

Cry of the Kalahari Study Guide

Cry of the Kalahari by Mark James Owens

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Plot Summary

Mark and Delia Owens meet as students at Georgia State University. They have much in common, especially their love for animals of the wild. They decide to self-fund a research project in Africa. They temporarily quit school, take on rather menial jobs and save their money toward their goal. After three long years, they take their savings augmented by money received for selling everything they have and head to Africa. They arrive in Johannesburg, take a short plane hop to Botswana and from a small village named Maun they venture out to the uncharted Kalahari Desert wildlife reserve. In a third-hand Land Rover that is not without its mechanical problems, they travel over rough terrain and arrive at Deception Valley where they will, unknown to them at the time, spend the next seven years.

Due to limited funds, their sparse camp provides little protection from the environment and from the many predators that with curiosity begin noticing the strange new creatures. The Valley of Deception is so remote that most of the animals who reside there have never seen a human and therefore do not instinctively fear them. Mark and Delia are as careful in their approach to the animals, but there are frightening incidents involving them. Delia is uncomfortable sleeping in the truck so she decides to sleep in the rickety tent they set up. She senses a presence and looks up to see two huge male lions poking their head in the tent's opening, staring at her. Each cat weights upwards of 450 pounds of pure muscle. She freezes until Mark who jumps to action when he sees that his wife is in trouble slowly drives the truck toward them. They retreat without incident but feel comfortable enough to return often.

The Owens' research project focuses on the feeding habits and behavior of the brown hyena in addition to the desert lion. Before their research, work was done on the Serengeti spotted hyena and lion but not much was known about the animals in the Kalahari. They do their best with heir limited funds and the adverse living conditions, but they eventually run out of money. Just in the nick of time, they receive a small award from National Geographic that keeps them going. Later, just about out of money again, the Frankfurt Zoological Society grants them a large award allowing them to continue their research.

Mark and Delia Owens discovered important data about the animals they studied. They found that unlike the Serengeti lion, the Kalahari lionesses are welcomed in different prides. In general, the Kalahari lioness is a more devoted mother than those in the Serengeti. The fact that the brown hyena lives in clans at first mystified Mark and Delia. Since hyenas are lone scavengers they could see no reason for them living in clans. Later, they discover that the brown hyena's cubs are raised communally. In the cases of both the desert lion and the brown hyena, Mark and Delia determine that the adverse conditions of the Kalahari that include fires, droughts and lack of food and water are the compelling reasons for the animals' unique behaviors.

After seven years in the Kalahari, Mark and Delia have grown to love and respect the animals they studied and knew so well. But their research is complete and it is time to

go home. They fly away from their beloved animals with regret. They truly could have lived there forever.

Prologue

Prologue Summary and Analysis

Mark and Delia drift off in their sleeping bags late at night when they could no longer hear the rustle of the Blue Pride they are tracking. They wake to see one of the large females at the foot of their bags. She walks by and joins the rest of the pride who is slumbering a short distance away. In 1974, Mark and Delia sold everything they owned and delayed finishing their doctorate degrees to make the expedition to the Kalahari. Their mission is to study the lion and brown hyena in their natural habitats. They are fortunate that the remote location they chose within the Kalahari was so untouched by humans and so the animals generally do not fear them. The story they tell is of that seven-year long journey of knowledge, understanding and love.



Chapter 1, The Jumblies

Chapter 1, The Jumblies Summary and Analysis

Flying to Africa, Mark dozes with his head against the airplane window. He dreams a nightmarish scenario that as a beautiful, swift cheetah chases an antelope it is waylaid by a hidden fence. The cheetah tears and breaks the proud animal and throws it to its death in a pile of dirt. After a short hop in another plane and a train ride, Mark and Delia wind up in Gaborone, Botswana. With \$1,500 of the \$6,000 they brought with them, they buy a third-hand Range Rover. They drive on to the last vestiges of civilization, a village called Maun where they can get gas, water and supplies. They need to establish themselves in a credible research project area in order to get grant funding. If they do not, they will not be able to fully pursue their dream.

They get some advice from Lionel Palmer, a veteran professional hunter. They are interested in Northern Botswana, which he tells them is remote and does not have contiguous roads. They get stuck in the mud and muck many times and have to dig their way out. After venturing to several remote areas, they find only one herd of zebras and wildebeest. Palmer then suggests they try the Kalahari Desert, which contains one of the largest wildlife reserves in all of Africa.

With directions as simple as turning by a broken palm tree and after a few missteps, they finally find their way to the Valley of Deception in the Kalahari. It is an ancient fossilized riverbed dotted with forested sand dunes. As they stop on a rise above the Valley, they see a huge herd of gazelles and hartebeest grazing peacefully below. They have found their research spot. They have no idea at the time that they will remain there for seven years.



Chapter 2, Water

Chapter 2, Water Summary and Analysis

The Owenses will sleep in the Land Rover on beds they constructed after they bought the truck. They are delighted with the herds of grazing animals who notice them but do not seem to fear them. Jackals and wild dogs are brazen and walk slowly near their camp, curious but also hopeful that they may find some food. The Kalahari is a semi-desert and has three basic seasons: A rainy season from November to April or May; a dry cold season in June through August; and a hot dry season the remaining months. The Owenses had arrived in Deception Valley between the rainy and cold seasons.

Driving around the area, the Owenses begin to name some of the landmarks to help them remember their way around: Eagle Island, Tree Island, Acacia Point and Bat Bush to name a few. At night, it is amazing how many eyes are looking back at them when they flash their lights on the terrain ahead. They begin to recognize the eyes. Eyes that tower over the bushes belong to giraffes. Yellow eyes that are higher than the bush are those of lion's. Yellow eyes close to the ground belong to jackals and wild dogs. One night, they are intrigued by a set of green, slanted eyes belonging to a good sized animal. They try to chase it to see what it is, but it eludes them. They finally determine that the animal is a brown hyena. Not much is known about this species and research on it could garner a research grant.

To their horror one morning they discover that their water supply is almost gone. The largest supply of water they had had leaked out of their rusty-bottomed container. The closest river is 140 miles away but they have to try for it. Things get worse as their Ranger Rover won't start. Mark figures out that the starter had slipped into some other mechanism. After trying all night, he was finally able to hand crank the engine and start it. Sadly, they realize that the Kalahari is far too remote for them to remain. This tragedy was avoided, but they cannot risk another close call or worse.

