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Jungle Fever



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the end of the tournament. The crowds broke up. The mediaeval pomp of the warriors contrasted remarkably with the ordinary Islamic costume of the remainder of his subjects.

I thanked the ruler of Bubandjiddaland for the magnificent display he had staged for me. Our farewell was lengthy and courtly as had been my original audience. Now for some weeks I was to explore the uninhabited walls of his kingdom and to study the rhinoceros which has become such a rarity in the Cameroons.

I spent the time until I was ready to set out—trackers, bearers and the other necessary staff had to be fetched by the Sultan's ambassador from the neighbouring farms and our provisions packed—to make a closer acquaintanceship with the people. Several times a day I wandered round the narrow streets, always accompanied by an official. I managed to collect a number of interesting details. Despite the constantly growing influence of the white administration the Sultan's power is still very great. It reaches beyond his own country as far as regions beyond the Chad frontier. Here, too, the inhabitants have to pay him tribute. Even the smallest gift presented to someone in the Sultan's sphere of influence finds its way to his court. A charming story was told to foreigners who visited the country. The Sultan allowed himself to be dragged about in a modern heavy car by three or four hundred of his subjects because there were no roads in his kingdom along which such a luxury machine could be driven.

The fabulous power of the Sultan of Rei-Bouba rests on an intelligently built-up hierarchy of officials such as existed in the past in other Fulbe and Haussa countries. A number of the high official posts are entrusted to relations of the Sultan, children by his concubines. Important posts are given to slaves and eunuchs, a striking phenomenon which can be traced back to the fact that many an African despot distrusted the power-hungry nobility, and thus the highest positions of trust were given rather to members of the subjected races. Intrigues and poisonings in the past were a common occurrence and even today they have not entirely disappeared. Even the Sultan of Rei-Bouba has his food and drink tasted by a man he trusts.

The Sultanate of Rei-Bouba—the strangest mediaeval state in Africa, but one which is also threatened by decay. Civilisation and science advance ruthlessly. How long will Buba-Amadou be able to preserve his majesty? When I visited the country for the second time I found that many changes had already taken place. Much of the pomp and ceremony had disappeared. In the army I saw hardly a single young face, for the youth prefers to wander across the frontier in search of modernity. Fifty miles from the capital, in the old summer residence, Choleré, the first European post, has been founded. A white teacher, a doctor and a missionary couple followed in the wake of these few white officials. But white traders and merchants are still not allowed to settle in the land, and white farmers are not allowed to own any land. It is reserved exclusively for the Sultan and his subjects.

I eventually set out on safari with seven bearers, two trackers, various servants and four warriors whom the Sultan had lent me as a guard of honour. Our goal was the little village of Bilu. The Sultan's men and myself were mounted. On both sides of the trail were marshy meadows where the grass had not yet been burnt. The riders disappeared up to their heads in a green sea of grass. A smaller trail then led through wooded country followed by light bush. Both these vegetarian belts had been partially burnt and the new green was gradually sprouting.

Bilu is the last Bubandjidda village on the Mao Veimba River near the Cameroons-Chad frontier. The village headman brought me a chicken and several eggs as a present. Eland crossed our path in the early morning and the ground was covered with tracks which, in size and form, resemble those of buffalo. These magnificent large antelope, the largest to be found in Africa, grazed in herds in the plain. Here we rested for a while to examine with Abdurraman and Askari these particular spoors. Torn-off branches, peeled and broken trees, indicated the way the herd had taken. Here the trees were already in leaf and the foliage is a favourite fodder for this game. The *jamussa*, as the eland is called in Fulbe, had now wheeled and suddenly I caught sight of a hartebeeste bull

grazing about sixty paces away from us. I managed to take his photograph.

Shortly after this I saw several pairs of oribi, graceful little buck, which stopped to scent us and then fled at a great speed. A herd of seven hartebeeste in single file nearly ran into our party. They eyed us, doubled back and disappeared clumsily in a hollow.

Towards midday we reached the Mao Behultir, a deep-flowing river about eight to ten yards across. There was little water in the dried up bed. My party looked for and found a young crocodile, which they immediately killed with spears. Crocodiles are often found here in clefts of the rock and little pools where they live during the dry months.

