCHEZ and his very tall wife, ANNA, argue under their breath.

Another couple, JAMES CARRUTHERS and his young bride, JUDE talk quietly nearby. Elderly and distinguished looking, Mr. Carruthers is impeccably dressed in black. Jude wears an expensive gown, slit up the side to reveal her long, tanned legs. She glitters with diamonds.

Sanchez sees them coming and whispers to his wife.

SANCHEZ

I bet he's loaded.

ANNA

Is he French? He sounds French.

SANCHEZ

Nah. Canadian. And would you take a gander at the trophy wife? *Brother!*

ANNA

Stare any harder and your eyeballs gonna pop outta your skull.

(to the Carruthers)

Hello again, you two. My, you do look smashing.

JUDE

Thank you. I don't think we've met.

ANNA

Pleased to meet you. I'm Anna, and this big joker is my hubby, Cowboy. That's not his real name. It's really Alfonso, but he hates it so, well, you get the picture.

JUDE

I'm Jude. Jude Carruthers. This is my husband James. So, are you two enjoying yourselves?

ANNA

Honey, I'm bored to tears. So far, the biggest animal I've seen in this joint is my husband!

Anna snorts with laughter while Jude rolls her eyes. Sanchez grabs James around the arm and hustles him off to the bar.

SANCHEZ

What say we get a drink. I'm parched. Say, do you play golf?

CARRUTHERS

Hold on there, Mr. Gomez.

SANCHEZ

That's Sanchez. But you can call me Cowboy. Everybody else does.

Carruthers looks back over his shoulder at Jude who is trapped with Anna Sanchez. Anna makes a face and grabs the back of her big thigh.

ANNA

I think I got a Charlie Horse from that awful bus. This whole cockamamie Africa thing was Cowboy's idea. If you ask me, this whole country's nothing but flies and sick people.

JUDE

Excuse me, I'll be right back

ANNA

What's the hurry? Cowboy says your hubby's rich. Course, Cowboy's no slouch in that department either. He's a dentist, you know. God, you are so lucky. I would die to have that figure! What's your secret?

JUDE

Just good genes, I guess. Excuse me.

INT. BAR AREA - NIGHT

FREDERICK RENFRO and his wife TULI, 40s, sit near the bar. He is thin and older. She is quiet and shy.

Kipling and Taylor are wandering around, looking at the pictures and awards hung on the wall. They approach the seated couple.

KIPLING

Hello.

MR. RENFRO

Good evening.

KIPLING

I'm Kip, uh... *Kipling*. Kipling Phillips. This is my dad.

Taylor shakes hands with the couple.

MR. RENFRO

Frederick Renfro. My wife Tuli.

TAYLOR

Taylor Philips. Nice to meet you.
Have you all just arrived?

MRS. RENFRO

We've been here for a few days now.
I think that you two were the last
ones. That other group came in this
morning. We haven't met them yet.

TAYLOR

Pretty nice place, right?

MRS. RENFRO

Oh, yeah, it's so big!

MR. RENFRO

It's almost a shame that we're
leaving so soon.

KIPLING

You're leaving?

MR. RENFRO

Well, yes, dear, we're all leaving.
Tomorrow morning, in fact. The
Safari, you know.

KIPLING

Oh, yeah, of course.

The BUTLER walks in to the room and ushers everyone into the
dining hall.

BUTLER

Supper will be served in two
minutes. Please be seated.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

As soon as they are all seated they begin chattering softly.
The volume builds a little as they become more familiar.

JONATHAN CONRAD, a tall, tanned, ruggedly handsome man in his
50s appears in the arched doorway. He is wearing a khaki
jacket and bush pants. The conversation stops as Conrad
surveys the group.

CONRAD

Good evening. I'm Jonathan Conrad.
Welcome to Brittania Lodge.

Everyone applauds.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

By now you all know that the Ruwenzoris have some of the most interesting and diverse environments in Africa. We'll see rain forest and scrub desert. If we're lucky we'll see one or more species of great apes. And if the Lord himself is truly smiling upon us, we may get to see one of the rarest sights in Africa... the majestic leopard. As you've probably heard, we'll be leaving tomorrow morning at six sharp.

The people seated at the table murmur.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Over the next ten days, I'm sure I'll get to know each of you personally, so I'll be merciful and keep it short. My daughter Helen and I are very pleased to have all of you here with us and I fully expect that this expedition will be for each of you, one of the most memorable experiences of your life. *Bon appetit!*

Everyone applauds and start talking at once. Conrad sits down at the head of the table next to Carruthers and Taylor. Jude leans over to Kipling and whispers.

JUDE

Quite the dashing hunter, isn't he?

Kipling looks at Helen Conrad who is seated nearby.

KIPLING

She's super pretty.

At that moment the waiter comes around with a bottle of wine and Jude pushes her glass out and smiles while he fills it.

WAITER

For the young lady?

KIPLING

What? Oh, no, thank you.

Twenty minutes later, the meal is in full swing and at the head of table, Carruthers and Conrad are deep in conversation.

CARRUTHERS

My company actually invests in several highly productive gold mines not far from here. Of course, the largest are in South Africa. We weren't able to invest there until a few years ago when that Mandela fellow caused all the ruckus.

TAYLOR

Ruckus? You believe in Apartheid?

CARRUTHERS

No, of course not. I just felt that it was, well, rather abrupt. Bad for business, you know.

TAYLOR

Well, I'm sure the Africans felt that it didn't come soon enough.

CARRUTHERS

What's your opinion, Mr. Conrad?

CONRAD

About what?

CARRUTHERS

You know, the blacks taking over South Africa. Running the show.

CONRAD

Well, it depends on which group of blacks you're talking about.

TAYLOR

Why should the few rule over the many? And, of course, the violence? You must admit its better now.

Conrad gives Taylor a long, hard glare, then smiles abruptly.

CONRAD

Whether you know it or not, there are many feuding tribes in South Africa. Long before white man and Apartheid, they were slaughtering each other rather regularly over the most trivial and petty of differences, and it hasn't stopped yet. In fact, it's gotten a lot worse. Just check the numbers.

(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

No offense, Mr. Taylor, but like most Westerners who haven't lived here, you simply don't know what you're talking about. Now, I must insist, no more politics at the dinner table! Excuse me, would you please pass the wine? Thank you, my dear. My, don't all you ladies look wonderful tonight!

EXT. THE ROAD OUTSIDE THE LODGE - DAWN

The long caravan of trucks and Land Rovers roll at a good clip through the wooded, unpaved road.

In one of the middle vehicles, Taylor and Kipling sit huddled together in the back seat, under a large coat they're using as a blanket.

TAYLOR

Thank God we brought our thermal underwear. These mornings are brutal.

KIPLING

Oh my God, Dad, I can't feel my nose!

TAYLOR

It'll get over 100 degrees during the day. Do you want to hold the hot thermos for a while? Might warm you up some.

KIPLING

How much longer 'til we get to the campsite, Dad?

TAYLOR

I think they said a few hours. We'll be there before you know it. Are you happy that you came along?

KIPLING

Like I had a choice. What did you think of Mr. Conrad? He seems kind of bossy.

TAYLOR

The Great White Hunter, Lord Of All He Surveys.

Kipling laughs and hugs him tighter.

KIPLING

What about Helen? I thought she was kind of cute.

TAYLOR

Oh, yeah? I didn't notice.

KIPLING

Uh huh.

TAYLOR

So, is Africa as horrible as you thought it would be?

KIPLING

Dad, could you just shut up and get closer before I freeze to death?

Taylor holds her tighter to him and smiles. He looks out across the great plains stretching behind him as their trucks climb over the lower foothills, heading deeper and higher into the jungle mountains.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTOBI'S TENT, REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

Kyana clings tight to Entobi under the blankets. He appears to be sleeping, but Kyana's eyes are wide open.

KYANA

Kenshe, are you asleep?

ENTOBI

Don't call me that! The men will lose respect.

KYANA

I'm sorry. I just wanted to know how much longer before we can go home. We have been out here for over two weeks now.

ENTOBI

Kyana, you must know by now. You can never go back home.

Kyana turns and looks away, fighting back tears. He sits up, awake now and wary of her mood.

KYANA

Yes, I know that. I mean back to our country... our people.

(MORE)

KYANA (CONT'D)

Kenshe... Colonel Entobi, we must return soon. You have much work to do. We have much work to do.

ENTOBI

Yes, don't worry, Kyana. We will go back soon, perhaps in as little as a week or two.

KYANA

I am afraid.

ENTOBI

Afraid? You, the princess who will soon be queen? All men will tremble at your feet!

KYANA

I am not interested in power. I have seen what it does to the heart of a man... or a woman. It turns them into something... inhuman.

ENTOBI

Only the weak of spirit can become corrupt. A true leader does not hunger after power because he already has it within himself. Only an insecure coward would step on his people, keeping their hopes pinned to the dirt while he becomes spoiled with riches.

KYANA

You mean my father.

ENTOBI

Your father is not unique. There are too many exactly like him. When one falls, another takes his place. We will change all that. The time is near. The people have taken all that they can take. The innocent mothers and children, and the brave fathers and brothers that have given their blood. So much pain. My own family, burned to death...

Entobi stops short, the bile rising in his throat. He takes a few short breaths to regain his composure.

KYANA

And what of my family? What will become of them.

ENTOBI

No more innocent life will be
thrown away. I promise you that.
But your father, and all who follow
him... when the time comes, justice
will be swift.

KYANA

And what of your men? I am afraid
of them. They seem so angry.

Entobi flips her around and kisses her neck.

ENTOBI

Shhh, little one. The only one you
must fear is me.

Entobi pulls back the blanket, then bites her playfully. She
leans back, closes her eyes and moans. They begin making love
softly and slowly. But soon their efforts become harsh and
brutal, shaking the ragged tent.

EXT. REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

Keeshata is sitting, eating a piece of dried jerky beside the
roaring campfire. He sits chewing on it, then stands up
abruptly and spits it out in disgust.

He grabs his rifle and walks over to the edge of the dark
forest, looking in. The other men stare at him, afraid.

LEMOO walks over to stand by him, listening to the jungle.

LEMOO

Permission to speak, sir.

KEESHATA

Spit it out, Lemoo.

LEMOO

When do we move out, sir?

KEESHATA

I do not know. But I am growing
tired of dried meat and boiled
water.

LEMOO

It has been difficult for all of
us. Who would have known that game
would be so hard to catch out here?

(MORE)

LEMOO (CONT'D)

There seem to be no deer or even wild pigs anywhere. We miss our beds. And our women.

Lemoo looks back at Entobi's tent.

KEESHATA

Lemoo, you are constantly whining... yet you speak the truth. What of the others?

LEMOO

They are loyal and obedient... but impatient. It is not good.

KEESHATA

They will not stand for this long. Tomorrow, I will take some of the men myself and explore the area further down by the waterfall. Perhaps, if luck is with us, we will kill some fresh meat or perhaps find a village.

Lemoo nods and walks back to the fire where he huddles with his men, telling them of Keeshata's plans.

Keeshata stares angrily out at the black forest. One of the rebels, carrying a rifle, walks past the dark perimeter behind the men at the fire, into the edge of the forest away from the other soldiers. He unzips his fly and pisses into the trees.

EXT. JUNGLE SURROUNDING REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

Within the dark foliage, a large leopard looks out at the laughing rebels around their campfire. The animal sees Keeshata staring somberly into the darkness.

The beast lets out a low, rumbling growl, backs up then walks slowly forward through the forest.

Suddenly, it begins to go faster, then very fast. As it breaks through the undergrowth, the leopard sees the urinating rebel who turns around at the last split second, a look of shock in his eyes.

The leopard jumps at him soundlessly and chomps down on his neck and just holds it there with unchallengeable strength.