Just as they are about to take off for Maun, they see a Land Rover approaching their camp. Bergie Berghoffer, a field rep for the Botswana Department of Surveys and Lands, surprises them with food and water. He had heard they were in the area and decided to see how they were doing. They were grateful but still plan to abandon the Kalahari the next morning. However, early the next day Bergie brings them a tent, more water and food and other supplies. They will be staying in the Kalahari at least a while longer. Bernie comes every week or so with more water, gasoline and supplies. He tells them rather ominously that the only thing he is afraid of in the Kalahari is fire.



Chapter 3, Fire

Chapter 3, Fire Summary and Analysis

By July, Mark and Delia have made the Kalahari their home for three months. Although it is 70 degrees during the day, the nights fall into temperatures in the teens. Along with having to cope with the frigid temperatures at night, a part of the Kalahari is on fire and is threatening them. For weeks the Owenses watch as the fire edges toward them. The vast fire is 50 miles across. Bergie stops by and tells them they have about two weeks before they have to worry. Bergie will stop back by before that.

One night Mark had immobilized a jackal so they could tag it. As it started to stir, Mark suddenly sees seven lions standing by the jackal. Delia is asleep in the tent nearby. To save the jackal, Mark slowly drives between it and the lions. He is successful in driving them away but notices a dim flickering coming from their tent. He backtracks immediately to find two large male lions standing at the end of Delia's tent with their heads poked in. He quickly drives toward them and is able to run them off. The lions didn't seem that interested in Delia, but nonetheless it was frightening.

The fire reaches the campsite. With miraculous effort, Mark and Delia are able to build a fire trench that barely saves their camp. Their eyebrows are singed and their faces are blistered. They have inhaled heavy smoke and expel it for days. Unfortunately, they were not able to save their research documents. Bergie's white truck approaches soon after. Instead of Bergie, some of his African workers alight from the truck. They deliver the sad news that Bergie is dead of a heart attack. The Africans take the items that Bergie had loaned them. All they had left is the Range Rover, some food and water and each other. They would have to somehow earn enough money to return home.



Chapter 4, The Cry of the Kalahari

Chapter 4, The Cry of the Kalahari Summary and Analysis

Within three weeks, the combination of the strong winds that followed the fires and the deeply moist earth from heavy rains the season before, the blackened and charred dunes are soon lit with fragile green sprouts. Amazingly, by burrowing in the ground or escaping to already burned out areas, most of the animals seemed to have survived. Mark and Delia decide to stay until their supplies run out. Their meager food choices have caused both to lose a good deal of weight and to grow increasingly lethargic and persistently weak.

Mark and Delia trail a jackal they have named Captain. Soon Captain takes on a mate, aptly named Mate. Captain astutely watches for a rat to exit from one hole as he digs at another. This behavior had never been noted before in research papers. Captain and Mate kill a large kori bustard, but before they can dine, a large hyena steals it for herself. Norbert Drager from Maun flies his prop plane in near the camp. He and his wife bring food and refreshments for the Owenses. Drager tells them that Nixon resigned a month ago over Watergate and that Ford is now the President. Drager brought mail and with delight, they learn that National Geographic has awarded them a \$3,800 grant. They immediately go to Maun to replenish supplies.

September brings stifling heat. Mark and Delia find it difficult to get much work done in the 118 degree temperatures. Finally in December, the Kalahari is blessed with abundant rain which instantly cuts the heat. The large herds of antelope that had abandoned the hot Kalahari now return with the predators not far behind. Mark and Delia take delight in studying the newborn pups of Captain and Mate. The Owenses decorate a Christmas tree but are unable to catch any guinea hens that frequent the camp for their holiday dinner. Their gift is seeing the elusive brown hyenas starting to appear more frequently. One has a white patch on her forehead. They name her Star.



Chapter 5, Star

Chapter 5, Star Summary and Analysis

Star teaches Mark and Delia the most about its species. Star comes to trust Delia and Mark—she sniffs Delia's face one evening not 12 inches away. When Star forages for food at night, the bright eyes of jackals are seen in the dark trailing just behind. Star follows the lionesses but stays a polite distance away until the lions are satisfied and leave left overs. Incredibly, Star can consume the large leg bones of the gemsbok. Until the Owenses did their research, brown hyenas were thought to be solitary animals. They observe Star travel down the same area of the riverbed most nights. She stops and marks the grass stems with a white substance that resembles Elmer's Glue. It is later determined that the white substance is the way the brown hyenas communicate with one another.

They also witness another adult hyena, subordinate to Star, crawl on her belly as Star walks around her and smells her scent glands. The hyenas play rough with each other, attaching their strong jaws to each others' necks and holding on for frighteningly long times. Mark and Delia conclude that the brown hyenas operate as a clan with a specific hierarchy. Mark tags Star and a few other brown hyena to facilitate their research. Brown hyenas are scavengers not hunters. Since they don't hunt together, why do they live in a clan and share kills left by lions? Why do they need each other? Mark and Delia will ultimately learn the answers.



Chapter 6, Camp

Chapter 6, Camp Summary and Analysis

Things have improved in camp. The hunter, Lionel Palmer, has loaned them a trailer which they use to get water at a much closer location than Maun. One day, Mark takes the truck to Maun for supplies. Delia wants to stay behind and catch up on a mound of paperwork. He will be gone three or four days. She shares bread with Chief the hornbill and some of his feathered friends. She thinks back about the critters that routinely come around the camp for a hand-out or to steal food. There is Laramie the lizard who eats as many flies as he can find. Moose the mongoose terrified Delia one morning when she felt him moving under her covers. She thought a big rat was in her bed and was relieved to see that it was a mongoose. Moose became a regular. Luckily, Mark had to kill only a few dangerous snakes who tried to make the camp their home. The hornbills became their snake alarm system. When the birds see a dangerous snake, they cluck and chirp until the snake is routed out. After Mark had been gone three days to Maun, the lion pride returns to the camp and sniffs and circles Delia's tent. She is about ready to hide in a large trunk when Mark appears. Fortunately, the pride peacefully leaves the camp.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7: Maun, The African Frontier

In March 1975, Mark and Delia take off for Maun for more supplies. They have decided to try to hire an assistant. They need help repairing the campsite, keeping it clean, fixing the car and helping with other chores. Their research has escalated so much that they are finding it difficult to keep up with every else. Socially, they are beginning to feel very isolated and look forward to seeing their acquaintances in Maun. A big cook-out is held at Dad's where they feast on goat. They are invited to spend the night at the Buffalo Cottage owned by Dolene and Simon Paul. They have the extreme luxury of sleeping in a bed without fear of lions circling them or mice or worse crawling in bed with them.

