

# Hell and back

## CHAPTER 20

Tom had planned to fuel up at the black market fuel depot just before the back road turn off. From a quarter mile away he could read **NO GAS** off the plywood tent sign on the shoulder of the road. When he saw the **CLOSED** sign on the screen door of the dilapidated building he drove on past. A couple of miles further he pulled over and stared at the fuel gauge. *If I turn here I'll shave off 45 miles. That should be enough fuel to get to the village.* A cattle truck roared by on the main road to Zangam Village.

Tom turned on the right blinker. When he turned off the pavement onto the dirt back road the in dash GPS blared, "Make a U-turn... Make a U-turn..." On the fifth make a U-turn warning Tom turned off the GPS. He thought he could remember the section of road that was booby- trapped. After the cattle guard was where he was to drive along the river bank for three quarters of a mile. Past the cattle guard the next twelve miles would be safe.

After an hour the bumpy rock and dirt road swept hard to the left and started down a steep grade. A buried piece of sharpened rebar penetrated the right front tire and destroyed the tire! When Tom jumped out he could hear the sound of the river. He walked around the bend in the road, three quarters a half mile ahead he spotted the cattle guard. There'd be no off road towing like back home in Texas. It didn't matter; there was no cell phone service in this remote part of Plateau State to call for help.

Cain and Able were circling, sniffing and marking territory. They had just worked themselves down to the river bank when Tom opened the side compartment and immediately noticed the rolled up airbed wedged between the spare tire and generator. *How'd that get here?* The rolled vinyl material weighed four times more than what it should. It made sense when Tom found the AR15 on the inside. *I thought I hid*

33 *this hunting long gun in the stepvan before they took the motorhome.*  
34 *How'd it get here? Maybe I dreamed the whole thing?*

35 Tom looked thru the red dot fast acquisition, aim and point optics  
36 mounted on the AR15. "What the hell." Tom yelled to himself. On the  
37 other side of the river a hunched back big eared wild dog had scented  
38 on Cain and Abel. Tom looked closer at the brown with black spotted  
39 carnivore; the puff of fur on the end of the tail sent a cold chill down  
40 his spine. This wasn't a dog — it was a hyena

41 Tom scanned along the river bank; his worst fear was  
42 substantiated. It was a clan of at least twenty Hyenas! "Cain, Abel  
43 come! Cain, Abel come!" Tom yelled.

44 Up river three of the largest in the clan were crossing the shallow  
45 rapids. The water running over rocks suppressed their yipping, that  
46 was somewhat like laughter sound. Tom pulled the trigger to send a  
47 warning shot — nothing! Tom ran to the edge of the road. "Cain, Abel  
48 come! Cain Abel come!" Cain looked up and immediately started  
49 toward Tom. Abel was still drinking from the river bank when the  
50 largest female hyena jumped on Abel's back and latched on to the  
51 leather dog collar. A second hyena bit into Abel's rectum and started  
52 to pull; a third predator chomped down on a rear leg. They pulled in  
53 different directions; the savage, ruthless hunters were disemboweling  
54 Abel.

55 Tom charged toward but it was too late, at least two feet of  
56 intestines were now hanging out of Abel. The extreme squealing was  
57 three times louder than the clans chatter. Tom couldn't watch or take  
58 Abel's calling out for help — he was overwhelmed in helplessness. He  
59 turned and ran than dove in the rear door, slid across the floor,  
60 opened the compartment and slapped in a banana clip. He crawled  
61 back to the rear door and from a prone position sighted Abel in the  
62 crosshairs. **Bam, bam, bam...** The first shot hit dirt, the second shot  
63 hit high shoulder and the third shot was direct to the head. Able fell  
64 silent — out of pain.

65 Tom inhaled and then held his breath. He took a low bead on the  
66 clan leader and squeezed. **Bam, bam, bam...** The bump stock  
67 recoiled on his shoulder three times. The large matriarch dropped on

68 top of Abel. The AR15 bump stock was set to burst fire three rounds,  
69 each pull on the trigger; a humane way to deliver at least one kill shot  
70 when hunting hogs.

71 Tom took a bead on the animal eating guts. All three shots were in  
72 the chest, all kill shots. The next burst of three hollow points blew the  
73 jaw off the hyena that had Abel's leg. The second and third shot were  
74 direct to the brain.

75 Tom's ears were ringing, yet he heard Cain yelping. He jumped up  
76 off the floor and out the back door! When he rounded the corner of the  
77 motor home one hyena had chomped onto Cain's ear and was holding  
78 him in the middle of the road waiting for help. Four hyenas were  
79 crossing the river. Tom steadied himself against the camper shell. The  
80 first hyena came up the river bank, **Bam, bam, bam...** The rabid  
81 carnivore did a complete front flip and flopped with its four legs  
82 pointed upward — twitching. The three others retreated back to the  
83 river. For a moment Tom had one of them in the crosshairs but didn't  
84 pull the trigger. United States military are trained not to waste  
85 ammunition; most all American middle school children know the  
86 phrase, 'Don't fire till you see the white of their eyes.'