My limbs ached. The strong *harmatan*, warm wind that brings dust from the Sahara as far as the fringe of the jungle, made the air stuffy and oppressive. Our servants erected the camp beds in the sparse shade of a tree and I took a short siesta. At half past four in the afternoon rather late, therefore, I set out on an evening stalk. In open country I sighted two horse antelope making their way unsuspectingly towards a copse. I trotted after them to get within closer range but my light steps had betrayed me. One of the bulls stopped, so I fired the small calibre Mannlicher-Schönauer at this big fellow from one hundred and twenty yards. It shuddered and went on fleeing. In the meantime his mate had appeared again. It received a bullet but fled.

Shortly before nightfall we found a dead bull two hundred yards from where he had been shot. Not far away lay the second which had left no trail in its flight.

During the night the native fires burned merrily in the camp. The men sat round the spit and enjoyed their venison.

I slept very badly—a bad sign, for in Africa I always enjoyed my night's rest. Towards morning I had nightmares and I was alternatively feverish and shivering. It was so cold that I did not want to get out of bed, but I soon felt in good fettle again when one of the trackers reported the spoor of a rhino bull. In the grey light he had been in search of food and had visited the spot where the burnings had recently taken place. Here the trees sported soft green leaves and the wild fig trees

were heavy with fruit. Unfortunately the rhino had too big a start. He had made off into a vast expanse of tall grass not far from a big stream and it would have been madness to have pursued him into this.

From all appearances this particular rhino was a lone beast which wandered outside the usual haunts of his species. We returned to camp. I now felt considerably better and was ready for the efforts of the day's march.

In the wilds we came across a little village in which the natives were dancing and leaping wildly beneath a shady tree. Some of them were beating their tom-toms and shaking rattle gourds. Round a number of clay vessels stood men who had obviously drunk considerable quantities of millet beer. The Bubandjidda had gone wild. With excited gestures they offered me a drink, and since I am no spoilsport I naturally accepted. The women in their huts were brewing more beer and it looked as though within a short space of time the entire village would be very drunk.

Suddenly a flame leaped from the roof of a hut and in a second it was a blazing furnace. A strong wind blew the sparks about, so that within a few minutes half the village was in flames. In their terror the Negroes came to their senses. They rushed about, screaming and gesticulating, trying to pull down the rattan fences round the huts to stop the fire. But the flames leaped from hut to hut. The wind grew stronger and the village was doomed.

When we left the spot that evening all that remained were blackened mud walls, clay jars and millstones, the few objects which could survive the fire. All the rest was ashes. In one of the huts where a woman was brewing the beer the flames had suddenly flickered up and set fire to the roof. In the general excitement caused by the drink the fire had been noticed too late.

We pitched our rhino camp on the Mao Veimba. The broad river was partially dried up and there was water only in places. In these spots, however, it was quite deep and was the home of hippos, crocodiles and a host of fish. Spoors everywhere. Storks strolled round the sandbanks. On the right bank was a thick forest. Buffalo tracks led towards it and I found signs

of rhino. To get my bearings I stalked along the river edge and in the bare branches of a tree discovered some magnificent marmosets with bushy manes. As I approached they tried to huddle close to the branches and in this way to conceal themselves. A little further on I came across a fresh rhino spoor. The hoofprints led to the river and the beast had been down to drink a few moments before I arrived. His droppings were still steaming. At any moment I thought I should come face to face with him, but he had slipped away noiselessly into the undergrowth. We had to give up pursuit because it was getting dark.

In our rhino camp messengers from Rei-Bouba arrived with a basket of rice and another of potatoes with the Sultan's compliments. I had sent him some baskets of roast venison. At night the lions prowled round our camp and the Negroes kept the fires burning brightly. They were nervous and only spoke in whispers. A leopard roared in the dry river bed and a family of baboons chattered in the trees on the opposite bank. The night was full of wild animals' cries.