The man's face is puffy and his eyes bulge, but no sound comes out of the open mouth. He tries to push the animal away futilely with his weak hands.

His body goes completely limp. The big cat drags the carcass back into the jungle.

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE PATH TO JOHN MATTE HUT - DAY

The tour group walks single file through the jungle, led by their twelve native porters and Jonathan Conrad. It is a grueling, uphill climb over boulders and through bamboo thickets.

Renfro catches up to Taylor and Kipling near the front.

RENFRO

Wicked pace, ay?

(louder, so Conrad can
hear)

I say, you'd think they'd give us a
little break!

TAYLOR

I think we're almost there. You see
the Spanish Moss around the heather
trees. That's from the heavy
condensation. That means we're
approaching a plateau. A valley...
perhaps a waterfall.

Conrad hangs back a bit and addresses the two tourists.

CONRAD

The professor's right. In fact,
here we are.

They pause at a rise and emerge from the trees onto the foot of a grassy meadow. In the middle of the lush green glade is a weather-beaten wooden lodge, about 40 foot long, with a slanting, mossy roof.

Conrad turns back and begins speaking to the Bakonjo porters in their native language, LuKonjo. While Conrad is distracted with the guides, Taylor, Renfro and Kipling eagerly begin the last walk towards the hut.

They are about five yards away from the structure when Conrad turns around and sees them.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Stop! Hold up!

Taylor, in the lead, turns around and yells back at him.

TAYLOR

I see the Poison Ivy by the door.
We'll walk around it.

Taylor turns around and takes another two steps.

Conrad takes his gun out and shoots it up in the air.

CONRAD

Freeze! Don't take another step.

Taylor, startled, ducks down instinctively. Kipling and Renfro stop in their tracks at the sound of the gun. Taylor, miffed, turns around and yells at Conrad.

TAYLOR

Hey, what the hell?

CONRAD

Be quiet, man! All of you, listen to me carefully. Don't move an inch. Stand very, very still.

Kipling feels something on her foot and looks down. She sees five or six large brown snakes slithering around on the ground under her feet.

KIPLING

Oh, my God! Dad!

Taylor looks down and realizes he himself is standing in the middle of a swarming group of snakes.

TAYLOR

Shush, Kipling. Don't move. Just don't move.

KIPLING

Dad, I'm scared. I'm scared!

One of the snakes slides back, coming close to Kipling's boot. Kipling screams but doesn't move her feet.

TAYLOR

Don't move, Kip! Keep very still.
If you don't move they won't hurt you.

Renfro looks down and sees a bunch of the serpents crawling over his boots and encircling his calf. He shouts, then turns and runs a few steps before letting out another grunt as a snake bites him.

Quickly, he tumbles down to the ground.

Kipling is shaking violently, trying not to move. Taylor, using a long stick, picks his way through the writhing ground, carefully pushing aside the hissing snakes.

As he approaches Kipling, she reaches out and grabs him, shaking violently. Taylor looks down and sees more snakes close by, but he thinks he can dodge them.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

You've got to stop moving, honey.
Just follow me carefully, slowly.

Taylor turns around and puts Kipling's hands around his waist. Slowly, he leads her back through the remaining snakes and back down to Conrad, who has his revolver out and cocked.

Kipling, still shaken, collapses into Helen Conrad's arms. Jonathan Conrad glares at Taylor, then turns around and together with three of the porters begin hacking away at the snakes with their long machetes.

Most of the snakes slink away, back towards the bush, the rest are killed by the experienced natives. They chop their way through to the place where Renfro fell. He is face-down in the grass and the porters turn his body over.

A long brown snake slides out from between Renfro's legs and one of the porters machetes it in half.

Helen Conrad immediately tears the pants leg off of Renfro, finding the bite wound. She pours some alcohol from her first aid kit over it, then one of the porters, without having to be told, kneels down besides Renfro's body and starts sucking at the wound.

Conrad kneels down over the body, then stands up.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Is he...?

Conrad stares at Taylor, transfixing him with blame.

CONRAD

I'll send two of the porters to cart him back down the mountain. The ranger station at Nyabitaba may have antivenin. If they hurry they can get him there in a few hours.

TAYLOR

But it took us two days.

Conrad turns around and barks orders at the tribesmen. They all turn around at the sound of a scream. Mrs. Renfro has finally arrived at the meadow and is standing in shock.

Helen rushes over and takes her in her arms. Kipling, still shaken, but calmer now, hugs her father.

KIPLING

That poor man. Dad, does this mean it's over? We've got to go back?

TAYLOR

That man was bitten because he didn't listen.

KIPLING

I don't care! I want to go back!

TAYLOR

We can't go back now, Kip. We've got to keep going on.

KIPLING

But what about him? Mr. Renfro? He could die, Dad!

TAYLOR

You heard Conrad, if they can get him down there in time, he'll be alright.

Conrad walks over to where father and daughter are huddled.

CONRAD

Did I say he'd be alright? I just said that he might live. Because of your arrogance, Mr. Phillips, you led your daughter and Renfro blindly into a nest of Gaboon vipers, one of the deadliest snakes in the world. Even if he survives, the pain is intense and it could take weeks, or months to recover.

Conrad glares hard at Taylor, then turns to Mrs. Renfro.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Mrs. Renfro, but you can't go back now, either. We can't spare another porter and you would just slow them down.

Conrad gets close to Mrs. Renfro and she falls in his arms. He pats her head and tries to comfort the poor woman.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Tonight, we'll stay here at John Matte Hut. Tomorrow, when the porters return, I'll have one of them take you back down to be with your husband. The rest of us must continue on with the safari. Do you understand?

Conrad turns and talks loudly and evenly at the rest of the frightened, keenly alert group.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

The rest of you, listen carefully. This is not the Discovery Channel or some Disney nature movie.

(he pauses and looks at them in turn)

This land is beautiful, but it can also be lethal. If you follow me or my guides at all times, however, I can practically guarantee a safe journey from here on out.

Conrad walks away towards the porters, who are loading Renfro onto the litter. Conrad yells at them in LuKonjo.

Taylor, hunched over and feeling angry, humiliated and guilty, stares at Conrad's back as he walks away.

At that moment, the clouds above them open up and a thick rain begins to whip down, soaking them instantly. With the rest of the porters leading and clearing the path before them, the frightened group stumbles and slips up the short incline and into John Matte Hut.

CUT TO:

EXT. REBEL CAMP - DAY

Entobi and Kyana stroll over to the perimeter where Keeshata is probing the ground with a stick.

Several of the men stand around warily. There are patches of blood, some hair, and bits of some red material sticking to the bushes.

ENTOBI

What happened here?

KEESHATA

Tuko wasn't in camp this morning. Some of the men looked around and found this. The rain washed most of it away.

KYANA

What is it?

KEESHATA

What's left of Tuko. This was his bandanna. The rest of him is out there somewhere. Probably in a tree by now.

KYANA

Who did this?

KEESHATA

Not who... a Leopard.

ENTOBI

Since when do they eat men?

KEESHATA

Since there is nothing else to eat. We've been getting reports of big cats prowling the area.

KYANA

That is strange.

KEESHATA

It is. But there is an explanation. A few days ago we ran into some local tribesmen. They said that the cats are passing through.

ENTOBI

Passing to where?

KEESHATA

There are remote areas on this mountain that the poachers haven't touched, because they are too difficult to get in and out of. He said there was wild game there.

ENTOBI

Where is this place?

KEESHATA

Past that ridge for four clicks there are two trails, one for the tourists and another that leads into a hidden gorge just below the waterfall. It looks like we accidentally got in the path of a hungry panther.

ENTOBI

What about lions?

KEESHATA

I am just telling you what the man told me. He claims that there are many leopards there now, but no lions. That's probably why the leopards are heading there. The lion is their biggest enemy, always stealing their kill.

Entobi motions for Keeshata to walk with him away from Kyana and the men, out of earshot. He speaks quietly.

ENTOBI

Keeshata, order the men to get packed. We're going back.

KEESHATA

Respectfully, Colonel, I do not think that it is time to go back yet. We are still not safe from the soldiers, and they will be guarding the border more tightly now.

ENTOBI

Perhaps, but we must risk it. We are growing weak here in the jungle with no food, no drink, and now... these attacks. It's too much.

KEESHATA

Exactly why I believe it is too soon. We are hungry and need to replenish our supplies. If we go back like this, in this condition, some may not survive.

ENTOBI

But we have tried hunting here. The men haven't caught a thing.

KEESHATA

There is an old trading post, now being used as a tourist camp, right by the junction of the two trails. It is here on my map.

Keeshata points down at his map.

ENTOBI

A tourist camp? The last thing we want is to run into anyone.

KEESHATA

Not likely. It is the beginning of the rainy season, not many tourists come up here. It may be stocked with food and fresh water. If not, we can go down into the valley and see for ourselves if there is game. Maybe we can even shoot some of these damn leopards.

ENTOBI

We are soldiers, not poachers.

Keeshata spins around in a fit of anger.

KEESHATA

We are hungry!

He stops himself. He turns around and stares at the valley and exhales, calming his rage.

Keeshata turns and fixes Entobi with a level gaze.

KEESHATA (CONT'D)

Trust me on this. Besides, the skins are very valuable. Think of all the guns they will buy.

Keeshata watches as Entobi turns and walks slowly towards the extinguished fire. He bends over and picks up a twig, stirring the ashes. In a moment the decision is made. Entobi straightens out and approaches his lieutenant.

ENTOBI

Alright. But first we will check this tourist post. If it is as well supplied as you say, then we will double back and go home. I do not want to delay out here.

Keeshata turns and gathers up his men, telling them to pack up and get ready to move out. Kyana turns around and looks at Entobi questioningly but he walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN MATTE HUT - LATE AFTERNOON

A wide sheet of rain obscures the view outside from the veranda window. The wind shakes the tops of the trees. The rain leaks through the roof in several places.

The safari group sits around the cast iron stove. Taylor pulls a blanket from his pack and puts it over Kipling, who keeps staring out, an intense look in her eyes.

TAYLOR
Are you alright?

She ignores him. He pulls her head up to look in her eyes.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Kipling?

Kipling stares up at him, then suddenly something in her eyes thaws out a little, and she smiles and nods faintly. He lets out a sigh of relief. Taylor walks away, looking back at her. Helen Conrad intercepts him.

HELEN
How is she?

TAYLOR
I think she'll be alright. It's hard to tell with kids.

HELEN
Yes, I know.

TAYLOR
You have children?

HELEN
Past tense. I did. A son. He had a cerebral hemorrhage when he was two. He was left... in the hospital... he died there.

Helen turns and grabs the railing against the wall. Taylor takes hold of her bare arm. She leans on him, steadying herself. She pulls back abruptly and shakes free.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Oh shit, how did that happen? I'm such an idiot.

TAYLOR

Listen, no. It's my fault. I didn't mean to pry.

HELEN

You didn't. I volunteered. It's just that, well, I have a hard time seeing kids in pain.

Helen walks away from Taylor and puts an arm around Kipling then quietly leads her to a stuffed chair. The others edge closer to the hot stove and the meal cooking on top.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WOODS BESIDE JOHN MATTE HUT - EARLY EVENING

The rebels sit below the ridge, looking down upon the hut. They see the smoke coming from the chimney.

The men stir restlessly. The smell of the meat within is making their mouths water. They are hungry, tired and edgy. Keeshata sends one of his men to circle the camp.

ENTOBI

What are you doing?

KEESHATA

We need to know how many there are.

ENTOBI

We are not going down there.

KEESHATA

Will you tell these starving men that they have to walk back through the jungle? After they risked their lives for you?

ENTOBI

They are fighting for the people, not for me.

Kyana moves up towards where the two men are arguing.

KYANA

What is going on here? Why have we not turned back?

KEESHATA

Are we being led by a woman now?