87 Tom trotted a few steps and put the barrel two inches from the  
88 hyena. **Bam, bam, bam...** Cain's left ear was flopped over, almost  
89 bitten half off. Tom used the red dot aim and point optics to scan the  
90 other side of the river. The remaining clan was in disarray. Their  
91 matriarch was dead, splayed out on top of Able. Tom sighted in on the  
92 eyes of another large female, most likely the next in line to become  
93 clan leader. He squeezed the trigger — it wasn't a waste of  
94 ammunition.

95 Tom got bottle of water and retrieved a first aid kit. There wasn't a  
96 bandage large enough to cover the three ripped out holes. The flopped  
97 over ear needed to be splinted in place to stop the bleeding. He  
98 reached for the brown bag under the table and grabbed the package of  
99 tampons. One tampon on each side of Cain's ear and then wrapped in  
100 white medical tape did the trick.

101 Cain started to bark and then pushed on Tom's butt. Out of the  
102 corner of his eye Tom saw two hyenas charging. He barely got a hand

103 on the AR15; from the hip he pulled the trigger. **Bam, bam, bam...**  
104 One of the predators dropped. Cain lunged forward and tackled the  
105 other hyena! "Off" Tom commanded. Tom burst fired and three more  
106 rounds were spent from the banana clip; there was one less clan  
107 member.

108 Tom leaned the long gun against the motorhome and scanned over  
109 his shoulders while he pulled the jack and spare tire out. Cain stood  
110 watch. On the other side of the river the remaining clan rallied in  
111 disarray — the Matriarch was dead.

112 After he got the spare tire on Tom backed the motorhome over the  
113 bank and down to the river. He pulled the German Sheppard away  
114 from the other carcasses, spread the air mattress over Able and then  
115 started piling river rocks on top. Two hours under the beating sun  
116 moving heavy river rocks Tom was drenched in sweat, dirty, and  
117 totally exhausted. He climbed back up to the road and rolled the flat  
118 tire to the far side of the road and drove off.

119 In the rear view hooded vultures were landing and already feeding  
120 on dead hyenas. If he had more time and ammo Tom would have  
121 killed the entire clan. Like the overrun of feral hogs in Texas the hyena  
122 population was most likely out of control. With less than a hundred  
123 lions left in Nigeria the hyena had no real predators — nature's  
124 balance ran amuck by humans.

125 Tom drove along the river's edge until he got to the fence and  
126 cattle guard. Cain was on the passenger seat looking out the window  
127 and then back into the Sprinter for Able. This day had started with  
128 jerky treats and fetch on green grass at a park. Cain felt like he was  
129 responsible for Abel's death — truth be told it was a predestined  
130 sacrifice.

131 The sun was almost setting when Tom parked on the outskirts of  
132 the village. It was about the same spot he stayed overnight last time.  
133 It was on the far side of the potter's field some distance from the  
134 school and somewhat hidden by a group of trees. Thru the vent  
135 opening he could see the three graves that the girls he prayed over  
136 were laid at rest. Cain jumped up on the bed with Tom. Bodily and  
137 emotionally worn out, they both slept hard.

138 Cain was restively digging and pushing his paws into the mattress  
139 and woke Tom. Cain's head was wedged thru the open vent hole and  
140 the bandaged ear was keeping him from pulling it back in. Tom hurried  
141 out the side door and carefully held his ear, pushed his head down and  
142 then back thru the eight inch opening. Cain yelped. There was no fresh  
143 blood on the Tampon makeshift splints.

144 The sun was already drying the wet school thatched roof. *It must*  
145 *have rained overnight*, Tom thought while he looked around. It  
146 seemed usually quiet for a cattle town. Sure, Sunday was the day of  
147 rest but cows still needed milked and livestock tended to. Tom went  
148 back inside to make coffee and feed Cain. His heart felt heavy only  
149 setting out one dog bowl. Now he was dreading the walk to the center  
150 of town to inform the villagers about not supporting their school any  
151 longer.

152 He was unaware that Mr. Chen, Tina and Victor had transported  
153 four middle school girls back to Lagos in the Sprinter earlier that week.  
154 They were at Oyins Holiday Inn and would soon be on the Dong Fang  
155 container ship headed for one of the US Virgin Islands where some  
156 world elitists often partied.