The dawns grew daily more spectacular. The sun rose blood red in a bright blue sky. The air was clear and clean such as one only finds in December and January dawns. The cold made me shiver. Later in the morning it grew hot, the sun beat down pitilessly and the air began to shimmer. Near the river we soon found many trampled rhino paths—convenient paths for the beasts themselves and also for us. The rhinos keep conservatively to these and it would have been dangerous to have built our camp on one of them. They are obstinate one-track-minded beasts which trample down everything in their path. On one occasion an acquaintance of mine had his tent smashed to pieces. Here the rhino travelled singly or in pairs or very rarely in a group of three. The lone beasts are usually old males, while the females sometimes took not only her youngest but also her grown-up sons with her. In this country only black rhino are to be found. His white cousin crops up very occasionally in the Oubangui-Chari region on the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan border. His presence here has never actually been authenticated.

In this region we had to move about very cautiously. The

visibility was extraordinarily limited and the rhino is an ill-tempered unpredictable creature. Since, in French territory, it is one of the most strictly protected beasts I had to be careful not to get in a hot spot and to have to shoot it in self-preservation. Naturally this is easier said than done.

On the Mao Veimba, within a few days, I discovered the presence of about thirty rhino. Sometimes I was close on their heels, but unfortunately they always disappeared before I caught a glimpse of them. They lead a very regular life, leaving the tangled thicket at night and wandering to their feeding grounds. They love leaves, young twigs and the green fruit of the wild fig. In the dry plain I came across several places where they had rolled in order to rid themselves of parasites. They were often accompanied by tick birds, which remove the pests from their backs. These small white birds warn their hosts by suddenly flying off.

The hunter can best be assured of meeting with a rhino in the early morning or late afternoon. During the heat of the day he remains in the shade of the thicket. To observe them on the Mao Veimba and in other parts of Bubandjiddaland was exceedingly difficult and entailed great physical effort. The grass had not been burnt everywhere and in many places it was uncommonly high—sometimes twelve feet. In the early morning, as soon as I found a fresh rhino spoor in the sand by a water hole, I followed it as far as the tall grass and on occasions as far as the thicket. It was not wise to follow it any further for there is no chance of eluding the animal in the high grass. Despite the security that this thicket gives him he is always very cautious and is on the alert at the slightest suspicious noise. He then tries to recognise the cause of the noise with his small eyes. At these moments he moves his head with the curved horn to and fro and will suddenly push unpredictably at a presumed opponent. Rhinos have regular places to leave their droppings which they then disperse with their hooves. My Negroes knew many of these places and we kept them under observation. Each morning, too, we checked the sandy river bed for fresh spoors, since they came down very early to the water to drink.

One morning just before sunrise I was on my way to the

Mao Veimba with two trackers who were carrying my reserve guns. A third scout carried spear and bush knife, and whenever we came to a brook he carried me across on his back so that I should not get my plimsolls wet. That morning there were no new spoor in the river bed. When we came to a tributary that flowed into the Mao we left its bed and made our way inland through the tall grass to a burnt-down patch of country. We had hardly gone a hundred yards when the grass moved and we heard a rustle and a breaking of twigs. The *cilifori*, as the Fulbes call the rhino, was on the move, coming back from his early morning drink to his daylight lair.

The man with the spear climbed up a tree to look round. At the same moment an enormous rhino—a fully-grown bull—came out of the tall dry yellow grass. He passed about thirty yards away from us, walking slowly. Suddenly he stopped as though rooted to the ground. Something had aroused his suspicion. I quickly tried to take a photograph of him with my telephoto. Unfortunately he was half hidden and the light conditions were bad since it was very early in the morning.

The rhino began to paw the ground with his front hooves and to belch loudly. He kept his clumsy head lowered. I estimated the front horn at about twenty inches; the second was on the small side.

I was delighted to come face to face with this "living tank" and I wondered what my behaviour would be like. The beast was restless, kept pawing the ground, wheeled away only to turn and come straight for me.

It was a dangerous moment—at any moment it could charge. The bearer next to me shouted quickly and excitedly: "*Dilli Nazarra! Dilli Nazarra! Dilli djonta!*" "Run white man, run quickly!"

He thought that it was bound to attack me. However, I got the beast in focus with my telephoto. A short glance over my shoulder showed me that my boys had run away and climbed up trees. At the next moment the rhino charged me. I shouted at it but ran as quickly as I could to the nearest tree. It broke under my weight as I scrambled up it. I landed with a bump on the ground. It was one of those withered burnt-out bushes which actually only give one moral support. The rhino

changed its mind. A few yards away from me it veered off and galloped into the bush, tail in the air.