One of the men at the cook-out suggest that an African by the name of Mox may be interested in the assistant job. The next morning, they meet the shy twenty-six year-old man. He speaks no English but through interpretation, Mox agrees to take the job for food and fifty cents a day. If they get another grant, they will give him a raise. Mark wonders why Mox took a job so far from his family and his social group. But then, Mark had to ask himself the same question.

Chapter 8: Bones

Mark and Delia decide to tag the lions of the pride that stay nearby. Since their study of the brown hyena involves their feeding on the remains of lion feasts, they deem it appropriate to study the movements of the lions. They need to tag them immediately since it is May and the dry season will soon be upon them. The lions will disappear with the seasonal migration of the grazing animals. When the lionesses are busy devouring an ostrich kill, Mark with the help of Delia and Mox, is able to immobilize each of them and tag them. Mark tags all the females with a blue ear tag and names them the Blue Pride.

Mark and Delia discover an emaciated looking male lion who is struggling to pull a dried out carcass over to a shade tree. They immobilize him and find that he is covered with porcupine quills and has a broken hind leg. They pull the quills out and repair his leg as best they can. Mark kills several antelope for the lion, whom they have named Bones, so he doesn't have to hunt, the movements of which would keep his leg from healing. Finally, Bones is better and moves away. When they encounter him again with his orange ear tag, they see him rejoin the Blue Pride. Unknown to Mark and Delia when they patched him up, Bones is the dominant male of the Blue Pride. All the lions soon disappear from the Valley.



Chapters 9 through 11

Chapters 9 through 11 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9: The Carnivore Rivalry

Through careful observation, Mark and Delia begin to understand the relationships between the brown hyena and other predators. A brown hyena waits until the lions are done feeding before going near a kill. However, it is surprising to see that in several cases, Star and another hyena named Shadow, both chase away a leopard dubbed the Pink Panther. After the leopard kills his prey, the Pink Panther timidly retreats and allows the brown hyenas to take his prey. The browns are aggressive and their strong jaws could break the leopard's leg. A pack of wild dogs intimidates Star and devours a kill she had commandeered. In the Valley of Deception, after the lions, the browns are the dominant carnivore followed by leopards, cheetahs and jackals.

Chapter 10: Lions in the Rain

Mid-January, 1976 brings the first rains of the season. The grazing animals return followed of course by the Blue Pride. The quenching rains bring a lightness and childish delight to Mark and Delia as well as to the lions and other wildlife. One night, Mark is rudely awakened by clanging noises outside the tent. He figures it's Star and other brown hyenas. He rushes out to the dark figure and hollers at her to get on her way. But the figure is too large to be Star. It is one of the lionesses. Suddenly he is surrounded by lions on all sides. He tries a few old methods to get them out of the camp, but nothing works. The lions have grown used to the sight of Mark and Delia and they seem to like to sleep and romp in the camp. That night Mark and Delia sleep in the Rover for safety. When they awake, they are surrounded by peaceful lions asleep in the morning sun.

Roars from Blue Pride lions are answered by lions in another area. Mark and Delia decide to make a visit to these other areas to see the lions. After almost getting lost, they find the other lions that the name the Springbok Pan Pride. Females often spend their entire lives in the same prides while males typically go off to establish their own pride and territory. There are usually one or two dominant males in each pride. Lions communicate by signaling with various postures and with movements of their ears, lips and tails. A lion's roar is a territorial designation and a way of reuniting with pride members. Lions also communicate with other pride members by scent-marking.

Female lions hunt together. When their prey is a large animal, such as a giraffe, the lionesses surround the animal, bite its legs and exhaust it until it collapses. Even though the females bring the prey down, the dominant males eat first. The dominant males may not allow younger male pride members to eat at all, a signal that it's time for them to establish their own pride. After feasting on a kill, the lions clean off the blood from one another.



Chapter 11: The van der Westhuizen Story

Mark and Delia get word through a mail drop from a passing plane that a Mr. Van der Westhuizen would like to meet them in Maun regarding grant money. It couldn't have come at a better time as they are about out of gasoline and money. They assume that Mr. Van der Westhuizen represents the government wildlife office they applied to for funding. They travel to Maun the next day with great enthusiasm and arrange for a lunch at the Rivera, a hotel where they have standing quarters in one of its shoreline huts. As it turns out Mr. Van der Westhuizen is a private citizen who wants to donate \$200 to them. While they are appreciative, it is not a drop in the bucket toward what they actually need to continue their research. During this trip, Delia develops malaria, mononucleosis and hepatitis and is anemic. She gets some bed rest in Maun but against doctor's orders returns to the camp where she slowly recovers.

Mark and Delia take an old short-wave radio set with them when they return from Maun. They receive a call on the radio that the Director of the Okavango Wildlife Society wants to meet with them about a grant. They travel to Johannesburg where their grant is approved. The funding will include money for them to travel home to visit their families. Delia is anxious to see her mother—she had just gotten word that her father died of a heart attack six weeks before.



Chapters 12 through 14

Chapters 12 through 14 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 12: Return to Deception

Mark and Delia return to Johannesburg after a four-week visit to the States. Upon their return, they learn that terrorist activity has escalated and that some terrorists were even seen in Maun. It will be risky to try to enter Botswana. After they purchase a second-hand Toyota Rover, they leave for camp. They are terrified when armed gunmen stop them along the way. After many questions, they are finally allowed to proceed. They have much trouble on the return trip to the campsite. The heat is oppressive and a large tank of gasoline in their truck bed develops a leak causing them to lose much of their spare fuel. They finally do make it back to Deception Valley finding their camp in disarray and the area parched and dry.

By January, the rains start and bring back the herds of grazing animals and along with them the lions and brown hyenas. Bones makes a quick visit to the camp one morning. When he departs, Mark and Delia follow in the truck. Soon, the entire Blue Pride pays a visit to the camp. The radio tags that they bought with grant money would have to be used on the hyenas first since the lions would soon be leaving the valley. Mark radio-tagged Star and although they had trouble with the antenna, they were able to track her and learn more about her activities and feeding habits. Mark and Delia still have no data on how the browns raise their young. They would find out, however, that the raising of hyena cubs is closely related to why the hyenas maintain clan relationships.