All the men are staring at Entobi. He turns to Kyana.

ENTOBI

Kyana, go back down the hill and wait there for me.

KYANA

But---

ENTOBI

--Go!

Kyana, hurt, turns and walks down the hill, looking back maliciously at Keeshata, who smiles at her. Entobi once again assumes control over the men. He turns and looks at them.

ENTOBI (CONT'D)

We will take the hut.

The men all nod in silence.

ENTOBI (CONT.) (CONT'D)

But not until dawn. We will wait and strike right before daybreak. They will all be sleeping then. But I want it clear that there is to be absolutely no shooting or killing. We take what we need then we go. That's it.

KEESHATA

A wise move, Colonel. A wise move.

Entobi stares back at him, knowing that he has been manipulated. Keeshata ignores the look and goes off to talk to the men.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN MATTE HUT - NIGHT

The exhausted travelers are tucked into their sleeping bags. There is the quiet shuffling of bodies and muted snoring.

Helen Conrad is sleeping curled up against Kipling. Jonathan Conrad and the porters are sleeping near the windows. Conrad has posted several sentries outside to keep watch.

Near the porters, Taylor is sleeping very soundly when suddenly a hand is clasped over his mouth. He starts awake. Jonathan Conrad signals for him to stay quiet.

Conrad slowly withdraws his hand. He motions for Taylor to follow him carefully to the window. From his pack, Conrad withdraws a night scope and hands it to Taylor.

When his vision adjusts he sees several distinct phosphorescently glowing figures crouched in the jungle around the hut. Most of them are centered in the middle, while some were circling around towards either side.

TAYLOR

It looks like there's five or six men out there. What do they want?

CONRAD

We counted nine. All heavily armed.

Conrad grabs the night scope and attaches it to one of the large automatic rifles in his bag. He thrusts it at Taylor's chest, who defensively grabs it.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

You know how to use this?

TAYLOR

Jesus Christ, this is insane!

CONRAD

Welcome to Africa, Professor.

TAYLOR

Whoa! Just wait a minute. Nobody said anything about... this.

CONRAD

I'll have to revise the brochure. Are you going to help or not?

TAYLOR

But... you mean... what, shoot this? At them?

CONRAD

Hopefully it won't come to that.

TAYLOR

Can't we just talk to them? Find out what they want?

CONRAD

I'll tell you what, I'll give you a white flag. You go out there and talk to them.

Conrad sighs.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Listen, take a deep breath and don't panic. We still have a bit of an advantage because they think they're going to ambush us.

TAYLOR

What do you want me to do?

CONRAD

We've got to get these people out of here as quick as we can. If they do attack, you and I might have to hold them off a while, give the rest of the group a head start. Helen will lead everybody out the back door. There's a little-known route back there that goes through the jungle. It's not on any of the maps. If we're lucky, they'll let us all leave and just take the hut.

TAYLOR

The hut? Why do they want the hut?

CONRAD

Christ on the cross, man! You ask a lot of stupid questions. I don't know. Supplies. Food. Listen, Taylor, you've got to get a grip and get moving or else, God help us, we're all going to find out soon enough!

As Conrad moves away towards the door, Taylor rouses himself and pulls on his boots and clothes. He glances over at Kipling, who is sound asleep in the middle of the room. Helen is busy waking up the tourists while simultaneously trying to keep them calm and quiet. She doesn't tell them about the danger, just that they have to move out quickly and quietly.

Kipling gets up nervously, knowing that something is wrong. She walks over to Taylor, who tries to hide the gun.

KIPLING

What is it, dad? What's that for?

TAYLOR

Just a precaution. Now, listen to me, you've got to be brave. I won't lie to you. We might be in some danger. There are some bad men out there in the trees and it looks like they might want to come in.

KIPLING

What? What for?

TAYLOR

I'll explain later. Right now, you've got to do what I say. OK?

Kipling nods tentatively.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

That's a good girl. Now, get your stuff together and go with Miss Conrad. She's going to take everyone outside.

KIPLING

What about you? I'm not leaving without you.

TAYLOR

Kip, you've got to trust me. Please. Now go with Helen. I'll be right behind you. I promise. Nothing's going to happen to me.

Helen comes over and gently takes Kipling's arm, leading her away with the group, who have straggled to their feet and are moving slowly.

Some of the tourists are muttering curses, complaining at having to get up so abruptly. Taylor turns and looks out the window. He notices that the sun is coming up.

Breathing heavily, he looks at the rifle leaning against the wall and grabs it reluctantly.

Suddenly, with no warning, the night erupts with gunfire and shouts from close outside. The tourists are instantly shaken, some screaming, others too stunned to react.

Conrad is helping evacuate the hut, when he sees one of the rebels cross the window ten feet away. Conrad brings the gun up and fires at the darting figure, grazing him in the arm.

The man shouts a curse and ducks away. Desperately, Helen grabs Kipling and starts running for the back.

HELEN

Hurry! Go!

With a mighty crash, the front door bursts open and three men armed with assault rifles rush in, firing as they go.

Two of the porters, scrambling for their weapons, are torn to shreds.

The rebels shoot anything that moves, mowing down porters and tourists indiscriminately.

One of the women starts running for the door and is shot in the back of the head. Pieces of her skull go flying in the air, one of them striking Jude Carruthers in the face.

She screams and her husband holds her protectively, huddling down as low as they can get. Conrad fires at the rebels and shouts at the Carruthers.

CONRAD

Run! Run for the back door! Follow
Helen! Now!

Carruthers picks up his screaming, bloody wife and hauls her to her feet. Before they take three steps, Keeshata jumps through one of the near windows and fires, dropping both of them in their tracks.

Conrad runs off towards the back door. Taylor sees Keeshata aiming at Conrad and reacts, firing a split second before Keeshata can squeeze the trigger. The wooden wall near the rebel's face explodes in a spray of tiny splinters.

Some of the flying shards hit him in the eye and he is temporarily blinded by the stinging pain. Keeshata drops his weapon and grabs his face with both hands.

Taylor levels his gun and fires off two more shots towards the incoming rebels, causing them to duck for cover. He looks around frantically.

TAYLOR

Kipling! Kipling!

Taylor runs down the hall after Conrad, but sees that the way is blocked by rebels.

Crouched down, he walks over to the open window on the kitchen side. Taylor checks to make sure he hasn't been seen, then jumps out the side window and lands in the bushes.

He straightens himself out and runs into the jungle, on the lookout for rebels and his daughter.

EXT. THE FIELD BEHIND JOHN MATTE HUT - DAWN

Helen pushes Kipling out the back door. The girl is crying hysterically, stumbling. She trips on a root and is separated from Helen, who surges ahead. Kipling, confused, wanders off to the left of the group. Suddenly, she slips in the mud and goes sprawling, hitting the ground with a thump.

Sobbing, she pulls her face up out of the mud and is eye to eye with the lifeless head of one of the porters.

She lets out a hideous, head-shaking scream. Helen turns around to look back and sees a short, armed rebel run up to the fallen Kipling and start to pick her up.

He signals to the other soldiers and they run over to see. Helen abandons her cover to help the girl. A powerful arm stops her and pulls her back hard.

CONRAD

Don't even think about it! They'll murder you. Or worse. Right now we've got no choice. We've got to get out of here!

HELEN

But we can't just let them take that poor girl!

CONRAD

We're badly outnumbered, Helen. Best thing, only thing we can do now is try and get out of here and come back for the girl. Come on!

Helen struggles then turns around and follows her father into the jungle. About twenty paces into the bush, they run into Taylor, who stops them.

TAYLOR

Where's my daughter? Where's Kipling?

CONRAD

She must have gone up ahead. We have to catch up.

TAYLOR

(looks at Helen)
Is this true? I thought she was with you? I'm going back.

Helen looks down in shame. Conrad grabs Taylor with iron hands.

CONRAD

Don't be a fool, man. They'll
slaughter you!

Suddenly, the jungle explodes as a fusillade of bullets smashes into the undergrowth beside Taylor. Two rebels, hacking away with machetes, break clear. One of them spots Taylor and raises his rifle.

Conrad is quicker, however, and shoots at the man, hitting him high in the chest. The man falls back onto his companion, twisting in pain. Helen takes Taylor's arm and pulls on him to go.

HELEN

Come on, Mr. Phillips, there's no
time! Please!

Taylor turns his head and sees some more men coming through the trees towards them, about forty feet back. A burst of gunfire goes whizzing by over his head, forcing him to duck.

He turns and runs after Helen and Conrad, the bullets flying close around him. A distant roaring fills the air, growing louder and louder.

Taylor pushes through some thick vegetation and out into a clearing. A fine spray of cool water washes over them. Taylor looks up to see a massive waterfall rising another three hundred feet above and in front of him.

They are on a grassy narrow cliff, extending out over the turbulent river beneath the falls, over a hundred feet up. Taylor stumbles over the last few feet of grass to the rocky edge of the sharp outcropping and looks down.

The channel below appears very far away and narrow. He grabs hold of Conrad, looking up to him, both their faces wet in the spray. Taylor has to shout to be heard over the noise.

TAYLOR

We've got to go back!

But at that moment, they hear more gunfire and the rebels break out through the bush and into the clearing. The mist from the falls temporarily obscures the three fleeing figures. Conrad decides quickly.

CONRAD

We've got to jump for it!

TAYLOR

What? That's crazy!

HELEN
It's our only chance!

TAYLOR
No! Not without my daughter!

CONRAD
Listen up! I lied to you back
there! I had to! I saw them take
your daughter.

Taylor, furious, grabs Conrad by the shirt.

TAYLOR
What? You lied to me? Why? You son
of a bitch! Oh my God! I have to
get her!

Taylor turns to go back. Rebel bullets are hitting the ground
around them. Conrad grabs him, pulling him down hard.

CONRAD
Think, Taylor! Think! If you're
dead then she's got zero chance,
man! Zero! There's only one way
out! You've got to do it, for her
sake!

Taylor stares incredulously at Conrad, then enraged, he grabs
him violently, pulling his face close to his, and lets loose
a primordial scream of fury.

Roughly, Taylor lets him go, looks back at the approaching
rebels, then turns and without waiting and with no warning
runs and leaps out over the cliff, screaming at the top of
his lungs. Conrad stares at Helen in disbelief.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
Sweet Mary!

HELEN
C'mon father. It's our turn.

CONRAD
I was afraid of that.

HELEN
Now, father, don't lie! You've
never been afraid of anything in
your whole life!

Without looking back, they race towards the edge of the precipice and jump out into the misty air.

CUT TO:

EXT. UNDER THE WATERFALL - DAY

Taylor struggles to swim to the surface. It is eerily silent below, the near deafening roar is now a far-off hum. He claws frantically while being dragged under. Two vertical funnels of water erupt behind him and a few seconds later he feels himself hoisted up, propelled to the surface.

Taylor breaks the surface with a gasp and looks back to see Helen holding him from behind and Conrad swimming towards them.

Conrad points to the far bank, where some fallen trees are jutting into the river. He shouts at them.

CONRAD

Do you think you can make it to those trees?

TAYLOR

No way! The current's too strong!

HELEN

We've got to or we'll end up in the rapids!

With Conrad leading the way, they swim against the current towards the downed trees. Conrad gets there first and grabs onto a long, splintered branch.

Conrad's legs go flying out with the current, and he's left hanging on to the thick branches. Helen and Taylor are suddenly swept up in the deep river current.

They are tossed hard straight into the branches. The force of their impact jars the branches loose, sending Conrad tumbling downstream feet first.

With an armful of broken twigs in her hand, Helen is separated from Taylor, who is trying frantically to right himself in the water. They both plunge into the falling current, about thirty feet behind Jonathan.

The river cascades slowly down for about a quarter mile into a steeper bend, and they are buffeted but unhurt by the smoothly worn rocks.