I heaved a sigh of relief. Things had turned out all right.

Near the village of Mayo I discovered further haunts of rhino. Apparently they were more prevalent here than on the Veimba. On my very first stalk I found fresh spoor of a pair which had crossed the river and the tall grass, and finally passed a strip of burnt soil quite near our camp. They had rubbed themselves against some boulders for we found smears of mud. Fortunately they had paid no attention to the camp which at that moment had been deserted. They were lying in the shade of a tree and from the top of another one I could see them through my glasses. They were asleep.

The number of rhino in Bubandjiddaland is estimated at about two hundred, half of which live on the Chad boundary. They are on the increase here, as they are in other parts of French Equatorial. In a few years the game authorities may consider allowing one or two to be shot on payment of a very heavy tax.

In the same country there are a host of small lakes which teem with hippos. They have become extraordinarily shy and secretive for they are constantly shot by the Sultan's hunters. Their meat is very much prized and one beast alone will furnish enough food for a few hundred men. They are comparatively easy to shoot and the natives succeed with their primitive weapons.

On a stalk between two of these lakes, in a rather remote spot not far from the water, I spotted the spoor of a baby hippo which had been left on land for a few hours by the mother. We followed the tracks of the full-grown male who had returned to the water and also saw the mother, who started to lash the water and was obviously very nervous at our appearance. I quickly retired with my boy so as not to disturb them. He looked very angry for he would have liked to spear the baby for its tender flesh.

On the return journey to the capital we had an exciting experience. We were walking along the lake edge through tall marshy grass. I suddenly stumbled over a sleeping coiled python. It immediately wriggled away. The bearers flung their

spears and wounded the huge fully-grown reptile. It turned round angrily to attack. Head raised and hissing angrily it attacked us. A dose of shot smashed the spine just behind the head. The Durus rushed wildly on the dead beast and cut off its head. Each of them took a piece of the snake's flesh and wrapped it in long plaited grass. When we got to our bivouac we stretched the skin in the branches of a tree. The following morning we found that it had been eaten by termites. I was very sorry because the beautifully marked skin of this python would have been a fine present for friends at home.

Our hunting in the wilds of Bubandjiddaland lasted for more than a fortnight. I met Buba Amadou once more and there was a further exchange of presents. To entertain the Sultan I brought out a small portable radio and tuned it in to Leopoldville. When the music rang out the Sultan's eyes lit up: he was as pleased as a child. I smiled. The Congo was broadcasting the theme song from *The Third Man*.

When we finally said goodbye he told me I must bring him a similar set from Vienna on my next visit.

A long cavalry escort led us out of the city walls and accompanied us to the first river where the bush began.

I looked back at the city lying there peacefully in the early morning light. I was sorry to leave. For a long time the shouts of the warriors rang in my ears: "*Njiwa manga, Njiwa manga Baba!*"

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Stalking Herds

THREE THOUSAND ELEPHANT STILL LIVE TODAY in the Chad basin; they have split up into between six and eight herds. They keep strictly to certain haunts and start their wanderings regularly in the rainy season.

The seasonal lack of food and water compels these pachyderms to lead a more unstable existence than their brothers in the jungle. As a result it is not always easy to find them, and the white hunter is more or less bound to rely upon the natives. I myself was often disappointed. Good elephant preserves in which I normally came across plenty of the grey giants were one day quite empty. The natives announced that they had cropped up some fifty miles away.

The elephant in this region is notorious for the indifferent ivory of its short uncurved tusks. This is due to the dry heat and the countless small grooves make it less valuable than the ivory from the jungle regions.

He is, however, more heavily built than his jungle brother. Giant specimens have been shot with an estimated weight of nearly eight tons, and have sometimes reached a height of almost eleven feet.

Between the Lagone and the Chari rivers, on a drive from Fort Lamy to Fort Archambault, I came across hoofprints on the dusty road. They had been left by an old bull. I parked the car in the shade of a "sausage" tree. The two imprints in the dust, which were almost as large as a hip bath, must have been made about midday and they encouraged me to an immediate pursuit. Within two hours I had this lone elephant just ahead of me in the thorny bush. With my two boys I was in the most favourable country. The bush was compara-