Chapter 13: Gone from the Valley

On a tracking expedition, Mark and Delia run into Lionel, the professional hunter, and a couple from the United States who have hired him for a hunting safari. Lionel invites them back to their camp for dinner and to stay the night. They have a fabulous dinner with oysters, steak, potatoes and wine. The hunters, Wes and Anne, had heard about Bones whose story had become legendary. They are moved to tears when they hear how Bones had been saved and regained his status as pride leader. The next day on their way back to their camp, they receive a radio communication. Sadly, Lionel and Wes had inadvertently shot one of their lions. Delia is inconsolable when she learns that the lion had an orange tag. Bones is the only lion with an orange tag.

Chapter 14: The Trophy Shed

Mark and Delia find Bones' remains in the trophy shed. They are both overcome with grief. He apparently had been following antelope and had wandered off the reserve. The hunter shot him in the heart—how did he miss seeing the orange tag? Bones' death illustrates the need to learn more about the desert lions. How many are hunted illegally? What is their population? Bones was killed in the dry season. Was he heading toward a



river for water? If so, the reserve needs to be expanded to include water sources for the lions. Mark and Delia had heard horror stories about hunting behavior. Hunters often bragged about shooting antelopes until they got the trophy they wanted or burning brush to force lions out for easy kills. Mark and Delia are determined to focus on the desert lions but to do so, they must follow them when they leave the Valley. Such research would require better radio tags and an airplane. Neither Mark nor Delia know how to fly a plane. They could barely afford their truck. How could they convince a sponsor to give them a plane? They didn't know but they had to try.



Chapters 15 through 17

Chapters 15 through 17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 15: Echo Whisky Golf

In late October 1977, Mark and Delia get word that the Frankfurt Zoological Society of West Germany is interested in funding a plane for the lion research. To get the plane, Mark will have to have a pilot's license. They immediately leave for Johannesburg to visit Roy Liebenberg who had offered to teach Mark how to fly if that need should arise. After the lessons and just 41 hours of flight time, Mark receives his license. The requirements to fly over the Kalahari include a minimum of 500 flight hours. When he flies over the Kalahari he will have to avoid detection by the civil air officials. They purchase a Cessna with the name "Echo Whisky Golf" painted under the wings.

Mark flies the plane back to the Valley. He is worried whether he'll be able to spot his campsite since the terrain is virtually featureless. A worse problem develops however. In a harrowing episode, one of his gas tanks leak spewing gas on the outside and inside of the plane. Miraculously, he is able to find the camp and land the plane which by that time is on empty. Roy and Delia drive back to the camp and Mark makes a quick hop back to Maun to pick up Mox. Mox at first is afraid of the plane ride but grows to love it. Two new young male lions show up on the area Mark is using as an airstrip. Perhaps one will become the dominant male in the Blue Pride, but to Mark and Delia no one can replace Bones.

Chapter 16: Kalahari Gypsies

Although Mark still struggles with mechanical difficulties with his plane, he manages to cover the Kalahari regions spotting various lion prides. After he spots a pride, Delia takes the Rover and travels to the location while Mark flies there to meet her. In one instance, Delia reaches the rendezvous point and begins clearing the land so Mark can touchdown. Although there are no lions around when she arrived, she suddenly looks up to see a group of lions staring her down. After a game of cat and mouse, she makes it to the safety of her vehicle.

With the benefits of having a plane and new radio-tag units, Mark and Delia are able to immobilize 16 different lions and radio tag them. The lions belong to the prides of the Deception, Passarge and Hidden Valleys. Six brown hyenas are radio-tagged in Deception Valley and the Cheetah Pan area. Through their aerial research, Mark and Delia learned that Star's clan is almost totally dependent upon the Blue Pride's leftovers for its main food supply. With their improved conditions and equipment, Mark and Delia finally feel a measure of success. At any given time, they can locate their tagged animals within minutes. It takes only a few hours each day to check in on all of them. They are learning more about their feeding and hunting habits and how they interact with each other. As Mark put it, "It was a field researcher's dream."



Chapter 17: Gypsy Cub

Tracking the lions, Mark observes Satan from the Springbok Pan Pride facing off against Muffin. They stay their distances from one another but continue to glare for long periods of time. Finally they engage in a fight and when Satan seems to be getting the better of Muffin, his brother Moffet joins in and defeats the challenging lion. The younger lions had rendered great injury upon Satan who was dead by the morning. Mark and Delia discover that Sassy and Gypsy each have a new litter of cubs. In other research, the Serengeti lionesses had been found to be poor mothers who abandon their young or refuse to feed them. Mark wants to see if the same label can be applied to the Kalahari lionesses. Sassy turns out to be a good mother and departs from the nursery with her young joining Chary who has new cubs, too.

Unfortunately, Gypsy fits the mold of the Serengeti mother lion. She abandons her two youngsters. One cub dies a few days later. Mark and Delia decide to adopt the other cub who is showing signs of malnutrition. The plan to make a trip to get the cub is delayed by a terrible storm that almost rips their plane away. They drive to the den of the abandoned cub. But it is too late—the second cub has succumbed to starvation. The dry season is coming. Sassy and Chary are caring for their youngsters but food and water will soon become an issue.



Chapters 18 through 20

Chapters 18 through 20 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 18: Lions with No Pride

Mark and Delia are observing the Deception Valley lions during the oppressively hot season. Although most of the grazing animals have vanished, the lions remain. The dominant males, Moffet and Muffin, of the Blue Pride now have to do some of their own hunting. They see Moffet chase a chicken-size fowl and a rabbit—hardly adequate meals for the king of the jungle. The females in the Blue Pride have split up so their meager kills can be divided among fewer diners. Chary and Sassy, the new mothers, have to travel up to ten miles every night to find food. Mark and Delia are realizing that the lions do not migrate in the true sense of the word. Rather, they expand their territory and change their diets and eating and hunting behaviors. Unfortunately, the revised reaches of their prides place them beyond the reserve boundaries and vulnerable to hunters and ranchers.

Muffin and Moffet begin courting Happy a female from the Springbok Pan Pride. Happy follows them back to the Blue Pride. Mark and Delia are anxious to see the reaction of the females in the Blue Pride. The Serengeti study found that nomad females are not allowed into established prides. Such females spend the rest of their lives alone. The prides consist of great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers and their young. The females use the dominant males to protect the pride's territory. They are surprised when the females of the Blue Pride seem to accept Happy. The switching of prides by female members is the single biggest difference between the Kalahari and Serengeti prides. Mark and Delia determine that the flexible nature of the Kalahari's behavior patterns is attributable to the extreme environmental conditions of the region.