157 A motor rumbling and then shutting off pulled Tom to the side  
158 door. Cain stood beside Tom in the doorway and growled when he  
159 heard shouting. Some ragtag soldiers waving machetes overhead  
160 were pushing four women from town up the dirt road. One of the  
161 women had a baby on her back. Tom stepped back inside and grabbed  
162 the binoculars. It looked like their hands were tied. Two soldiers that  
163 looked to be no older than fourteen didn't have guns. They were  
164 barefoot had no military hardware besides their wielding knives. Tom  
165 scanned up and down the main road. *Where are all the men?*

166 At the porch of the school house one of soldiers kicked the back of  
167 the legs of one of the women. She fell to her knees. He put his knife  
168 against her throat and yelled, "Boka Haram!" Tom couldn't hear the  
169 words which mean, 'Western education is forbidden.'

170 When the second boy kicked at the knees of a different woman  
171 Tom burst out of the motorhome! He ran across the field with Cain at  
172 his side. "Stop that! Stop it!"

173                   Barely halfway across the field the first woman slumped forward  
174 with blood gushing from her neck.

175                   Tom yelled, "Angreifen," and Cain took off at full speed and latched  
176 onto the arm of the second boy. The knife went flying! **Bam...** A  
177 single gun shot rang out from behind the corner of the school house.  
178 The bullet grazed Cain shoulder and then the young soldier cupped his  
179 hands over his stomach.

180                   Trained to take cover at the sound of gunfire Tom dove to the  
181 ground. He then crawled to the cover of the mounds of the freshly dug  
182 graves. Two armed Boka Haram members came out from around the  
183 corner and started to scan the field. Tom heard a motor start and then  
184 a pickup with a machine gun mounted in the bed slowly headed back  
185 down the road to finish off Cain. Tom pressed his head into the dirt  
186 and didn't move.

187                   **Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom...** Came from the  
188 50mm the machine gun down the road — then nothing. Tom jumped  
189 up and ran for the trees and brush at the edge of the field. From the  
190 front of the schoolhouse the Boka Haram main leader raised the  
191 Russian AK-12. **Bam...** Tom heard the first round *whizz* over his head.  
192 But, he didn't hear the second shot. The 5.45 mm piece of lead from  
193 the Kalashnikov rifle traveled faster than sound. At the waist Tom was  
194 bolted forward and then his entire body cart wheeled him into a cattle  
195 drinking pond. The butt shot felt like he'd been kicked by a mule He  
196 gulped in a mouthful of water and then rolled onto his stomach. He  
197 couldn't move his right leg! The more he tried to crawl up the muddy  
198 bank the more he slipped back underwater!

199                   Finally, some movement came to Tom's right leg; he was able to  
200 work himself over the bank, crawled across the grass into some brush.  
201 He wiped mud over his face and then crawled along a fence line to the  
202 side road and then down to the Sprinter. Adrenaline was full on!

203                   Three of the women were still standing with their hand tied behind  
204 their back. The dead woman was lying faced down; her blood was  
205 running over to the one school step. The gut shot teenage cadet was  
206 leaning against the school door. His classmate and childhood friend  
207 was on his knees sobbing while trying to stop the bleeding.

208           The fully combat dressed out commander looked around, unzipped  
209 his uniform pants then desecrated on the three grave markers. He  
210 jogged back across the field and picked up the bloody knife. Then he  
211 ordered the crying cadet to stand and forced the knife into his hand.  
212 Nothing will groom a child to be a soldier better than part taking in a  
213 beheading.

214           The cadet dropped the bloody knife and shook in place. The  
215 oversized leader kicked the boy in the gut and then grabbed one of the  
216 women by her hair. He pulled the bayonet off his long gun and held  
217 the sharpened steel skyward and yelled, "Boko Haram forever!"

218           The first 223mm round was to a kidney, the second round into the  
219 chest and the third shot under the armpit. The beheading bayonet hit  
220 the dirt! The second in command soldier came from behind the school  
221 turned ninety degrees and started rapid firing along the fence line!  
222 **Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam...** He emptied the entire  
223 AK12 magazine. He then pulled his sidearm and pointed it at the baby.  
224 He'd be able to kill to hostages with one shot. Tom sighted breath in  
225 and then held his breath. **Bam, bam, bam...** One to the chest, one in  
226 the neck and one right between the eyes. The second Boka Haram  
227 terrorist dropped in place!

228           Even National Guard grunts are taught armament strategy and the  
229 element of surprise. Tom's quick assessment from the rapid boom  
230 sounds was; that a 50cal machine gun was mounted in the bed of the  
231 pickup truck. That caliber bullet would slice thru the motorhome like a  
232 knife thru butter; a shot out tire or a shot to the motor would leave  
233 him stranded. He hobbled to the corner of the road and slipped into  
234 the shallow road ditch; a snake slithered toward him. **Bam, bam,**  
235 **bam...** Tom shot the snake.

