

The Lion Hunter Garth Tuxford



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The Lion Hunter

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By

Garth Tuxford

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DEDICATION.

Judy and I married in 2014, we had previously been married and widowed and now both of us in our 70's have embarked on a very exciting and fun new life.

Between us we have a bunch of children, a bigger bunch of grandchildren and now at number five on the great grandchildren list at the last count.

I would like to say a big thank you to Judy who has put up with me and read every word I have written more times than I can remember. We had fun with the spelling because I am English and she is American and I always like to say that the Americans love throwing letters out of words

Thank you for your love and your encouragement, you were the driving force that got me to the end of this exciting tale.

I have also written two Sci-Fi books and also over 100 poems, Judy was there prodding me and continually encouraging me to continue writing and to be the best that I could.

Without her I would not have succeeded and I love her more and more each day.

PREFACE

THE LION HUNTER

The following profile and the complete story is a work of fiction, it's all brilliant lies.

Main Characters:

Chris Phillips,

When Chris was a young boy, his parents moved from England to live in quiet rural area close to Mombasa called Nyali. He grew up and joined the British army and became a lieutenant in the Royal Parachute Regiment. Nine years later he returned to Kenya where he secured a job working at the Tsavo Game Park close to Mount Kilimanjaro. Before joining the army, he and childhood friend Jimmy had helped as tour guides and rescue teams on the mountain.

Jimmy Stirling

Jimmy, similar to Chris moved to Kenya as a young boy with his parents and also grew up in Nyali. Jimmy had remained in Kenya and spent most of his time working in Loitokitok at the Outward Bound School advising tours and individuals about safety on the mountain. As mentioned above he was also a tour guide and on the rescue team.

Thabo

A native of South Africa, from near Cape Town he left his home village after a bloody squabble with the brother of his number two wife. He moved to Kenya and now works with Chris and Jimmy at Tsavo.

Gabriel

Old Gabriel, how old is he, who knows but he is old, very old. He is like a housekeeper come general helper and he does things around Tsavo.

Dawn and Oscar

Dawn is Chris' Wife and Oscar is his son, enough said

This is a fast-moving adventure story about the senseless and pointless killing of lions for profit in and around Kenya and Tanzania by a vicious and ruthless lion poacher and murderer.

He must be brought to justice!

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Part 1: Where is Thabo?

Chapter 1. A Very Hot Spring

It was an incredibly hot and sticky morning and the sweat poured off Jimmy, Chris and Thabo as they worked amongst the animals in the pens. It was nearly thirty eight degrees Celsius and was not yet ten thirty in the morning. This was unusual for the time of year and they had been baking like this for several weeks. The dry season usually lasts until the end of March but this was only the second week in February and if it continued the land would become totally parched and many of the animals would die.

At all the watering holes in the park fish were lying in the baking mud, flapping and desperately trying to penetrate the thick black molasses to find water. Crocodiles lay motionless in this dry sticky environment, their usually alert and bright eyes, dull and brown and their long dark craggy bodies were almost resigned to the burning hell that they were trapped in. Buffalo and antelope were trying to find shade under palm thickets and acacia trees.

Hundreds of animals were without water and they would die the most painful of deaths if it didn't rain soon. Any water that remained had turned brackish and brown and the smell of death seemed to permeate the very air itself.

The usual lush green grass in Tsavo was brown and burnt and the ground in exposed areas was cracked and dry with huge dusty potholes appearing where there would normally be large pools of water. The trees were

withering, dry branches and twigs burnt to a crisp and looking like charcoal, lay in profusion everywhere.

Chris, Jimmy and Thabo had been up since before daylight but even then the heat had been so intense that the scolding breeze just took away their breath and parched their scorched throats. They had over fifty animals in the pens and they needed to feed, water and let them out into their separate compounds so that they could hopefully find a little shade nearby. Most of the animals would be released as soon as their treatments were completed. Chris was thinking that they might have to release them sooner if this inferno continued.

He called to Jimmy,
“We will have to be very careful with some of our bigger guests; this heat could cause them to go crazy particularly the big cats so watch them very carefully.”
“I will,” said Jimmy.