Chapter 19: The Dust of My Friend

Mox is given the chore of gathering and mounting mice for Michigan University. Unfortunately, he kills one of Delia's favorite camp visitors, William the shrew. On a trip to Maun, they learn that the Frankfurt Zoological Society is funding them for another two years. During this trip, Mox returns home for a two-day break. When Mark and Delia come to pick him up, he is gone. Obviously, he quit but they are hurt that he did not tell them. They never see him again. The couple travels to Johannesburg to celebrate their new grant; however, they feel uncomfortable around the crowds and the noise. They run into one of Bergie Berghoffer's daughters. They stay in touch and see her again the next year. They participate in scattering Bergie's ashes into the winds of the nearby rolling hills.

Chapter 20: A School for Scavengers



During the 1978 wet season and the winter months that follow, Mark and Delia keep up their research on the brown hyena as well as the lion. They fear Star might be dead. They haven't seen her for weeks. They follow her radio signal and discover she has a new litter of pups. They observe her feeding and caring for her litter. She is a good mother who is not impatient with her young like the lionesses are. They finally find out why the brown hyenas live in clans. They follow Star as she carries her pups to a new location. It is a large den where there are youngsters of all ages—brown hyenas raise their young communally, enabling the hyenas and their young to share in the food found by foraging members. Mark and Delia conclude that, like the lions, the browns have developed behaviors to cope with the rigors of the Kalahari environment.

Star is scavenging one night in the drought-stricken region. Finding no food, she lays down to rest for a while. Moffet and Muffin, searching for a meal, spot her and attack. Star is dead, leaving behind her three pups.



Chapters 21 through 23

Chapters 21 through 23 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 21: Pepper

Mark and Delia watch the den where Star's pups are. They see other members of the clan bring them food. It is an amazing piece of research—brown hyenas adopt pups who become orphans. This behavior is rare among most species. Although the adoptive relatives appears to be selfless, the core reason for the behavior falls more to the theory of kin selection. The survival of the fittest refers not to an individual's fitness but rather the survival of their genes to future generations.

Their study of the "helping" behavior of the brown hyena is Delia's subject for her Ph.D. Delia spends most of her hours with the hyenas—at first in her truck, then sitting on the grass. Star's young pups begin to trust her. They come close and sniff her hair, her toes. She is careful not to be so exposed when the adult hyenas are around. The parched earth that the 1979 drought was leaving behind in the Kalahari is devastating to the animals. Although the older hyenas feed the pups, it is not sufficient and the youngsters start foraging themselves. Pepper surprises Delia by showing up in the camp one day. Delia would love nothing better than to feed her but the gesture would destroy their study of the animals in the wild. Even though she's not fed, Pepper becomes a regular visitor to the camp.

Chapter 22: Muffin

The drought and oppressive heat continue into late 1979. In the last 20 months, there has been only four inches of rain in the Kalahari. The temperature in the camp rises to 122 degrees; on the riverbed it is 150 degrees. Out of desperation for food, Muffin and Moffet leave the reserve. Muffin's leg is caught in a large trap and he is unable to escape. Moffet is shot in the face and chest and runs off. Mark locates Muffin's signal in a native village and finds his large skin stretched out to dry. Moffet's signal is dead. The gunshot must have penetrated his radio collar. Did Moffet run off to die?

Chapter 23: Uranium

The campsite gets two surprise visits. A helicopter touches down whose pilot and rider tell the Owenses that they are geologists looking for diamonds. Another plane brings two Union Carbide representatives looking for uranium. Mark and Delia are horrified. After all their years of work to protect the region, will it soon be destroyed by diamond and uranium mines? The Union Carbide reps are abruptly rejected when they ask if they can use the camp's airstrip for their planes. One day a whole convoy of loud trucks come rumbling in. Union Carbide is testing for uranium. Delia and Mark make pleas to the Botswana officials to prohibit such activities. The drillers promise not to drive fast, especially at night, to avoid disturbing the animals. They do not keep their promises and

their presence proves very disturbing. After eleven days, they thankfully pull out. They did not find enough uranium to warrant any further investigation.



Chapters 24 through 26

Chapters 24 through 26 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 24: Blue

The Blue Pride has disintegrated. The drought has forced them into smaller groups. In the case of Blue, she has become a nomad. Mark and Delia note her deteriorating condition. She is gaunt and her hair is falling out. At a time when she can't feed herself, Mark and Delia discover that she has two cubs. She tries her best, but one cub dies of malnutrition. The other cub, named Bimbo, is in better health and begins following his mother who searches for food. Mark immobilizes her one night to check her condition more closely and to attach a new radio-tag. Blue has managed a condition which is difficult to treat in the wild. Mark decides to rub motor oil all over her body in hopes of smothering the parasite. Blue's skin improves and begins to heal. Mark and Delia watch Blue one night as she kills a large wildebeest bull. She and Bimbo feast on the kill and happily fall asleep with full stomachs. The remains feed several brown hyenas and some jackals as well.

Chapter 25: Black Pearls in the Desert

The wildebeest that Blue killed came from the second largest wildebeest migration on earth. Mark is astounded when he sees the herd of tens of thousands from his plane. From the air they look like a string of black pearls. Delia and Mark fly over the herd the next day and make observations and take notes for their study. They determine that the animals were instinctively heading north for water. The herd, joined by giraffes, gemsbok and hartebeest, are halted in their journey north by a high-tensile fence constructed to control foot-and-mouth disease (protecting domestic animals raised for human consumption).

The herd is forced 100 miles out of their way. Many are becoming weak to continue and are left behind. Thousands in the herd collapse and die. Others have to enter an area where safari hunting is allowed. Those who finally make it to Lake Xau find water but no food or shade. They are attacked by poachers who run them down in trucks or let loose their dogs on them. The ones that make it to the lake will have to drink quickly and then return to the woodlands 25 miles behind for food and shelter. The heat, scarcity of food, fence and poachers all contribute to the death of thousands of grazing animals.

Mark and Delia conclude that the reserve does not provide an adequate habitat for the grazing animals who provide the main food source for the predators. Unless corrective measures are taken, the Kalahari's wildlife will disappear. While they appeal for support from authorities and influential individuals, they have little hope that things will soon change.