236           The pickup driver heard the shots and turned the truck around; he  
237 was now slowly working itself back toward the school. The machine  
238 gunner was using binoculars!

239           A four hundred yard kill shot was beyond Tom's ability. He laid on  
240 top of the snake and aligned the crosshairs for the mounted machine  
241 gun armament. The warm blood from the snake was soaking into his  
242 shirt. The adrenaline shakes were not helpful. Tom took a deep breath

243 and squeezed **Bam, bam, bam...** It was almost a full second before  
244 the three burst shots busted out the windshield. Shards of glass  
245 exploded into the driver face. The soldier opened up the door and  
246 bailed out; the rear truck tire rolled over his left ankle.

247 **Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom...** The gunner started  
248 scraping the road with 50mm rounds. Some of the bullets ricocheted  
249 or spun off road rock; a few whirled over the top of the ditch. Tom  
250 pressed his face down against the snake's slimy skin. The firing  
251 stopped; followed by a metal crunching sound. The pickup crashed into  
252 a tree and threw the gunner's face into the turret armament and  
253 gouged out an eye.

254 Tom now smelled blood. He rolled off the snake and onto his side  
255 to self examined his right buttocks. There was so much mud he  
256 couldn't tell how hard he was bleeding. The gunfight paused. Then  
257 there was a loud masculine scream; other male voices joined in. After  
258 about a minute there was one lone, **Bam...**

259 Tom rolled back onto his stomach. The husband of the one slain  
260 woman was standing behind the crashed pickup with one of the AK12  
261 Russian long guns. The other men were untying their wives. Tom  
262 sighted in on the teenage recruit that was again next to his gut shot  
263 schoolmate. Neither of them was old enough to shave. The villager  
264 walked back across the road from pickup truck and pointed the AK12  
265 at the sobbing, shaking boy.

266 **Bam, bam, bam...** Tom fired three rounds into the lintel across  
267 the top of the door. With all his strength he yelled out, "No more  
268 killing! No more killing!" The villager threw down the rifle and then  
269 knelt down to anguish over his wife. The soldier with the crushed foot  
270 was being dragged toward town.

271 On his right a village elder was at the motorhome waving a white  
272 piece of cloth. Tom got up on his hands and knees and then used the  
273 AR15 to help him get to his feet.

274 The well seasoned man with a broken giddy-up approached. "We  
275 talked a few weeks ago. You prayed over our three school girls. "

276 "I remember..." Tom replied and then said, "I've been shot."



277           The old man bloodshot eyes studied all the blood mixed with mud  
278 on Tom's chest and stomach. "Take off your shirt.

279           "No I've been shot in the butt."

280           The old man moved to behind Tom and got on his knees. There  
281 was a tear across the right rear pocket. "Drop your pants."

282           Tom undid his belt and let his camo pants drop.

283           There was a hardly any blood. The old man pulled down Tom's  
284 boxer shorts. There was a deep purple bruise with a small amount of  
285 blood in the center. The old man used his white surrender flag to wipe  
286 away the blood. He tried to push his finger near the center of square  
287 black and blue bruise.

288           Tom moaned and then asked, "How bad is it?"

289           The old man was now digging into Tom's pants pocket. He pulled  
290 out the multilayered cell phone pouch. "Whatever this is made out of,  
291 it stopped the bullet."

292           "Graphene or some word like that. Its made from conductive  
293 carbon atoms to blocks cell phone signal. At least that's what a  
294 computer technician told me!"

295           "Feels like black rhino hide to me." A revving motor sound down  
296 the main road ended their conversation. A few men were trying to  
297 back the pickup off the tree and out of the ditch.

298           "Let's get your motorhome turned around. I'll help you."

299           Tom pulled up his pants and put his arm around the old man.  
300 Together they hobbled to the Sprinter. It took a five point turn before  
301 Tom got turned around. About two hundred yards on the back road  
302 they stopped in front of a lean-to type garage with farm implements  
303 and a tractor inside. The old man brought out four glass bottles of fuel.  
304 He emptied them into the motorhome.

305           The elder told Tom that what had just happened could not be  
306 shared with anyone. Especially, the Nigerian Federal Police. If they  
307 heard they would have a reason to bulldoze the village. It was the  
308 second time in two days that Tom had been told not to tell the truth  
309 He asked about what would happen to the innocent young recruit that  
310 didn't do anything. The old man didn't say a word — just shook his  
311 head side to side.

312                   When Tom started the Sprinter the old villager came up to the  
313 window and handed back the grapheme pouch. "There are no Black  
314 Rhinos left in Nigeria. We killed them all off..." Tom tossed the cell  
315 phone bag onto the dash. He's been to hell and back and now he  
316 couldn't talk to anybody about it. Valor was the last thing on his mind.