By the time they reach the much calmer, wider expanse of the bend, they are spent and listless, unable to do much more than float on their backs and gasp for air.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Father, are you alright?

CONRAD
I'm in one piece, sweetheart. What about the professor?

TAYLOR
I can't talk right now.

Conrad scans the river around him and sees a strange dark shape about forty feet from them, floating in the water.

CONRAD
Helen, take Taylor up to the bank on that side. Quickly.

Helen looks over her father's shoulder and recognizes the imminent danger. Taylor sees the big snout and the ridges gliding rapidly through the water towards them, about twenty feet away and closing fast.

TAYLOR
Oh my God, are those....?

HELEN
C'mon, let's get moving!

TAYLOR
But what about your father?

HELEN
Don't worry about him. He's an old hand with crocs.

TAYLOR
What? That thing will destroy him!

HELEN
Just shut up and swim, Taylor!

Taylor and Helen swim frantically to the shore and scramble up the muddy bank. Taylor climbs to his feet and looks back in wonder at Conrad who is dog-paddling in the middle of the slow river, splashing his arms, with something clenched between his teeth.

The croc turns and zeros in on the splashing noise. In just moments it converges with Conrad, who dives under at the last split second.

Instantly, there's a furious churning of white water. A huge reptilian tail comes up out of the water and slaps the surface with a splash.

TAYLOR

Jesus H. Christ! He's getting
killed out there!

With a mighty lunge, the two combatants come flying out of the water. Conrad is literally riding the huge monster's back, and slashing at it with his razor-sharp bowie knife, plunging it into the lizard's ridged neck.

Blood gushes out and sprays all over Conrad's face, turning it into a grinning crimson mask. In his final death throes, the great carnivore tries to dislodge Conrad and rolls around in the water several times violently.

Conrad holds on, and as he comes up for air a second time, he lets out a whoop of triumph, like some crazed cowboy. The croc's corpse floats just above the surface. Quickly, Conrad swims out from behind and starts dragging it to shore.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Oh, my God. Let it go, man!

Helen goes down the bank to where her father is hauling the heavy lizard up the slippery grade.

HELEN

Let me help you!

CONRAD

Helen, go back up there. I can
handle this little one myself.

HELEN

Oh my God... watch out!

She screams as another giant croc comes flying up out of the water at Conrad's feet, huge jaws agape. With a mighty chomp it clamps down on one of the dead croc's feet, and starts to twist violently in the water.

Conrad, still holding on to the first lizard's head, is pulled back into the water with the spiraling gray monster.

He releases the head and wades out and up the bank, holding his hand out for Helen, who helps him up.

Suddenly, the churning in the water changes direction and a massive ridged tail whips out, knifes through the air and hits Conrad between the shoulder blades with a loud crack.

He lets out a muffled grunt and falls face down. Helen screams but holds on. Taylor scrambles down the bank and aids her in pulling her father away from the water.

The crocodile, having torn the leg off the carcass, gulps it down then swims lazily away from the carnage to deeper water. Taylor and Helen drag Conrad up into the thick elephant grass nearby, well away from the water.

Helen searches her father for signs of life.

TAYLOR

Is he breathing?

HELEN

Father? Can you hear me?

Father? Please, father, please!

With a loud gasp, Conrad takes a deep breath, moaning in pain. He continues drawing breath for several seconds, then wearily opens his eyes.

CONRAD

Helen? Are you alright?

HELEN

Yes, father. Yes!

CONRAD

Where's my croc, damn it?

Conrad can only manage to move his head and arms. His attempt brings another spasm of pain, and he wrenches his head to the side, clenching his teeth in agony.

HELEN

Shhhh. Lay still, you're hurt.

CONRAD

I think... it feels like my back's broken. God damn it!

TAYLOR

Can you move your legs?

CONRAD

I can... yes, I can feel them.
But, Jesus, it hurts like a mother.
Something's loose in there.

HELEN

Please, father, lay still. We'll
have to get some help, then get you
out of here.

CONRAD

No good. No good. We're too far off the map. That would take days, if you could find your way at all.

TAYLOR

Exactly where are we?

CONRAD

Some sort of valley. Rock cliffs on three sides, the falls on the other. Damn near impossible to get in and out of.

Conrad moans and collapses, out cold. Helen gathers some dry leaves and rolls them up into a pillow for his head.

HELEN

Taylor! Look around for some dry wood. We've got to make a fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN MATTE HUT - DAY

The rebels stand on the hillside, looking down at the still smoldering hut.

Kipling lies curled up in the mud under Kyana's arm, her blouse torn and bloody. The two sit at a safe distance from the rebels.

Entobi leaves the men and shambles over to where Kyana is guarding Kipling. The white girl shrinks back defensively as he approaches.

KYANA

Stay back. You will frighten her.

ENTOBI

Kyana, I must speak to you. Alone.

KYANA

I have nothing to say to you. And I won't leave her here with these... these murderers!

ENTOBI

It was not my fault, you must believe me. I never meant for anyone to be hurt.

KYANA

How many innocent people did your so-called Freedom Fighters kill today? Ten? Twenty? Or does it not matter because they are white?

ENTOBI

We only wanted supplies.

KYANA

Oh, and tell me, how much food were you able to find? How many guns? Nothing, that's what! It's all burned now and all those people are dead! If it weren't for me, these bloodthirsty criminals you command would have raped and killed this child as well! We have to get her out of her quickly!

ENTOBI

We will leave as soon as we can.

KYANA

We must leave now! This very instant! Don't you see we have no business here?

Keeshata, nearby and overhearing, steps between them.

KEESHATA

We're not going back.

ENTOBI

Keeshata!

KEESHATA

I am truly sorry, Colonel, but we cannot go back. As you can see, now we have no food. We have no choice but to go down by the river. There might be some animals down there or perhaps a village.

KYANA

What? So you can kill more innocent people?

KEESHATA

Quiet, woman!

Entobi turns to argue, then becomes aware of all the others staring at him.

ENTOBI

Alright. Alright. We will go down to the river.

(loudly, to the men)

But if any one of you so much as looks at this girl, he will answer to me. Is that understood?

KEESHATA

A wise decision.

KYANA

You, you cannot do this! This girl is terrified!

ENTOBI

Kyana! Do not disobey me. I order you to get up!

KYANA

No! I have watched enough of this barbarity. If you do not listen, I will take her myself.

Entobi walks up and slaps her in the face. She looks up at him with tears in her eyes, but he looks away, ashamed.

ENTOBI

Let's clear out. Now!

Keeshata walks by the kneeling woman and looks down at her, a wicked half smile curling his lips. Kyana returns the gaze with hatred, and spits at his feet.

She grabs her things and gently takes Kipling by the arm, walking away.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN MATTE HUT - DAY

One of the rebels, RENY, sifts through the burned rubble of the building. Suddenly, he pauses and pokes around. Interested by something in the soot, he takes his machete and starts hacking at it. After a few seconds he quickly jumps up on his feet, yelling.

RENY

Look what I've found! Look what I've found!

The men all turn to look at him. Reny is standing there with a stupid gap-toothed grin, holding up a severed arm with a shiny watch on the wrist.

RENY (CONT'D)

Look! It's a watch! A gold watch!

At this Keeshata and the others start laughing.

RENY (CONT'D)

What? What?

This causes the men to laugh even harder.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEAR THE RIVER - DAY

The fire crackles and pops in the late afternoon. Conrad is still asleep, delirious and feverish, mumbling incoherently.

Taylor sits with his back against the flames, drying off. Helen stands up and sits next to Taylor.

HELEN

He needs to be in a hospital.

TAYLOR

I know. But how? We're stuck here, wherever this is. I feel so useless.

HELEN

Well, you'd better snap out of it, and quickly. There's no time for self-pity. Not here. Not now.

TAYLOR

What do you suggest we do? We're down here and my little girl is God knows where with those killers. I never should have left her.

HELEN

Think about it! How the hell are you going to help her if you're dead? No, Taylor, you did the only thing you could do. Live to fight another day.

TAYLOR

You're right, I've got to do something... but what?

(MORE)

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

We have no weapons, no guns... nothing. And you saw those guys, they're trained killers. Even if we could somehow manage to find them, how the hell are we going to save her?

HELEN

Don't give up, Taylor! Never give up! I think I know a way up the mountain. Back up to the hut. It'll take you a little while longer but it's safer than the rocks near the falls. Maybe those men are still there. If so, then you can walk down to the Ranger station and get some help. They're probably just some crazy poachers.

Suddenly, a voice booms out from behind them.

CONRAD

No poachers. Frelimos.

HELEN

Father!

Helen and Taylor rush over to Conrad's side. She grabs the his hand and holds it tight, kissing him and crying.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Oh my God, I was so worried!

CONRAD

Come on, Helen. I'm tough as they come and I still got my trusty bush knife. But you... you've got to get back up there and see about the Professor's little girl.

TAYLOR

Just show me the way.

CONRAD

That's no good, Professor.

TAYLOR

What's the matter? Don't think I can make it?

Conrad shakes his head.

CONRAD

I saw the way you handled yourself up there. I confess, I didn't think you had it in you. And then jumping over the cliff like that, well you've got a set of balls on you, I'll say that much. But you'll be lost in ten minutes alone in the jungle. No, Helen has to go with you.

HELEN

I can't just leave you alone!

CONRAD

You have to go, sweetheart. I'll be fine. Just prop me up against a rock and build the fire round me.

HELEN

No!

CONRAD

Don't argue. He'll never make it without you and then we'll both be stuck down here. Now, please look in my pack. I stuffed some jerky in there. And maybe Taylor here can catch us some fish. You do know how to fish, don't you, professor?

TAYLOR

Of course I do, but what will I use?

CONRAD

St. Joseph on a donkey! Why don't you just order a fishing kit from the catalog? Better yet, why not just phone in for a pizza?

HELEN

Glad to see you're back to your normal cheerful self. C'mon, Taylor, I'll give you a crash course on wilderness survival.

EXT. HIDDEN VALLEY, NEAR THE RIVER - NIGHT

Around the fire, the survivors dig in to their food.

TAYLOR

I didn't know anything could taste this good.

CONRAD

That's because you caught it yourself. Always tastes better.

HELEN

Father, earlier you mentioned something about Frelimos?

TAYLOR

Frelimo rebels? From Zaire? But what would they be doing way out here?

CONRAD

Do you know where Lake Kivu is?

TAYLOR

Let's see, isn't it on the border of Zaire and Uganda? About fifty miles Southwest of here?

CONRAD

President Mobutu's summer palace is there. About two weeks ago, a group of rebels stormed the place and kidnapped one of his daughters, Kyana, I believe. Somehow, they crossed the border.

TAYLOR

I didn't see anything in the newspapers or TV?

CONRAD

For some reason the government covered up the whole story. I think they were just embarrassed as hell.

HELEN

So how do you know so much?

CONRAD

My houseman, Samuel, he's from the Lake region. He told me about it.

TAYLOR

And Mobutu just, what, let them go?

CONRAD

Mobutu's too busy with his own country's civil war to be distracted by this. For now, anyway. I'm sure he'll deal with them in his own, uniquely brutal way sometime down the line. Besides, he's got twenty or thirty kids, you know.

TAYLOR

What?

CONRAD

That's what happens when you have eight wives. He's a busy man.

TAYLOR

I'll say. So they got away, and, what... they're hiding out in the forest? It still doesn't explain their actions. Why would they massacre civilians? It makes no sense.

CONRAD

Killing is nothing new to them. I'm sure you've seen the news. You know there's a brutal civil war. Thousands dead.

HELEN

If his daughter is with them, then maybe that's good news for Kipling.

TAYLOR

How so?

CONRAD

Helen may be right. Have you ever heard of Colonel Entobi? He's the current head of the Frelimos. From what I recall, he was educated in Oxford as an exchange student. Entobi returned to Zaire only to find his family slaughtered and his entire village burned down.