Chapter 26: Kalahari High



After two long years, it finally rains. Mark and Delia fly over the wildebeest herd. At first the air is so hot that the rain evaporates before it touches ground. Eventually, however it reaches the thirsty antelope who relish the downpour. Mark and Delia fly over Blue and Bimbo. They see a large male with them who amazingly turns out to be Moffet. He had survived gunshot wounds and the drought. They see the two-year old brown hyena subadults, Pepper and Cocoa, enjoy their first rain. Mark and Delia feel relieved—the animals will thrive for a while. They notice a nearby tree where a blue plastic survey streamer is hanging—an ominous reminder that man may destroy the Kalahari.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Mark and Delia take a last look at the Kalahari. The Blue Pride is split up; Moffet is a nomad; Chary and Gypsy have new cubs; Rascal and Hombre were both shot by ranchers. More than one-third of the lions they tagged, have been killed by hunters, poachers or ranchers. Lions from other prides have been separated from their members; others have been shot and killed. The Frankfurt Zoological society has funded a project to save the wildebeest to be run by two other field researchers. Additionally, the Botswana government is funding programs to help the Kalahari antelope as well.

Mark and Delia are publishing their research results and completing their Ph.D.'s After seven years in the Kalahari, it was difficult for them to fly away for the last time.



Characters

Mark Owens and Delia Owens

Mark Owens, along with his wife, Delia co-authored the book, *CRY OF THE KALAHARI, SEVEN YEARS IN AFRICA'S LAST GREAT WILDERNESS*. The pair spent seven years in the Kalahari Desert, a desolate region in the northern sector of Botswana. Mark and Delia were both students at Georgia State University where they met. They shared a passion for animal conservation and research. Mark and Delia abandoned their quest for doctorate degrees so they could work to save enough money to travel to Africa and conduct wildlife research. Three years later, after saving everything they could and selling all their personal belongings, they flew to Africa, ending up in Botswana.

They settled on journeying to the vast wildlife reserve located in one of the most isolated areas of Africa. They bought a third-hand Range Rover and have a rough trip to the Kalahari. They were elated to see the vast herds of thousands of grazing springbok, gemsbok and hartebeest in the area known as the Valley of Deception where they made their camp. When they were almost out of supplies and money, they receive word that National Geographic awarded them a research grant. It wasn't a large amount—\$3,800 in 1972 values—but they were jubilant.

The pair stay on for what would be seven years. Their research focused first on the elusive brown hyena. Not much was known about the species, so their dedicated research provided important data about the animals. Later, Mark and Delia focused on the lions of the Kalahari. They studied the habits of a lion pride that they named the Blue Pride. Once again, their work added important information about the lions. The Kalahari was so desolate and untouched by human presence that the animals do not perceive Mark and Delia as a threat. This factor allowed Mark and Delia to establish trusting relationships with the animals and to conduct their research mostly unrestricted.

The seven-years that Mark and Delia spent in the Kalahari were rife with danger, risk, health concerns, accidents, and harrowing conditions. On the upside, Mark and Delia learned much about the brown hyenas and lions of the Kalahari. Much of their research revealed new information about the animals that had been unknown until their field work.

Mox

Mox is the twenty-six-year-old African Mark and Delia hire to help them in their camp. They offer to pay him his food and 50 cents per day. When Mark and Delia first meet Mox, he is so shy that he keeps his head bent downward with his eyes on the floor. He cannot speak any English. Mark and Delia only know a few words and phrases in Setswana, Mox's native language. At first, the Owenses are not sure that Mox will work out as their assistant. Africans feel most comfortable among other Africans so the



adjustment of being with two white Americans proves a difficult one for Mox. But through the interpretation of a friend, they learn that Mox is willing to take on the job and more importantly will work for the meager wage of 50 cents per day and food. The 50 cents per day is a raise from the 40 cents per day he had been making on his former job.

When Mark and Delia arrive with Mox to begin his employment, there are several lions from the Blue Pride roaming the campsite. No words were necessary to show the fright Mox had with the presence of the large cats. No one exists in Mox's African social group who studies lions. Mox is bewildered when he learns that part of his job is to track the brown hyena. To Africans, the hyena is worthless vermin. His puzzled expression tell Mark and Delia that he does not understand their interest in the animals. It will be a whole new world for Mox. That first night, Mark and Delia see one of the lions near Mox's tent. They rush down and cannot find Mox. Finally, they hear a rustle and see that Mox without a stitch of clothing up in the tree.

Mox proves to be a great help at the campsite. He cleans and straightens the site and cooks a lot of the meals. He retrieves items stolen by lions and hyenas and other visitors. Mox is a strong, young man and proves to be invaluable helping Mark cart large items around and freeing the truck when it gets stuck in the muck.

Understandably Mox is disinterested and fearful of the wildlife that Mark and Delia are studying, but as time goes on he begins to become somewhat engaged. Mox begins to enjoy the frequent presence of Bones, the large, dominant male of the Blue Pride. He plays a part in the actual research when he is given the responsibility to gather the different species of mice to mount in response to a request from Michigan University. On a trip to Maun to get word of more grant money, Mark and Delia take Mox home for two days off. When they come by to pick him up for the return trip to camp, he is no longer at his mother's hut. No one knows where he is and, so they say, even who he is. Mark and Delia are hurt that he didn't tell them he was quitting. They never see him again.

Lionel Palmer

Lionel Palmer, a professional hunter living in the village of Maun in the northern region of Botswana. The Owens were told to contact him for guidance once they reached this remote village. He is the guide for the hunter who kills Bones.

The Blue Pride

The Blue Pride is the name Mark and Delia Owens gave the lion pride that they track for their wildlife research project in the Kalahari Desert. The name was derived from the blue identification tags that Mark clamps on their ears.



Bones

Bones was the dominant male in the Blue Pride. When Delia and Mark first discover him, he is near death. They immobilize him, mend his broken leg and extract porcupine quills from his body. They bring him fresh meat for days to keep him off his feet. He survives, returns to his position as dominant male of the Blue Pride and becomes a regular at the campsite. . .until a hunter shoots and kills him.

Bergie Berghoffer

Bergie Berghoffer, a field rep for the Botswana Department of Surveys and Lands, flies in to the camp and brings Mark and Delia food and water and other supplies they need.

Norbert Drager

Norbert Drager from Maun flies in and brings food and refreshments for the Owens. He also brings their mail to them.

Star

Star is the female brown hyena from whom the Owens learned the most about their brown hyena research subject. Star is seven years old when she becomes the prey of lions.

Gus Mills

Gus Mills is another field biologist who was studying the brown hyena in southern Kalahari.

Muffin and Moffet

After Bones died, Muffin and Moffet became the two dominant males of the Blue Pride. During the drought of 1979, they left the reserve for food. Muffin was trapped and killed. Moffet was shot in the face and chest but survived.



Objects/Places

University of Georgia

The University of Georgia is where Mark and Delia first met. They were graduate students when they decided to leave the university temporarily and undertake a wildlife research project on their own in Africa.