Many of the pens had to be made of metal so that they were strong enough to house the bigger predators but with the outside temperatures so high the heat in the pens could rise to over forty five degrees.

Jimmy had untangled and rigged up a number of fresh water hoses and was trying his hardest to dampen down and cool as many of the animals as possible. It wasn't until times like this that he realised that the hoses would soon need replacing as the outer cloth round these old hoses was worn and very soon the rubber beneath could easily be snagged and perish. The hoses had all been donated from one of the early fire engines but had lasted them exceedingly well. Perhaps they would get another donation because funds were always short at Tsavo and they had to rely so heavily on

charitable donations.

The lions did not like the hoses but it was the only way to keep them cool.

They could be bad tempered at any time but the heat was driving them crazy. Their long shaggy manes were lathered in sweat. Their usual bright, striated, ginger coloured fur was now dingy and yellow looking and they were continually growling and very unsettled.

Another urgent situation was going to be the supply of water from the tank that was installed at the back of the house. They knew it could not last too much longer without being refilled. They had called a water bowser company in Nairobi but the demand for water had been overwhelming and they were working flat out to supply everyone's needs in these phenomenal conditions.

Dawn was in the house trying to freeze and refrigerate as much water as possible with Oscar helping her. Whilst old Gabriel ferried the cold water from the house to the men working in the searing, strength sapping conditions.

Oscar had been filling up containers with water and taking them to his mother for her to refrigerate. At twelve years old he had never seen conditions like this. He was supposed to be at school but even that was closed for a few days until the seasonal weather returned. Oscar normally attended Oloitokitok Secondary School during the week and boarded with some friends, and then came back to the park each weekend. However, the school had found it necessary to send all the students home until the weather conditions improved.

Chris always enjoyed having Oscar at home because he was learning about the animals very quickly and loved being in the park environment. He had confided in his mother that when he finished school he wanted to train to be a vet.

Chris made a hard decision and said to Jimmy, "If this awful heat continues then tomorrow we must start releasing some of the animals. Some of them are nearly ready to leave but we do not have the resources to take care of them for much longer in these conditions. We are going to have to keep the four lions because they are likely to slaughter many of the other animals if we release them as well. We will have to keep the two young rhino's and the hippo. I am not sure what we should do with elephants. Perhaps we can wait a day or two and make a decision then."

Poor Chris had never had to make a decision so crucial before. They had been subjected to hot and dry times but nothing as severe as this. By the end of the day they were all completely exhausted.

It was becoming a desperate situation and Chris could not remember it ever being as bad as this before. They urgently needed more medical supplies for the animals and he thought that they could also do with getting another freezer and so he asked Thabo to make the journey to Nairobi to get what they needed.

The only real road that ran through the park was the A109 from Mombasa to Nairobi and the tarmac was so hot that it had turned molten and so sticky that it was too dangerous to drive along during the day with tyres sticking to its surface like superglue. It was only really safe to drive at night when the temperatures dropped.

It was nearly midnight before the roads had cooled enough for Thabo to drive. It was a long hot drive and he had needed to stop several times to allow the vehicle to cool down. He still managed to get to Nairobi before dawn but was now worried about the return journey. He was hoping that he could get the animal medical supplies and buy a new freezer early in the day and then he could rest up and make the return journey to Tsavo during the night.

The freezer that Thabo was bringing from Nairobi was desperately needed because many of the medicines they used for the animals needed to be kept in very cold conditions and now with so much space being used to cool water it was becoming a desperate situation.

Thabo was not usually bothered by the intense heat but even he was feeling irritable and beads of sweat pushed out onto his black brow. Nobody knew how old he was but he had several wives and numerous grandchildren all living down near the Cape who he visited on occasions. His previous completely black hair was now starting to show a few silver threads and he smiled ruefully as he noticed them in the driving mirror of the land rover.