TAYLOR

But I still don't see...

CONRAD

It just so happens that Kyana is also an Oxford grad.

(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

And she happened to be there at the same time as Entobi.

TAYLOR

I don't get it.

CONRAD

Think about it. The President's heavily guarded summer home, invaded successfully by a bunch of rebels? Not likely. No, they had to have had help from the inside.

HELEN

So Kyana meets Entobi at Oxford...

CONRAD

--and nature took its course.

HELEN

Of course! But again, why the massacre? If he's so civilized. It just doesn't fit.

CONRAD

There's someone else. I saw him inside the hut. He killed the Carruthers in cold blood.

TAYLOR

The man I shot at.

CONRAD

I was meaning to thank you.

TAYLOR

Don't mention it.

CONRAD

I won't. I've seen his kind before. This man is dangerous, extremely so. The rest are just followers. But not this one, this one is a cold-blooded murderer.

Conrad has a sudden spasm of pain. His face wrenches uncontrollably, gasping for air. Helen rushes over and dabs at his face with a wet rag until he falls asleep again.

Helen sobs miserably, head down near her father. Taylor gets up and, respecting her grief, walks around the perimeter of the firelight, staring out at the black jungle.

EXT. JUNGLE AROUND THE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The leopard wanders around the edge of the camp, watching and waiting. From the eyes of the leopard, the group of humans around the fire appears agitated.

He watches as one of the figures cries out in agony.

The leopard silently glides through the leaf-carpeted floor of the forest, always keeping an eye towards the humans. He sees one of them get up and walk towards the trees. Instinctively, the big cat follows.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Taylor looks out at the forest, exhausted.

EXT. JUNGLE AROUND THE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The leopard crouches in the grass not more than ten feet away from the unsuspecting man. He crouches lower and shuffles forward carefully, silently. Closer. Closer.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Taylor suddenly looks up, then spins around. Helen's hand is on his shoulder. She hugs him hard against her, then leads him back to the fire without a word.

EXT. JUNGLE AROUND THE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The leopard is aware of the figure moving back towards the roaring campfire. The wild animal stops and waits to see if he will emerge again.

After a few moments he turns and trots back into the jungle and quickly scampers up a tree. As he stands on the branch, silhouetted by the moonlight and the stars, he lets out a mighty, braying roar.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Taylor and Helen, near the fire, turn and stare at the dark jungle, frightened by the tremendously loud roaring coming from somewhere very close by.

TAYLOR
Holy shit.

HELEN
That sounded close.

TAYLOR
Way too close. Was that a lion?

Conrad, who has been eavesdropping, decides to join in.

CONRAD
No lions down here. That was a leopard.

HELEN
Father. Thank God, you had me worried there.

CONRAD
Takes more than a bunch of stinking Frelimos and some mangy crocodiles to kill me off.

TAYLOR
I thought all the leopards were poached out.

CONRAD
This is a special place, Professor. Only the leopards can make it down here, by climbing onto the high branches, tree to tree. According to tribal folklore, once every few years, the leopards come here by the hundreds to sleep in the trees. What a sight that would be!

TAYLOR
You sound skeptical.

CONRAD
The locals believe the leopards are really the ancestors of great warriors, and that their purpose is to protect the righteous. It's a bunch of superstitious rubbish, of course. Leopards are solitary creatures. They never group like that. Even when they're mating, it's just the core family unit: Mother, father, and cubs.

TAYLOR
The nuclear leopard family?

HELEN

No, that would be 2.3 cubs!

They all laugh and soon after fall asleep, huddled together for warmth in the cold African night.

EXT. JUNGLE TRAIL - DAY

Helen and Taylor struggle up through the barely visible path, their feet jolted by shafts of pain. Thorns and sharp branches tear at their exposed skin and clothing. Taylor stumbles and falls then picks himself up, breathing heavily.

After hours of this torture, Taylor just plops down on his back in the middle of the path, sitting on a fallen branch.

HELEN

What do you think you're doing?

TAYLOR

I just need a little pitstop. Just a few minutes, please.

HELEN

Don't tell me you're tired already? We're not even halfway up yet.

TAYLOR

Please don't say that.

HELEN

Alright, we'll take a short break here. But only a short one. If you stay down too long, your muscles will stiffen up and you'll never get them going again.

TAYLOR

The pain is pretty bad. Could you just amputate my leg and carry me the rest of the way?

HELEN

Seriously, Taylor, we have to hurry! I don't want to leave my father down there much longer. He's badly hurt. And I keep thinking about those leopards down there and God knows what else. We've got to keep going.

With a groan, Taylor struggles back on to his feet and they continue climbing through the thick vegetation.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCK CLIFF NEAR WATERFALL - DAY

The column of rebels and their captive climb down the slippery rock cliff near the waterfall. In the middle of the column, Entobi helps Kyana who must allow Keeshata to half-carry the white girl with one strong arm. He is very careful with her, and does not let any of the other men near.

Suddenly, some loose rocks near the front of the column break loose, and three of the men lose their footing, falling on their rear ends. One of them goes sliding down the steep hill over the smooth rolling pebbles.

He catches the edge at the last minute and screams, dangling over the precipice, the rushing water far below him. The two other rebels freeze, too scared to move.

Slowly, the two scramble up, back onto the path and relative safety. Keeshata looks over the edge and sees the dangling man. The man screams and begs for help.

A shadow passes over Keeshata's face and he signals for the men to continue on. Reluctantly, the men start moving, looking back over their shoulders. The doomed man's pleas for help grow louder and more frantic, his hands bleeding and raw on the edge of the boulder.

Keeshata takes up his rifle and methodically shoots the man off the cliff. The man's body jerks once and flies off the rock, striking the jagged wall many times on the way down.

Keeshata puts the rifle away and looks down at Kipling. She is staring at him, sobbing, hatred in her eyes. He sees this and is momentarily taken aback by it, then he begins to laugh.

KEESHATA

So you think I am a bad man?

KIPLING

You're a monster!

KEESHATA

Hmmm. You may be right, little one.
But for now, this big, black
monster is all that you have.

KIPLING

My father is coming for me. He'll bring soldiers. They'll kill all of you!

KEESHATA

There are no soldiers out here in the jungle, besides, your father is dead. No one can help you now. Except me. Think of me... as your new father.

KIPLING

Dead? I, I don't believe you. I saw him get away!

KEESHATA

They are all dead. My men caught up with them by the falls. They jumped out over the cliff into the river below. It is a terrible fall, no one could survive.

KIPLING

I hate you! Why don't you just let me go? Please, I can't take this anymore!

KEESHATA

(laughing)

Let you go? Here? No, my beautiful little dove. I have other plans for you. Come now, we need to be down in the valley before the sun drops.

Kipling kicks out at Keeshata and catches him on the shin, causing him to wince in pain, momentarily distracted.

Quickly, she starts scrambling back up the cliff face. Keeshata, annoyed, lunges for her leg, grabs it and pulls her down, close to him. She screams and tries to scratch his face. He pins her arms down while she struggles in vain.

Then, tiring of it all, he casually backhands her and knocks her out, then swings her limp body onto his shoulder and carries her easily down the gorge.

Keeshata soon catches up to the struggling group. Kyana looks back and sees that Kipling is hurt. She turns to help, but Entobi grabs her arm.

ENTOBI

No!

KYANA

But she's hurt! I have to help her!

ENTOBI

He won't harm her. I know how he thinks. She is still of value to him and that is all that matters. Have patience, we have many things yet to settle and we will need all our strength.

Kyana starts to protest, but shuts up at the last second, looking back over her shoulder only once before continuing the descent.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN MATTE HUT - DAY

Taylor and Helen reach the charred remains of the hut in the late afternoon. They are bone-weary from the climb and the sight of the ruins brings Taylor down to his knees.

Helen searches through the rubble. Suddenly she jumps up and yells at Taylor.

HELEN

Taylor, come here. I found something!

Taylor gets up unsteadily and staggers over to where Helen is sifting through the ashes. She is holding something in the palm of her hand, looking at it carefully.

TAYLOR

Oh, my God.

Helen is holding Kipling's gold chain with a leopard figurine on the end.

HELEN

This belongs to your daughter. I saw her wearing it at the lodge.

TAYLOR

I gave it to her the night before we left.

HELEN

I'm sorry.

TAYLOR

No, this is good. It means she's still alive. Don't you see, she left it for me! Helen, please, don't bullshit me, how good are your tracking skills?

HELEN

I... I don't know. I've never tracked people before, just game animals. But wait... you mean, me... and you, what... follow that bunch into the jungle? They could be anywhere! And even if we find them, what then? We don't even have a gun, they'll murder us. No, we have to go down and get help.

TAYLOR

Let's look around, maybe we can find something they may have missed. It doesn't look like they stayed behind to clean up.

They start searching through the rubble, but most of it is just a mess, impossible to go through.

Taylor stands up and wipes the sweat out of his eyes and looks up. At the fringe of the jungle, five BaKonjo tribesmen stand motionless. Taylor signals to Helen.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Aren't those the same guys we saw down by Brittania Lodge before we got started?

HELEN

You know, you're right. That's Nkabi's cousin, Benji.

Helen calls out.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Benji!

BENJI walks over and Helen talks to him, gesturing with her hands for effect. Benji drops his head down and turns to his fellow tribesmen, saying some incomprehensible words.

TAYLOR

What is it?

HELEN

I told him about Nkabi. And the others. They're all from the same tribe.

Benji turns around again to face Helen and Taylor. There is a sadness in his eyes. He talks to Helen once again, signaling for the others to join him. The rest of the tribesmen move closer.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I told him that you're going after the men who did this.

TAYLOR

Do you know where we can get some guns?

Benji responds in broken English.

BENJI

There are those who sell guns in my village.

TAYLOR

Here, give them this. I need as many guns and men as you can buy.

He hands Benji the golden leopard chain.

HELEN

But, that's too much, Taylor! It's far too valuable.

TAYLOR

All the gold in the world won't do me any good if I can't save my daughter.

HELEN

I still think our best shot is to get the Rangers involved.

TAYLOR

No. Kipling could be dead by then. Go ahead, Benji. Please take this and get as much help as you can. And hurry.

Benji nods and goes into the jungle with his tribesmen.

EXT. HUT RUINS - LATER THAT DAY

Taylor sits on a log, tending a small fire.

HELEN

They won't be long now.

TAYLOR

I hope so. If they don't return soon, I'll have to go on my own.

At that moment, Benji steps through the jungle, followed by seven tribesmen. They are carrying rifles and boxes of ammo. Benji hands one of the rifles to Taylor.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

This is the same rifle your dad gave me in the hut.

BENJI

One of the boys found it on the path near the waterfall.

HELEN

Well, the odds just got a lot better but its still a huge risk. Are you sure you want to do this?

TAYLOR

I have to get my daughter back! Whatever it takes. Come on, Benji, let's search the area again.

Helen stares at him as he stalks away, leading the others. After a few seconds, she runs to catch up.

In the jungle path leading to the waterfall, the bushmen comb the jungle, and after a few minutes they find Conrad's gun. It still has the night scope on it. Nearby they find a bandolier of shells, and a huge bush knife.

HELEN

Thank God for father.

TAYLOR

Wait!

HELEN

What is it?

Taylor points to some snakes that are slithering around at the base of a fallen tree, six feet from them.

TAYLOR

I just had an idea. Benji, what's your cousin's name?

BENJI

His name is Rafi.

TAYLOR

Tell Rafi to empty one of those bags he's carrying and see if he can't bag a few of those snakes.

HELEN

Clever. Dangerous, but very clever.

TAYLOR

I saw it in a Bruce Lee movie once.

Rafi and his friends laugh when they are asked and in a few moments they easily capture three of the poisonous snakes.