Johannesburg, South Africa

Johannesburg is the large South African city where Mark and Delia leave and enter the country. They also received their first large grant from the Frankfurt Zoological Society in Johannesburg.

Botswana

The Kalahari Desert is located in the African nation of Botswana.

Gaborone, Botswana

The town in Botswana in which Mark and Delia spend their first night in Africa and purchase their first Land Rover.

Central Kalahari Desert

The vast Central Kalahari Desert is where Mark and Delia Owens track the lion pride they named the Blue Pride for their wildlife research project and where they study the brown hyena.

Great Thirst

An immense track of land in the Kalahari Desert. It is desolate and inhabited by only Bushmen.

Maun, Botswana

Maun, Botswana is the last village in Botswana before the desolate, uncivilized areas of the Kalahari. The Owens obtain gas, water and other supplies in Maun.



Valley of Deception

The Owens made their home in the Valley of Deception in the Kalahari. The valley consists of an ancient fossilized river bank spotted with dunes of green. Some flats of the valley create a mirage that looks like water, fooling even diving birds looking for fish. Thus, the deception it offers is how it got its name.

Boteti River

The Boteti River, near Maun, Botswana, is where the Owenses take some much needed swims after leaving the heat of the Kalahari. They have to watch carefully for crocodiles while they swim.

Echo Whisky Golf

Echo Whisky Golf (the word "whiskey" is misspelled as "whisky") is the name painted on the used Cessna that Mark purchases with grant money. Having the plane allows the Owenses to expand their study of both the lion and the brown hyena.



Themes

Rugged Life in the Kalahari

On their first venture into the Kalahari from the last vestiges of civilization, Mark and Delia take off on their third-hand Land Rover. Mark alights from the truck and walks across shallow water a mile wide, stomping the ground below looking for firm land for the truck to pass over. Still, the Rover would sink at times to its undercarriage. After swatting masses of mosquitoes, they wash the crusted mud off their hands in faces in mud puddles. They sleep atop their truck not knowing what or who may approach at night. The terrain is so adverse that on some days, they would travel only a few miles. Their scant directions to the wildlife reserve include a left turn at a broken palm.

Mark walking in front of the Rover to make sure the terrain is safe sometimes steps in animal burrows. He prays that it isn't the home of a venomous snake since they had no anti-venom with them. Without markers or roads, Mark and Delia often get lost burning up precious fuel. In 1972, Mark and Delia venture on this field research study in the Kalahari wildlife reserve with no means of communicating with anyone in the civilized world. They have no phones and no two-way radio system.

At the campsite, poisonous snakes are a constant danger. Both the species the Owensens study are predators. These animals and other predators could at any time attack the vulnerable humans and easily kill them. The lions and hyenas grow to trust Mark and Delia and frequently visit the camp. But they are wild, dangerous animals who could turn on them at any time with the slightest of provocation.

The couple had trouble with their old vehicles the entire time they were there—getting stuck in the mud and muck, breaking down, sustaining damage on the rough terrain, running out of fuel. Truck problems were never-ending with no one to help them. To thoroughly study the lions, Mark bought a prop plane that leaked gas all over the outside and inside the day he brought it home. He was able to land it just as it stalled on the empty tank.

The environment was not friendly. The couple had to contend with fierce fires, torrential rain and droughts. In the hot season, the temperature could reach as high as 150 degrees.

Building Trust in Wild Animals

Delia and Mark personalized their relationship with the wild animals they encountered in the Kalahari by naming them. When Delia baked bread in a pot on the fire, she was forced to share it with Chief and the other hornbills who would perch on her head and shoulders. Of course, Delia encouraged them. Early on, she began leaving bread crumbs out for them and dishes of water. Laramie the Lizard was another frequent guest. He nested in their camp on one of the empty boxes on top of an orange crate.



Laramie was helpful to Delia and Mark as he ate as many flies as he could find. Delia would use a forceps and personally feed him termites, his favorite food.

Most of the animals that Delia and Mark encountered in the Kalahari were not afraid of them. The Valley of Deception where the Owenses set up their camp was so desolate that the large majority of animals had never seen a human. Hunters were not allowed in the region as it had been granted reserve status by the government. Mark and Delia were extremely careful to be gentle with the animals to further gain their trust. They did not want to disturb the animals; additionally, their work was easier if the animals were not threatened by their presence.

The elusive brown hyenas, one of their main research subjects, at first hid in the bushes from them and were rarely seen. But the nocturnal animals began to trust the Owenses and were not disturbed when the Owenses followed them on their nightly foraging expeditions.

Delia's very first encounter with the Blue Lion Pride were with two of the large males. She was sleeping in her tent when they stopped by and stuck their heads in. Mark was a short distance away in his truck but realized she was blinking her flashlight in distress. He was astonished to see the two large males with their heads in the tent eyeing and sniffing his wife. He gently drove them off with his truck. They did not hurt Delia but they could have eaten her alive. It was their first point of contact with Delia and Mark who built upon the incident to form a relationship of mutual trust.

The Animals of the Kalahari Desert

There are several categories of animals in the story of the Kalahari Desert. The smallest size group (as in number of species), but most dangerous, is the predators. Predators include lions, leopards, cheetahs and wild dogs. The next group are the scavengers which include the jackals and the brown hyenas. The undulates make up the third and largest group of animals. The undulates include hartebeest, wildebeest, giraffes, gemsbok, springbok, zebra, eland, steenbok, kudu, cape buffalo, lechwe antelope and other grazing antelopes. The undulates are the prey hunted by the predators. The scavengers forage for the leftovers after the predator is finished with the kill.

Many exotic birds visit the campsite of Mark and Delia Owens. They include the yellow-billed hornbill, the violet-eared waxbills, scaly-feathered finches, crimson-breasted shrikes, tit-babblers and Marcio flycatchers. Large eagles, kori bustards, guinea hens and loons are also common in the area. Mark and Delia also had to contend with unwanted visitors to their camp. These pests include rats, mice, mosquitoes and other insect as well as venomous snakes including boomslangs, banded cobras, puff adders, black mambas and others.

During droughts and fires when the grazing animals migrated to other regions, the predators had to settle for smaller prey. These animals include springhares, porcupines, rodents, hyenas, honey badgers and bat-eared foxes.

Mark and Delia also had the opportunity to observe many lion cubs and hyena pups over their seven years in the Kalahari.