Normally he enjoyed the occasional visit to Nairobi but the buildings in the city seemed to exacerbate the already sweltering heat. He had been and purchased the biggest and best freezer that was available and it was perched precariously in the back of the rover. It was a twenty one Cubic Foot Tropical chest freezer and he had been lucky to find this one, most of the refrigerators and freezers had been sold in the previous weeks with everyone trying to get whatever they could to help cope with these conditions.

Thabo left the land rover parked in the shade of a large palm tree in the car park of the Westgate Shopping Mall. He wandered around inside simply because it was fully air conditioned and he wanted to cool down before beginning the hot drive back to Tsavo. He stopped and chatted to one or two of the sales assistants that he knew from previous visits and he was beginning to relax knowing that he would be in this cooler environment for at least three more hours.

He sat on a stool at the cold drinks counter enjoying the rare opportunity of doing nothing for a few hours when suddenly his blood ran cold as he heard a man speaking to a sales assistant just out of sight around the end of the bar.

He had heard that voice before and it brought terror into his mind. At first he could not remember what it was, only that the sound terrified him. He tried to get a glimpse of the man but all he could see was his back. He was an older white man with shaggy white hair which still had one or two strands of its original very crinkly dark brown. He stood just over six feet and was broad shouldered and very powerful looking,.... but that voice?

He was speaking in English but there was a definite timbre to the voice that he could not make out. He wasn't from England and Thabo had not heard too many white voices from anywhere else but England and South Africa. He wondered if he was from Australia and as he listened he began to tremble, desperately trying to recall why he was afraid of this man. Thabo remained on his stool racking his brain but he still hadn't remembered when the man strolled casually away.

Then Thabo remembered and in a flash he vividly recalled everything as if it were only yesterday; this was the man that had killed his father when he was just a young boy. He recalled watching in horror and disbelief as this man butchered his father in cold blood, and now Thabo was trembling more violently in fear, anger and outrage. In all those years this sadistic killer had never been brought to justice.

In an instant he was suddenly back to when he was a young man growing up in the jungle near to the Cape.

Chapter 2. Thabo's Early Years

On the surface Thabo had been so much like other boys of his age, however beneath this sparkling, mischievous African boy's exterior burned a proud African tribesman with a vision and a desire of what he wanted from life. He was still too young to have been tainted by all the disappointments and tragedies that life dished out daily in this harsh and rugged part of the world.

He was naïve, vulnerable but with the courage of a lion. He was just seventeen years old and had enjoyed a lot of the pleasure of growing up here but he had also viewed a lot of tragedy in his short time.

Thabo's father was old beyond his years, worn down by hard work, poverty, sickness and the constant battle against his neighbours, other farmers, poachers, thieves, cutthroats and an oppressive tribal political regime.

His father had once confided in him that he had often lain on the floor at night hoping that he would not wake up in the morning. His body was tired and he was wracked with pain from so many injuries inflicted on him during bloody battles or by wild animals that he had fought off protecting his family and livestock.

In fact Thabo could remember when he was very young sitting with his brothers listening in fascination to their father telling them animatedly how he had received each and every scar. He presented them all as if they were trophies, which I guess they were. Some he had received in an entanglement with a lion or leopard or in an attack from a rustler trying to steal his livestock, or

less importantly he would chuckle, one of his wives.

Thabo and his brothers became so excited listening to these tales in total awe and admiration of their hero father; he was their idol, their inspiration.

Of course, it was all a false illusion, their father had always been able to romanticise everything to keep them captivated. In fact, he was an intelligent man who excited his boys intentionally. He had to give them a glimmer of hope for the future. He didn't want their young lives and their aspirations to be shattered. He didn't want them to feel forlorn and totally without optimism of what was to come.

Maybe, just maybe the future would change, and these very poor African boys would succeed. If only one of them managed to change their lives because of his romanticising, then it would have all been worth it.

Thabo was more mischievous and ambitious than his brothers and his father thought, perhaps this is the one who will break the mould and make a difference to the family's future.

As he grew older Thabo's father began to recognise more and more potential in his second youngest son than any of the others. He was also more tiresome, more disobedient and more adventurous than his brothers. He started to recognise more and more that Thabo would be the one to change their lives forever.