They drop them into a canvas drawstring sack. Rafi ties it to his waistband and stands, a big grin on his face. Without a word, Benji and his men lead the way, tracking skillfully through the dense trees.

EXT. VILLAGE

Taylor and Helen follow the makeshift native troops through a rain-soaked village. The homes are made of corrugated aluminum and cardboard. Some of the huts are made of brick and mud. Barefoot mothers watch over their listless children, playing naked in the puddles with sticks.

TAYLOR

This is sad.

HELEN

I've been in Africa a long time, but you never get used to the poverty.

They walk through the tired village, beyond the tree line into the forest.

WATERFALL ROCK PATH - SUNSET

They reach the top of the stone cliff just as the sun is going down. Taylor looks down at the formidable path and is filled with dread. Benji approaches.

BENJI

The Frelimo, they were here.

Benji shows Taylor an abandoned fire pit.

The men start to set up camp as the sun is setting. Helen looks at him then stares out over the precipice, into the darkening valley below.

CUT TO:

EXT. REBEL CAMPSITE IN VALLEY - NIGHT

The rebels trek for several hours through the valley before finding a big clearing near a freshwater stream. Wearily, the hungry men dump their packs and begin setting up camp.

Two of the younger soldiers, SOTI and BRAMEY, go scouting in the jungle around the camp. Bramey hacks his way through the undergrowth and gets separated from Soti for a moment.

Soti looks up and is almost run over by Bramey running wildly back straight at him, screaming. Soti follows Bramey as he scrambles up a tree. They look down and see a wild boar circling the tree, snorting.

Soti laughs, takes his rifle and riddles the beast with automatic fire. Triumphantly, they carry their trophy back to camp, to the cheers of their starved comrades. The men roast the pig and devour it, washing it down with creek water. Afterwards, most of the men doze off around the fire.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Kipling is tied to a stake inside one of the tents, near Entobi and Kyana's tent.

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

They stand at the entrance to the white girl's tent and look in. She is sleeping on her side.

KYANA

We must get her out of here. Not even Keeshata can hold back these men for long. They will want to have her, and she is just a child.

ENTOBI

We cannot risk everything for some white girl we don't even know.

(MORE)

ENTOBI (CONT'D)

We have to stay here for a few days, then head back to Zaire. Do not worry, I have ordered the men to leave her alone.

KYANA

How much longer are you going to keep pretending that you're in charge?

ENTOBI

Do not talk to me that way. I am their leader. This is my destiny. Don't you see? It is up to me to free my people.

KYANA

Keeshata will never let you.

ENTOBI

Keeshata is difficult. But he would not betray me. He is loyal.

KYANA

To no one but himself! He has already usurped your position and you're too stubborn to see it.

ENTOBI

You must never talk to me like that again. Never!

KYANA

Kenshe, please listen to me. I love you. I believe that you are destined someday to be a great man. But if you do not resist Keeshata then not only will that innocent girl die but so will you and I! So will you and I!

Entobi turns away and looks off, feeling the burning of her words on his heart. Kyana, desperate, puts her head down and sobs. After a few moments Entobi walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOTTOM OF STONE CLIFF - DAY

Helen and Taylor, along with their five guides, descend the final grade of the stone cliff. Below them the hidden, fog-shrouded valley is spread out, a river running through the center of it, the sides carved out of sheer black granite.

Within the dense bowl of the canyon, the only things visible are the tops of the trees. The jungle here is denser, greener and more vibrant. As they draw closer, the sound of the waterfall fades away and is replaced with the urgent callings of tropical birds and monkeys.

The six weary travelers stop at the base of the ravine and pause to assess the situation.

HELEN

It's so incredibly beautiful here.

TAYLOR

Yet so deadly.

HELEN

Are you frightened?

TAYLOR

I've never been this scared in my life. But I'm also pissed off! These people, whoever they are, they have no right! No right!

HELEN

You'll need to channel that anger if and when we find them.

TAYLOR

Helen, we've got to split up here. You take one of the men and go find your father. Stay with him until we get back. Or try and send the guide for help.

HELEN

Taylor, no, I don't want to leave you alone. Those men. I'm, I'm scared.

TAYLOR

Helen, I know this is going to sound weird. I know that it's just me and a few bushmen, some snakes in a bag and a few guns, but, they're the ones that should be afraid. Do you understand?

HELEN

I think so. Taylor, you've changed. In just a few days you've grown... harder somehow.

TAYLOR

I'm going to bring Kip back. It's a simple as that.

HELEN

And... what if she's--

TAYLOR

--Dead? I've thought of that and I don't know how, but I really feel that she's still out there somewhere, alive, calling to me. Do you know what I mean? Ah, shit, I know it sounds crazy, but I can hear her voice in my head. I know my little girl and I know that she's waiting for me. God help those sons-of-bitches if they've touched her! Now go. I know your father's the toughest man in Africa, but right now he needs all the help he can get.

Helen turns to go, then comes running back and hugs Taylor, kissing him fervently on the mouth, surprising him.

HELEN

You take care of yourself, Taylor.

TAYLOR

I'll be back. I promise you.

They stand there looking at each other for a few moments, then they separate. Helen turns and walks off into the forest. Taylor turns and follows the BaKonjo.

EXT. JUNGLE PATH

A few hours later, Taylor is tramping through the dense forest, when Rafi calls him over. He kneels down and points to some barely noticeable burns on some leaves and some tiny bits of white ash.

A few yards away they find the cigarette butt. Taylor is excited and instantly they pick up their pace, following the sloppy trail that the rebels left behind.

Benji approaches Taylor.

BENJI

Soldiers are near. Over the next big ridge. One click. Maybe two.

TAYLOR

Tell your men to be very quiet and to alert me as soon as we get to the edge of their camp.

Benji turns and passes on the instructions.

CUT TO:

EXT. REBEL CAMP - DUSK

Entobi watches from the distance as Keeshata laughs with the men around the campfire. They are playing a knife-throwing game against a tree trunk and Keeshata is beating them all and taking their meager provisions as bets.

Entobi, enraged and also angry at himself for being so weak, walks up to the men. He stands there watching them gamble.

Some of the men look up when he comes, and stop laughing. Keeshata continues to place his wager however and pretends not to notice the sudden shift in tension.

Smiling, Keeshata throws the knife even harder, hitting the center of target squarely. He looks up at Entobi and smiles wickedly.

KEESHATA

What's the matter? Did you get tired of your woman so soon? If you are done with her, perhaps you would let us have a turn.

At this the men all howl with laughter. But Entobi is furious and stands there glaring.

ENTOBI

You forget your place, Keeshata. Perhaps I should remind you!

The men all quiet down at this and stare at Keeshata, who tenses, then springs to his feet, a huge bowie knife in his hand. But Entobi is too quick for him, and has anticipated the big man by pulling out his pistol first. He freezes Keeshata in mid-lunge.

Keeshata just stares at him in blind fury, then slowly his anger dissolves and he begins to chuckle, then laugh.

Entobi looks around to see every rifle pointed at him. Lemoo walks over and snatches the gun out of Entobi's hand.

ENTOBI (CONT'D)

So, this is how you repay me? With betrayal. You are all traitors!

KEESHATA

Don't be so dramatic, Colonel. It appears you aren't so charismatic after all.

ENTOBI

You will hang for this, Lieutenant!

Suddenly, the knife flashes in Keeshata's hand and he swipes smoothly at Entobi's face. Entobi holds his hand up to his cheek, the blood streaming from an open gash. In shock, he falls to his knees, bleeding profusely on the dirt.

KEESHATA

Tie him up. And bring me his bitch!

INT. TENT

Kyana, watching unseen from a distance, quickly sneaks around to the tent where Kipling is tied up. Working rapidly, she cuts the girl loose.

KYANA

Hurry! Get as far away as you can!
Take this knife.

KIPLING

What will happen to you?

Kyana looks down for a moment, shaking her head, trying to stop the tears. Then she looks back at the little girl and her resolve hardens.

KYANA

That is not your concern. Now, run!
Get away! Go!

Kipling starts to run off, then stops abruptly, turns around, rushes back and hugs Kyana hard before running off alone into the pitch black jungle.

Kyana, holding her head up, smiles through her tears. She knows what she must do. She turns and walks proudly, majestically, back through the camp.

The men instinctively part as the princess approaches. She heads straight towards Keeshata but suddenly pulls up as she sees that Entobi is wounded.

KYANA (CONT'D)

Kenshe!

She drops down to one knee and rips her shirt to form a bandage. Kyana presses the torn shirt to Entobi's face.

KEESHATA

Look! She cannot wait to take her clothes off for us!

The men chuckle with nervous, suppressed laughter. Kyana, enraged, turns her attention on Keeshata.

KYANA

Traitor! Coward! You will never get away with this! Do you think the people will stand for this?

KEESHATA

And who will tell them? You? You and your lover boy will be forgotten quickly. But do not worry, we Frelimos will remember you. You will both be heroes, martyrs to the cause. And who better to continue Entobi's legacy than his faithful partner Keeshata and his loyal men, of course?

All the men erupt in applause, some of them shooting their guns up into the night sky. Keeshata, smiling, looks down upon Kyana.

She jumps up and spits at him. He slaps her to the ground. Standing over her, he grabs her and lifts her easily.

Keeshata holds her up in both arms like a baby, as if he were offering her to some sky god. Slowly, he brings her down until their faces are almost touching.

Her eyes open wide in fear and she turns her face to the side and shuts them, repulsed. Keeshata, very close to her face, whispers in a ragged, husky voice.

KEESHATA (CONT'D)

I will need a queen. You... will be her... you...

Kyana, turns her head back to him, looks him straight in the eyes, and starts laughing.

KYANA

That is just about the stupidest thing I have ever heard in my life!

(MORE)

KYANA (CONT'D)

You really haven't thought this through, Keeshata. What makes you think that the people will accept some half-wit like you to be anything other than hired muscle? You are really deluding yourself.

KEESHATA

Look around you, I am their leader now! Soon, I will lead all the people. You will have the honor of being at my side, to serve me.

KYANA

Ah, but there is a small problem. You see, I require a real man to be my king.

At first he is shocked, then when she continues laughing, some of the men begin chuckling also. Keeshata, humiliated and furious, looks at them with mayhem in his eyes and they are instantly quiet, all except for Kyana who continues to mock him.

Savagely, he throws her down to the bare dirt. She continues laughing at him, though, and this really sets him off and he begins kicking her in the side repeatedly.

Entobi lunges at him, but the men hold him tight. Suddenly, one of the men breaks through the group and goes running up to Keeshata, out of breath.

SENTRY ONE

The white girl is gone! She ran off into the jungle. We found her ropes. Somebody cut them clean through!

Keeshata stops kicking the unconscious girl, and turns to run back to the camp, the men at his side. Lemoo orders one of them to stay back and guard Kyana and Entobi. The rest of the men begin fanning out through the foliage, shining their flashlights and walking warily.

EXT. JUNGLE PATH - NIGHT

Kipling runs as fast as she can through the forest, bumping into trees and branches. She knows her life is on the line and hurries, eyes narrowed, her will bent on survival.

She hears distant shouts and nearer, the cracking of undergrowth.

Kipling is running and breathing hard and as she looks to her left she sees a blurry animal running through the jungle. It is too far to her left but it startles Kipling.

Kip, struggling for breath, turns her head and looks again and it is closer still. This time she sees it is a female leopard, fast and sleek, gliding through the jungle, parallel to the girl. The panther coughs a dull, muted roar and runs off slightly to the left, away from Kipling. She runs towards it, believing her good luck charm is trying to save her.

She reaches for her necklace in mid stride and gropes blindly at her neck. She realizes her talisman is gone. She closes her eyes, crying. Suddenly, a thick tree branch catches Kipling in the midsection. With a groan, she loses her breath and collapses.