Thabo would sometimes disappear for days on end leaving his other siblings to do his share of the work. For some reason they always forgave him his indiscretions, Thabo returned with a smile, grin or

humorous remark, or an insult but he was always forgiven and, in many cases, encouraged. It was not only their father that saw a brighter future because of Thabo but also his brothers and sisters.

Their father had four wives and between them there were eleven sons and eight daughters. He always believed that this many sons and daughters would secure the future of the family. Thabo had no idea who his mother was out of his father's wives or indeed who were his real brothers and sisters. They were all part of one big family and this was not unusual in this part of Africa.

The family's livelihood was earned by rearing livestock, cows, pigs and a few fowl where they eked out a meagre living on common land. But as he grew older Thabo recognised that every day was virtually the same and their financial situation was never going to improve; there was nothing better on the horizon.

Vicious attacks by lion, leopard, hyenas and other predators were terrifying but somehow, they added a little excitement to their normally mundane days.

They had spent most of the week bringing in the small herd of cows in a fenced coral. The skies looked black and the rainy season would soon be upon them. The rainy season is usually between September and April and during these times Thabo's father liked to keep his animals close by. At other times he would let them wander further away. None of them knew what the months were but they knew when the different seasons were.

All the livestock were in the coral and all twenty-four of

this close-knit family gathered round the fire to eat a well-earned evening meal.

It was quite usual for their father to tell them stories of his many adventures after they had eaten, and tonight was no exception. Ubawo (father) tell us a story the younger boys urged their father. Their father was a proud warrior and loved to tell his boys all about the things he had done.

Thabo was inquisitive and being one of the youngest and also the brightest his father would indulge him knowing that this son had a thirst for knowledge.

“Ubawu,” said Thabo,

“What is that big shiny medal you wear round your neck?

“Well Umfo, it was given to me by a great warrior who won it in battle from a white hunter many years ago. It is very valuable to the white man; they call it igolide (gold). It is in the shape of an elephant and is worth many cows.”

After the food and the tales, they were feeling very tired and all of the girls including their father's wives went off to their huts to settle down for the night. Several of the boys also decided it was time for bed and wandered off to find a comfortable place to sleep near to the animals. Thabo found a small hollow at the far end of the coral and he and one of his brothers set about building a crude hut to protect them from the expected heavy rain. He drifted off to sleep contented after a busy day and was soon dreaming about golden elephants and mighty battles with white hunters.

Thabo woke suddenly wondering what had disturbed his sleep, he glanced over towards the fire and saw that it had died down realising that he must have been asleep

for several hours. There was nobody else moving but then he saw his father stand up and pull his blanket round him wander off towards the bush.

Thabo sat up and was thinking of going to see where his father was going when there was a huge loud bang and he saw his father come running back into the clearing. He had only gone a few yards and there was a second bang and his father fell to the ground. Seconds later three assailants ran into the clearing and dragged his father back out into the bush.

By now everyone in the camp was wide awake and his sisters and mothers were all screaming. The rest of his brothers came running into the clearing all shouting at once.

None of the others had seen what had happened and Thabo had to explain what he had seen. All together they rushed off in the direction that Thabo had pointed without any thought for their own safety. Thabo stood still and wondered what he should do. He didn't have to wait long before they all returned carrying their father between them.

They laid him down by the fire and Thabo could see that he was bleeding heavily from his chest. He was in considerable pain and shaking uncontrollably from the shock. The bullet had gone into his body under his arm and had exited through his chest close to his heart.

Our Mothers' gathered around him and tried to make him comfortable but there was little they could do. He was crying and shouting at the same time and kept pointing at his neck: his Igolide medallion was gone.

His ranting became laboured and soon there was no

sound at all. Our oldest brother took the men-folk away from the clearing and into the coral. Very quietly he said,

“Ubawu is dead.”

Within minutes all the women of the family were wailing and ululating, tearing at their clothes and beating their chests in anguish. Some of the younger pre-pubescent girls threw themselves onto the ground in a dead faint. It was a terrifying dreadful sound and went on for most of the night.

Fortunately, it did not rain and early in the morning we gathered round the dying embers of the fire and our fathers brutally murdered body. We all touched him and sat quietly a few feet away to pay our respects.

My brothers did not seem to want to go into the bush and see if there were any clues as to who had murdered our father but seemed more intent on preparing for the funeral. I left them to their deliberations and wandered off to try and find out exactly what had happened.

I searched the area and at first there were little signs of anyone having been there but then I found several things which I thought were worth keeping. There was an unusual white button large enough to have come off a jungle safari jacket; however, it had an insignia on it that looked like a strange looking bird. There was an empty black cigarette packet with gold writing which said Sobranie Black & Gold and next to it was an empty book of matches with the words Dynamos Glamour Boys FC.

There and then I made up my mind that I was going to follow these men and avenge my father's death. I was young and impetuous, and I really had no idea how I

was going to do it but somehow, I knew that I would. I returned to my father's body and knelt down by him and kissed his head and whispered in his ear, "Ubawu, I will find them, and you will be avenged." At that time, I had no idea how many years it was going to take for me to avenge his brutal murder.

I sought out one of my favourite sisters and told her what I was going to do. She said that I should wait until after the funeral, but I knew that the trail would be cold by then and I would have to go now. She packed me some meat into a brightly coloured cloth and brought me a flask of water telling me to be careful and return soon. She agreed not to tell anyone for at least two days what I intended to do.

The bush nearby where the men had laid in wait for my father was several hundred feet wide, but it was crisscrossed with several small trails. Some of these had been formed by my own family but there were others that continued through the bush and out onto the plains on the other side. Although there had been little rain I could still see signs of boot prints in the soil and broken twigs lay scattered along the way.

Once I had navigated my way onto the wide green plain then there was only one quite large trail that headed north east. I had followed the same set of foot prints onto the plain and I could clearly see which direction they were headed. I was not a trained tracker but living out in the bush was a way of life and tracking came as second nature.

I wanted to close the gap between me and the perpetrators as quickly as I could and broke into a run; this was something that I could do for hours on end

without getting too tired. These men were not very clever because as I covered the ground I found several signs that they had been there.

I knew I was getting closer when I found the remains of their fire which was still warm. These people were sloppy because a few minutes later I heard the sound of guns being fired and knew instinctively that it had to be them. I headed in the direction of the gunfire and within about forty-five minutes I came across a killing field.

These butchers who had murdered my father had indiscriminately shot and killed about fifteen young fallow deer and some of them had been shot many times. There was blood and broken bodies everywhere. Many of the young deer lay with their eyes still wide open in fear looking sightlessly onto the open plain. These cruel people had done this for pleasure and not just to feed themselves. Thabo felt sick as no South African would kill just for the pleasure of seeing something die.

He could feel the fear rising inside him because he knew for certain that these blood thirsty vicious killers thought nothing of taking a life, either human or animal and had no conscience.

He knew there were at least three of them but of course there could be many more and had no idea what their plans were or where they were heading. He knew that he would need to be very careful from now on as he was very close behind them. He needed to make some sort of a plan; until today he had always done things instinctively, which hadn't always been successful.

He was also on his own and had no friends to call on so far away from his family. Now it was getting dark and

he needed to find a place to stop and sleep, he was also very hungry and the meagre things that his sister had given me had all gone hours ago.

He was now beginning to feel nervous and frightened, he had never been this far from his home and family and was planning to kill at least three people. His initial anger started to wane as he thought more and more about what he was doing. What would happen if he managed to kill three white men? What would the repercussions be?

He heard a noise quite close by and knew it was the sound of a vehicle. It was almost dark, and he moved quickly towards the sound. He nearly ran into one of the men in his haste to get close to their vehicle. The man was carrying some rifles and Thabo

was lucky that he could not see clearly over the top of them. Thabo managed to duck behind some bushes making some scraping noises but fortunately he didn't see Thabo, but he did shout out, "Who's there?"

Thabo kept perfectly still, and the man continued carrying his load towards a dark coloured land rover.

Thabo noticed in the fading light that there was an illustration painted on the front of the land rover and it was the same logo that he had found on the button just after his father had been killed. That strange looking bird again he thought and wondered what it was?