Kipling, bends over and struggles to recover, coughing and gasping for air. Her head is bent down and she sobs.

KIPLING

Mommy! Mommy! Please! Please help!

She cries hard, head bowed, until she hears movement to her left and ahead. Startled, Kipling looks up.

On the branch of a tree around ten yards ahead of her stands the mother leopard, looking straight at Kipling. For a few moments they lock eyes. Suddenly, the panther makes a huffing noise, then darts to the left and ahead.

Somehow, Kipling realizes she must follow and stands up in pain, stumbling and jogging behind the cat.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST

Taylor and his men walk through the raining fields and jungles. Villagers step aside and stop working, watching them go through.

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Kipling struggles through the jungle, too scared to stop moving, tired and frustrated from stumbling over thick roots and hitting dense walls of damp vegetation. She has not seen the leopard in a while and she runs recklessly, blindly.

Not daring to slow down, the girl throws herself through the trees, the branches scratching and clawing at her face and tearing her clothes.

Thunder cracks overhead, shaking the jungle, followed almost instantly by the crisp, ozone-smelling flash of lightning hitting somewhere close by.

Seconds later, the sky opens up, dumping millions of gallons of water all at once. Kipling slogs through the sheets of rain on the pitched game path, and suddenly slips as a rushing torrent of mud crashes into her legs from behind. She goes sliding out of control down the steep grade.

She flips over several times as she vainly tries to stop herself. Suddenly she arrives at the bottom of the grade and is tossed through the air, landing in a thick, deep brown puddle of mud.

She lays there for a few seconds, face down in the mud.

Slowly, still gasping, Kipling lifts her head up, straining to see in the pitch black space in front of her.

A wide sheet of brilliant lightning splits the night sky and suddenly Kipling realizes she is just inches away from a huge pile of decomposing skulls and human bones.

She screams and scrambles to get up, knocking down some of the skeletal remains in the process.

She tries to scramble back up the path but the footing is impossible, wet and slippery. She finally sits down, spent.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEAR THE GAME PATH - NIGHT

Keeshata and his men are stumbling around in the dark, rainy jungle, searching for the escaped hostage. Seething, Keeshata trudges on. His men are frustrated and tired.

LEMEOO

Lieutenant, we will never find her
in this weather. I suggest we go
back to camp and look for her when
the sky clears.

Keeshata looks stonily at him, unwilling to give up the search. Lemoo shakes his head but turns to his men and gives the order. They fan out and expand the search area.

Suddenly, from the northern edge of the game path, one of the soldiers calls out. Keeshata and Lemoo find Reny hunched over a strip of cloth. A piece of Kipling's shirt. Keeshata smiles, then signals the men on at a faster pace.

They all pause momentarily, however, as a lightning bolt flashes in the distance, and as suddenly as it began, the brutal downpour stops cold.

CUT TO:

EXT. REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

Taylor and his BaKonjo guides edge quietly up to the rebel camp. Taylor climbs up one of the trees, looking out through the night scope.

He sees only one guard, sitting close to the two bound and gagged prisoners. He looks around for any sign of Kipling, but sees none, only some closed tents.

The armed guard stands tense and alert, nervously scanning the black forest for any intruders. Benji comes up silently behind Taylor, startling him.

BENJI

There is only the one guard.

TAYLOR

Yes, Benji. I can see that. What about in those tents?

BENJI

Perhaps. But I believe that there are no others.

TAYLOR

What makes you so certain?

BENJI

Look how he shuffles back and forth on his feet. He is nervous. Scared.

TAYLOR

Maybe the others went off to hunt. We've got to get down there.

BENJI

We must kill him.

TAYLOR

And how do you plan to do that?
Shoot him? That would alert anyone
in the area instantly.

BENJI

Do not worry, Professor, I will do
it myself, very quietly.

Benji pulls out his bow and notches a short, feathered arrow. He climbs down from the tree and disappears into the dense shadows. A few seconds later Taylor sees the guard flinch and grab his throat. As he turns his head, Taylor is shocked to see an arrow sticking through his windpipe.

The guard vainly tries to take out the dart but succeeds only in breaking off the tip. At last, he falls face-down in his own blood. Benji and the others appear from the woods seconds later, crouched over and searching around in the tents.

Taylor climbs down off his perch and joins them. Benji comes up, shaking his head.

BENJI (CONT'D)

She is not here.

Taylor walks over to the unconscious and bound Kyana. He pulls the knife from his pocket and cuts open her gag.

Taylor pours some water from his canteen over her face. As the water goes down her throat, she coughs involuntarily, sputtering up the liquid. Her eyes flutter open.

He pours more in her mouth and she drinks gratefully. Benji prods at Entobi, trying to rouse him.

Kyana lunges at them to make them stop but draws up short, grimacing in pain. Taylor looks down at her injured, bloody midsection, lumpy from the beating she took.

TAYLOR

Don't try to move. They'll tend to
him. Hmmm... this doesn't look too
good. I think you may have several
broken ribs under there. Please,
listen to me. I need to know about
the girl. What, what happened to my
daughter?

KYANA

Your daughter? I... I tried to help
her. I freed her... she ran off
into the jungle.

TAYLOR

Kipling... oh my god... alone, out there? Oh, Jesus. But, how was she, has she been... how is she?

KYANA

The girl was untouched. I have watched over her. She always said that you would come to get her. But you must listen to me! You must be extremely careful. Keeshata will kill you! He'll kill all of us.

Kyana gasps, then loses consciousness once again.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Taylor waves to the BaKonjo and they head out at a fast clip through the forest. The natives lead the way, reading the fresh signs like road maps.

Using their torches and machetes, they chop their way through the dense thickets, periodically stopping and chattering over some new sign or clue. Benji points out one such spot.

BENJI

All of these prints belong to men with boots. Over here these are smaller, lighter. Here's a partial impression.

TAYLOR

Kipling's new boots! Benji, you're fantastic! Is she close?

BENJI

Yes, I think that she is close by. Very close. But the Frelimo are also near. We must proceed with extreme caution.

They reach the end of the game path. Benji roots around in a pile of mud, holding on to a branch for support. He dives down under the mud and foliage, then emerges a few seconds later, talking animatedly.

BENJI (CONT'D)

There is a hill that goes down behind the trees. It is covered with mud here.

TAYLOR

Do you think that she could have gone down that way?

BENJI

It is possible. Her tracks end here. Unless she doubled back.

TAYLOR

That's doubtful. Look, this mud is fresh, it must have been during that last downpour. Maybe it just covered the path she went down.

BENJI

We can try and follow, but it will be difficult and slow trying to get back up if she's not there.

TAYLOR

Something tells me that she's down there. Something in my gut. I can't really explain it. It's like she's calling me.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEARING ON THE VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT

Kipling staggers past the wall of skulls and bones. It is pitch black here at the bottom of the slide, tall trees stripped of foliage form a solid wall of thorny branches that block out almost all the available light.

She hears sounds in the darkness. Animals. Ghosts.

She walks steadily onward and gradually sees a sliver of light appear through a framed arch in front of her. As she gets closer, Kipling realizes that it is a hole in the briar and she crawls through it, tearing her clothes.

Through the tunnel she scrapes and claws. Finally, with one last push, she shoves through the opening and falls out onto a lush, grassy meadow.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Kipling stands and looks up at the full moon that illuminates the entire area. She stares up, amazed at the millions of stars, so thick in the heavens that they seem to blend right into the dark trees at the edge of the horizon.

But as she walks, she stops suddenly. She squints to focus and gasps at what she sees. What she thought were stars in the trees are not stars, she realizes, but... eyes!

The trees are full of animals. Animals with bright, shining eyes! Scared, Kipling crouches down and falls to the grass, trying to stay hidden.

EXT. MUDSLIDE DEADFALL - NIGHT

Keeshata and his men struggle through the dense forest. They followed the muddy tracks to the deadfall.

Just as Keeshata is about to call an end to the search and call the men back, one of them whistles from within the brambles he was hacking at.

The men congregate on the point and one by one, they squeeze through the small opening that was cut into the wall of leaves and branches.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

They emerge out on the far side of the clearing, tumbling out onto the brightly moonlit lawn, awestruck by the stars. The grass is wet from the rains and gives off a dull glow.

Using his binoculars, Keeshata is the first to spot Kipling, lying down in the field about a hundred yards ahead of them. He smiles at his good fortune.

Keeshata signals to the men and they begin walking carefully up the slight incline towards the dormant girl.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUDSLIDE DEADFALL - NIGHT

Taylor, Benji and the tribesmen follow the mudslide down to the base where their flashlights illuminate the eerie scene.

They stare open-mouthed at the stacked-up skeletons in what is obviously some sort of killing field.

BENJI

This is the sacrificial mound. The Buru lived here in the old days, before they were hunted and killed by the mountain tribes.

TAYLOR

But why here... in the middle of the jungle? It doesn't make sense.

BENJI

I have heard of this place, but no one has ever seen it. The Buru worshipped the leopards. They believed that warriors who died in battle came back to earth as panthers.

RAFI

There is an opening in the bramble wall up ahead... and look, these are the same tracks we saw earlier!

TAYLOR

Kipling! Quick, she must be nearby.

Taylor gets down on all fours and shimmies through the tunnel of thorns and branches, scraping and bruising himself further. He pushes his way out into the clearing, trying to adjust his night vision to the bright scene in front of him.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Benji and his men climb out of the hole and gather around. Benji prods Taylor's arm and points to a spot about seventy yards to his right, below a sparse clump of trees in the middle of the meadow. Taylor sees his daughter. He whispers to Benji.

TAYLOR

Kipling! I think she's injured!

Benji suddenly claps a hand over Taylor's mouth and motions for him to be quiet and duck down.

BENJI

Careful, Professor. Look over there by those trees.

Taylor sees the dark figures of several men moving through the grass, several hundred feet away.

BENJI (CONT'D)

I will take my men and double back around the Frelimos. You must go get your daughter. Hurry, but keep low.

Taylor, scrambling low in the grass, edges his way towards Kipling. He looks up and sees that the soldiers are also closing in, not twenty yards from the girl.

In the lead, he sees the cruel looking man that he tried to shoot at the hut.

Taylor, still forty yards away, realizes that he will never get there first. In desperation, he stands straight up in the grass and screams.

TAYLOR
Kipling! Kipling!

Kipling looks and sees her father in the distance.

KIPLING
Dad! I'm here!

TAYLOR
Stay there, Kipling! I'm coming to get you!

At that moment, Keeshata and his men see Taylor. The men raise their rifles, but Keeshata motions for them to hold their fire. Kipling, exhausted, does not move.

Keeshata shouts.

KEESHATA
It's all over, American!

TAYLOR
Please, leave her! I'll pay whatever you want. Just leave her!

KEESHATA
If I leave her, then why would you pay anything at all? Do you think we are stupid?

TAYLOR
Please, don't touch her. She's my daughter. How much do you want? I can get money back at the lodge.

Keeshata laughs angrily, booming loud in the silence.

KEESHATA
You Americans are all alike. You think that money will buy you anything in Africa. All you've got to do is pull out your fat wallets and we'll grovel for you.

TAYLOR

No! You don't understand!

KEESHATA

No! No! It is you who does not understand! You do not know anything about our land or our people! We don't want your money!

Keeshata pulls his rifle to his shoulder and lets loose a volley of automatic gunfire at Taylor's position.

Taylor jumps to the right and buries himself behind some boulders, the bullets whistling by several feet to his left.

At that moment, one of the rebels cries out, dropping his rifle. He reaches down and pulls up the back end of a viper clinging to his leg by the jaws.

In an instant, two more of the soldiers also start convulsing and go down screaming.

Several arrows come flying out of the dark, striking three more of Keeshata's men, felling them in their tracks.