The group of three men had now become four and he assumed that the fourth man had been with the land rover. They all got into the vehicle and drove slowly away. He now began to think that he would have no chance of keeping up with them but just as the rover was about to disappear into the gloom he heard a shot

ring out in the darkness and there was a metallic thud as it ricocheted off something metal. Thabo saw bright red lights at the far end of the meadow and could see that the vehicle had come to a standstill. These men were not even being careful and were carelessly taking pot shots at anything.

He came out of his hiding place and ran as quickly as he could towards the men who were now crouching down and trying to assess where the gunfire had come from.

Then without any warning someone tackled Thabo to the ground and he lay on the soft damp soil wondering if he was about to die. Then a hand came over his mouth and a familiar voice whispered shh, keep still in his ear. He relaxed his grip and Thabo rolled over to see his eldest brother smiling benevolently at him.

"Why did you run off so quickly," he said quietly,
"Did you really think that we would do nothing about our father's killers?"

"There are four of us here and we were very worried in case they spotted you following them," he said.

"Come, we will join our brothers."

They moved carefully and quietly along the edge of this huge open area watching their prey from some distance. They quickly re-joined the other young men who were Thabo's older brothers. They had known for quite some time that the headstrong Thabo was somewhere out there and had been very concerned for his life and wellbeing. They had strong fears that he would be seen and caught and were now much happier that they had been reunited.

Fortunately, they had brought some food with them and Thabo was grateful to have something to fill his

rumbling stomach. He had to eat it cold because they did not want to bring their presence to the attention of these brutal men.

The men with the land rover also took this opportunity to stop and make a meal for themselves. They obviously thought that they were completely safe because they made no attempt to disguise their position and were in fact quite noisy as they drank beer and ate their food.

After their dinner they pulled out a large canopy from the rear of the vehicle which made them a quite large sleeping area and they slowly and noisily settled down for the night. They must have had other friends nearby because as we got closer to their position we could hear them talking on a crackling radio.

Because of my youth and inexperience, I wanted to go in and kill them all as they slept in their tent, but my brothers thought that it would be a bad idea and that the authorities would hunt us down.

My brothers wanted to find out about these people and try and find out where they came from and where they were heading. They made me stay away from the vicinity whilst they took it in turns to creep up close to these men and try and find signs that would give them vital clues.

During the night my brother's managed to get in close several times and were able to bring back a lot of information about our father's murderers. They had listened to them talking and had picked up a strange accent that these people talked in. They were speaking English, but they had a very strong dialect that they did not recognise.

They had also noticed the unusual logo on the vehicle but at this time were not aware of the items that I had found earlier which also included this logo. They recorded the registration number on the vehicle and also listened to the men talking as they settled down for the night.

Early the following morning the men were up early and after a hasty breakfast packed up their equipment and reloaded it into their vehicle. Before they left we could hear the crackling of a radio and very soon the men were on their way still heading north east.

At times they moved quickly over the open plain but at others they were impeded by the rough terrain and tangles thickets that barred their way. This gave us an opportunity to follow them at a safe distance.

My brothers were intent of finding out where they had come from and had not really thought out what they intended to do just yet. Nearing midday they arrived on a large plain and deer and buffalo could clearly be seen in great numbers moving towards the west. We assumed there must have been a watering hole or even a lake not too far away and the animals were going there to drink.

Suddenly and without warning we heard a loud droning sound and looking up we could see a large pale blue plane glinting the bright sunlight coming in to land on the scrubby grass of the plain. It came down quite steeply and was soon on the ground and running towards us and the men in the land rover. It bounced and bumped over the rough ground but without any damage; it soon came to a halt not two hundred yards from where we were hidden in the undergrowth and

able to observe all that was happening.

At the rear of the aircraft a horizontal door dropped down with a ramp attached and within minutes the land rover had disappeared into the cavernous hole at the rear of the plane. The driver then jumped off the back of the plane and ran towards the front. All but one of the men boarded the plane and he stood well back as the plane taxied and took off heading north east.