Two of the BaKonjo rise up out of the darkness and notch more arrows in their bows, trying for a second volley. Lemoo turns around and fires at the tribesmen, who return fire with their rifles.

Benji leaps out of the grass and runs away, with Lemoo shooting after him.

Keeshata turns and runs towards Kipling.

Taylor sees him and gets up, running towards her as well, his gun in his hand, screaming at the top of his lungs.

TAYLOR

Kipling! Get up, Kipling! Get up!

KIPLING

Daddy? Daddy!

Kipling gets up and starts to slowly stumble towards Taylor. Keeshata is now close behind her, perhaps fifteen feet or less and closing rapidly.

TAYLOR

Watch out, Kip! Behind you!

Kipling looks back and sees Keeshata just steps from her, reaching out to her. She screams and lunges to her right, causing Keeshata to miss her.

Taylor stops and raises his rifle, trying to get a shot at Keeshata. The soldiers, however, have lined him up in their sights, ready to fire at him upon command.

Suddenly, a great roaring freezes all of them. They all stop in their tracks, whirling around, trying to find the source of the sound.

Then, as if in a dream, the trees around them seem to literally come to life. From the higher canopy where they were hidden, the leopards jump down onto the lower branches.

Keeshata looks up in dumb amazement and realizes that there must be dozens of leopards surrounding them. The big cats begin a symphony of grunts, roars and sawing coughs, raising the hair on the back of the soldier's necks.

Several of the rebels, in stark panic, begin walking backward toward the forest, holding their rifles out in front of them for protection.

LEMOO

Lieutenant, we must leave this place! It is cursed!

KEESHATA

Be quiet! We will leave when I say.

LEMOO

The panthers will rip us to pieces. There are too many!

KEESHATA

Stop whimpering, you coward!

Keeshata looks down and sees Kipling cowering a few feet away. He grabs her and pulls her towards him savagely. She resists weakly, too tired to do much against his massive strength. He drags her towards the tree line.

TAYLOR

Stop! Leave her alone!

Lemoo and three other remaining soldiers are ahead of Keeshata, running frantically back to the place where they had entered the meadow.

Suddenly, the night is rendered by a pitched roaring, and five panthers spring from the elephant grass at their feet.

Before they can shoot accurately, the leopards are upon the screaming soldiers. They struggle, but the panthers clutch at their necks, holding them until they stop moving.

Keeshata sees this and draws up his weapon. He spots two leopards crouched in the grass close by and he shoots at them, killing one and scattering the other.

Kipling kicks at him and he loses his grip for a second, allowing the girl time to scramble a few yards away. He turns and brings the gun up once again, this time aiming at Kipling. She looks up and locks eyes with him.

KEESHATA

It is too bad you must die. You have spirit for one so young. But I cannot afford to be slowed down any longer. Goodbye, my little dove.

Keeshata pulls the rifle up and is just about to fire when a shotgun goes off over his head. He spins around and sees Jonathan Conrad, standing fifty feet away near the tree line, coming closer and reloading his elephant gun.

Kipling sees her chance and scrambles away from Keeshata, but bumps into a body in the dark. She screams and starts kicking and beating with her fists, eyes closed.

TAYLOR

Kipling! Kipling! It's me, Kipling.
It's me!

KIPLING

Daddy! Oh, Daddy!

TAYLOR

It's all right, baby, it's all right. Are you hurt?

KIPLING

No. I'm Okay.

TAYLOR

Can you make it to the trees back there where you came in?

KIPLING

I... I think so. But what about you? You can't leave me again.

TAYLOR

Mr. Conrad is out there. And so is Benji. I can't leave without them. Now go, quickly. Go!

Kipling hesitates, then sucks it up and runs blindly towards the tree line. It seems farther than she remembered.

Taylor turns around and focuses in front of him. Keeshata has his back turned to him, aiming at Conrad who is methodically limping through the high grass, reloading his huge gun.

Keeshata fires off some rounds from his automatic rifle, the muzzle-flash bright in the darkness of the field. In the light of the flash, Taylor sees Conrad go down hard.

Taylor fumbles with his own rifle, bringing it up and aiming at the rebel. Taylor zeroes in on the man and squeezes the trigger, but nothing happens.

He tries again to no avail. The gun is hopelessly jammed.

Keeshata sees this and a wicked smile crosses his face.

KEESHATA

Now it is your turn, American. You should have stayed home in your easy life. This is no place for someone like you!

Keeshata laughs, a low rumble in the darkness. Taylor's fear turns instantly to fury and he throws the gun to the ground and leaps up blindly from the shadows, screaming.

Keeshata, surprised, brings up his gun quickly, but too late.

Taylor knocks him down just as Keeshata squeezes off a burst wildly to the side.

Taylor takes advantage of his position and with a bellowing, insane roar he brings all his strength down and strikes Keeshata on the head with his elbow.

Keeshata groans then lashes out with his boot, kicking Taylor hard in the leg. Taylor gasps in pain, trying to pin down Keeshata's gun hand to his chest.

Keeshata, blinded and maddened, pushes with his huge arms against Taylor. For all his anger, Taylor is no match for the much stronger rebel leader.

Suddenly, Keeshata head butts Taylor, causing him to release his grip. Keeshata brings the gun up again but Taylor reacts and bites down on the black man's hand.

Keeshata screams and pulls his arm back violently, dropping the rifle and using his free hand to beat at Taylor, trying to get him off. They roll onto the grass, Taylor biting harder and harder into the hand, drawing ribbons of blood.

Keeshata draws back his fist and smashes Taylor on the nose, crunching it and sending Taylor back to collapse painfully.

Keeshata gets up holding his bloody hand. He limps over to where Taylor lies and with a mighty yell he kicks Taylor, rolling him over with the impact.

Taylor goes rolling down the softly graded hill three times, stopping hard against a rock. Keeshata walks back and picks up the rifle, then turns and draws a bead on Taylor. At this distance, less than five meters away, he cannot miss.

In the grass, Taylor rolls over and sees Keeshata aiming.

A sound in the tall grass next to him makes Taylor instinctively turn his neck. He strains to see in the darkness and seems to see a shifting in the shadows that feels out of place.

He closes his eyes for an instant then opens them. He gasps.

Less than three feet from his prone body is the large, flat head of a leopard.

He instantly realizes that the animal is not alone. There are several more with him, crouching in the tall grass, ready to spring.

Keeshata pulls the trigger on the gun but is surprised when nothing happens. He tries again with the same results, then looks down at the gun in his hand.

Keeshata swears under his breath as he realizes that he has picked up the wrong gun. Taylor's jammed rifle.

Keeshata turns the rifle around and holds it like a club over his shoulder and walks towards the fallen white man. Keeshata holds the gun with his good hand and rubs his mauled hand on his shirt, then his pants, trying to wipe it clean.

He looks at his hand in the moonlight and sees that he is losing more blood than he thought possible.

Taylor only sees the leopards, however, and holds his breath, waiting for them to spring on him. He sees the lead animal clearly and realizes that he will soon die.

But almost in unison, all the animals in the grass perk up, shifting their attention. They sniff the air, smelling something irresistible. Fresh blood.

Keeshata, still dripping blood and angrier than ever, stands over the top of Taylor and grips the rifle with both hands, ready to club the man to death.

But, suddenly, Keeshata realizes that something is wrong. He stares into the dark grass and his eyes open with panic. He sees the shadows move toward him but is slow to register.

When he does realize, he backs up awkwardly, tripping on a root and landing on his ass. He scrambles to get up, but the first leopard springs up with a roar and knocks him back down. He gasps for air and reaches to bring up his gun.

With a blood-curdling scream, Keeshata tries to fight off the big male with his rifle butt. He clubs the first one off and tries to scramble to his feet, but is knocked down again from behind, a smaller female digging her jaws into his thigh, dragging him back.

In moments he is covered in a sawing, roaring mass of leopards, tearing him to pieces.

Taylor, mesmerized, is suddenly yanked to his feet from behind.

CONRAD

On your feet, man! This is no time
to be a spectator.

TAYLOR

Jonathan! Jesus Christ, I thought
you were dead.

Taylor and Conrad run away from the leopards back towards the tree line, where they find the opening. They scramble back through the briar tunnel and emerge near the bone pile.

Kipling comes running up and grabs him in a bear hug. Taylor, crying openly, hugs her and kisses her face. When Kipling pulls away, he looks beyond her and sees Helen standing there, tears in her eyes.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Helen! Oh, my god. Helen.

They embrace, crying and hugging, then Kipling comes up and joins them. Conrad clears his throat behind them.

CONRAD

If you're through with your family
reunion, maybe we can get this show
on the road.

TAYLOR

But what about Benji and the
others?

CONRAD

I don't know about Benji. Some of the others went down fighting. If Benji is alive, he'll meet up with us later. Right now, we've got to get some space between us and those big cats.

Suddenly, a figure silently appears out of the jungle canopy.

BENJI

You have nothing to fear from those animals. Not in this place.

HELEN

Benji! You're alive.

TAYLOR

What is this place, Benji?

BENJI

It is sacred. The Buru called it "Where the Leopards Dream". The legends say that no harm can come to a righteous man here.

Benji turns around and walks up the muddy uphill path. They all look at each other, exhausted, then fall in line.

CUT TO:

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Taylor, bandaged and bruised, bends down and kisses the sleeping head of his daughter then pulls down the mosquito netting and exits the tent.

EXT. REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

He walks, limping and hunched-over to the campfire where Conrad sits with Helen and some of the tribesmen, including Benji. Benji gives Taylor a bowl of food.

Kyana sits inside of her open tent, caring for Entobi. Conrad looks at Taylor on the other side of the fire, scrutinizing him. Taylor looks up and they lock eyes for a moment.

CONRAD

You've changed.

TAYLOR

I think we've all changed...
somehow.

Helen gets up and sits beside him, rubbing the back of his neck. He is stiff at first, then loosens up as her hands massage him. He looks at her and she stares back, crying softly. Taylor pulls her to him, comforting her.

Conrad stares at them and remarks.

CONRAD

You may have gotten more than you
bargained for on this vacation.

TAYLOR

Some vacation!

CONRAD

Listen, it could have been worse.

TAYLOR

Worse? How could it have possibly
been worse?

Conrad gets up from the log and walks towards his tent. After five feet he turns around and looks back at Taylor.

CONRAD

You could have gotten malaria.

With that, Conrad turns around and goes into his tent. Taylor begins to say something but thinks better of it.

TAYLOR

He'll never change.

HELEN

Thank God something is the same
around here. So now what? I suppose
you'll be heading straight home.

TAYLOR

Yes. Of course. We need to get
Kipling somewhere safe where she
can recover and maybe, one day...
forget.

HELEN

What about you? Are you going to
forget?

TAYLOR

Maybe.

HELEN

So I guess this is goodbye.

Helen gets up to walk away but Taylor grabs her arm.

TAYLOR

Please stay. Stay with me for a little while. I need to process everything.

HELEN

Good luck with that. Might take some time, don't you think?

Taylor frowns.

TAYLOR

Right now I'm just worried about Kipling.

HELEN

That's natural. But what about you?

TAYLOR

I don't know. PTSD maybe? I feel kind of shell-shocked. I mean, don't you, after all this craziness?

HELEN

Well...

TAYLOR

Then you're tougher than I thought.

HELEN

It's not so much that I'm tougher. I just, I don't know, I've been here a long time. Here in this wild country. Takes a lot to break my shell, you know?

TAYLOR

Maybe. Maybe. Or maybe you're in denial? I don't know, maybe we can help each other? Just a thought.

HELEN

I'd like that, Taylor. I'd like that very much. Just, uh, one thing.

TAYLOR

Yes?

HELEN

You got to stop with this Rambo stuff, okay? I like the boring professor better.

Taylor laughs quietly.

TAYLOR

Deal.

Helen settles back into his arms.

FADE OUT