Style

Perspective

The book *CRY OF THE KALAHARI, SEVEN YEARS IN AFRICA'S LAST GREAT WILDERNESS* was written by Mark and Delia Owens. It is written in first person with Mark as the main voice. However, in the prologue, he makes the point that the entire book, though written in his first person, is truly a collaboration between he and his wife, Delia, who shares every moment of the Kalahari experience. Some chapters are marked "Delia" so in those cases, she takes the dominant role in relating the story of the chapter.

Mark and Delia are field biologists and ecologists who met as students at the University of Georgia. They both had dreams of attaining their doctorate degrees; however, they temporarily abandon those goals in favor of traveling to Africa to study the wildlife. When they quit their studies, they both took jobs to make as much money as they could for their African venture. It took them three years to save enough. Prior to leaving, they sold everything they owned to fatten their savings. Still, they didn't have much, less than \$7,000, to start research which was not supported or funded by anyone else.

Mark and Delia were not only ideal people to write this book, they were the only people who could have written it. Written from the perspective of the only two people on earth who lived the story, no one else could begin to tell it as completely.

Tone

The overarching tone in this book that is dedicated to the animals of the wild is soft and reverent. Although the adventurers, Mark and Delia, possess great knowledge of the wild animals they love, they are continuously surprised by their behavior and beauty. Everyday they spend on the Kalahari Desert is Christmas morning for Mark and Delia. The respect that both Mark and Delia show for their beloved research subjects is undeniable. In telling the account of their seven years in the Kalahari, they portray the wildlife and plant life as vibrant and important parts of nature. In one episode, they tell of requiring some human guests to use the foot paths that they created rather than step onto the surrounding foliage. The greenery is food for some of the animals and insects of the region and Mark and Delia know all too well what a long time it takes to regrow the greenery in this semi-desert locale.

Mark and Delia both lost a good deal of weight during their first year in the Kalahari. Their only source of protein were beans and an occasional tin of goat meat brought by a rare human visitor. At one point Mark tries to kill an unsuspecting antelope. As he lunges for it, it easily moves away from the strange intruder. He gives up and from his words he is relieved. Mark feels guilty about even considering the slaying.



Although Mark and Delia have voluntarily placed themselves in a hostile, dangerous and isolated environment, the rugged lifestyle they are forced to contend with is incomprehensible. However, the love and respect they have for the hyenas they are researching and the lions they are studying overrides the inconvenience and risky nature of their venture into the Kalahari.

Structure

CRY OF THE KALAHARI, SEVEN YEARS IN AFRICA'S LAST GREAT WILDERNESS, the account of the wildlife research project undertaken by Mark and Delia Owens begins with a prologue and ends with an epilogue. The rest of the account is segmented into twenty-six chapters. The story is written in a straightforward manner with limited use of flashbacks. The story has clarity and is easy to follow due the authors' sparse utilization of technical terminology and explanations. There are 44 pages of photos from the Kalahari. The reader is able to see images of many of the animals that Mark and Delia studied and grew to love and respect during their seven-year tenure in Africa. The photos also show the beautiful but obviously desolate region in which the Owenses conduct their research. After the epilogue, there are three appendices that cover their conservation recommendations for the lions, ungulates and brown hyena. There is a list of the Latin (scientific) names for the animals, along with notes, references, acknowledgments and an index.

The prologue, while placing them in Africa in the midst of lions, explains how the couple temporarily abandon their plans to obtain their doctorate degrees and head off for Africa for a once-in-a-life-time opportunity. After that, the chapters line up in mainly chronological fashion with splashes of other incidents to help drive home the subject being covered.

If the structure of the story was illustrated using a trend line chart to gauge the success of Mark and Delia Owens, the line would begin below the "X" axis and end with a strong showing in its upward trend. The line in between is where the story unfolds with its peaks of hope and dips of hopelessness. The line however gradually trends upward. The saga begins as Mark and Delia Owens with only meager resources travel to the most remote and treacherous area of Africa to conduct wild animal research. Although they start with next to nothing, they don't give up but hang on with grit and tenacity. In the end Mark and Delia reach successes in their research of which they never dreamed. The account is related in a roller coaster fashion which maintains the rapt attention of its readers to its conclusion.



Quotes

"The cheetah, still at full speed, reaches forward a club-like paw to destroy the balance of its prey. The antelope cuts sharply, and what was ultimate form is suddenly perverted. At seventy miles per hour the fence wire slices through the cheetah's nose, shatters its jaw, and snaps its head around. Before its momentum is spent on the mesh, its elegant neck is twisted and broken, the shank of a splintered white bone bursts through the skin of its foreleg. The recent recoils and spits the mutilated form, ruptured and bleeding, into the dirt." (6)

"Here was a place where creatures did not know of man's crimes against nature. Perhaps, if we were sensitive enough to the freedom of these animals, we could slip unnoticed into this ancient river valley and carefully study its treasures without damaging it. We were determined to protect one of the last untouched corners of earth from ourselves." (22)

"The earth never tires; the earth is rude, silent, incomprehensible at first; nature is rude and incomprehensible at first; be not discouraged, keep on, there are divine things well envelop'd; I sear to you there are divine things more beautiful than words can tell. - Walt Whitman" (48)

"I've been this far and no father,' Bergie said. 'Beyond here no man knows.' None of us spoke for a long time. We listened to the wind singing in the grasses and looked over the great expanse of wilderness stretching for hundreds of miles beyond. 'You know,' Bergie said, 'there's only one thing that really frightens me out here, and that's fire.'" (35)

"Early one morning, still groggy from sleep, I threw back the cover from the dilapidated tea crate. When I reached inside, looking for a tin of oatmeal, my breath caught. The long grey body of a banded cobra was coiled in the cans, inches from my hand." (92)

"Much later, when the fire had died to embers, I lay on my back looking up at the blue-black star-filled sky. Had we made a mistake? Had Mox? Why had he left the security of the village and his family—his social group—for the unknown of the Kalahari Desert? I turned the question back on myself." (110)

"Looking back, those nights far from base camp seem as if they were of another world. We lay on our backs beneath stars and planets set like diamonds in the inky black of space and undimmed by any lights of human civilization. Meteors left blue-white trails across the sky and man-made satellites hurried along on their journeys through space. No one on earth knew where we were; we barely knew ourselves." (150)

"By nightfall we were miles from the last road, the last village, the last contact with humans. From here on we would reckon distance in time, and time by the positions of the sun, moon, and stars in the sky. I slipped off my watch and laid it in the ashtray; it spoke the language of another world." (174)



"From the air we could see the valley and riverbed as a big gameboard, with the hyenas uncannily monitoring the predatory movements of the lions so that they could get at a carcass as soon as the predators had moved off. They were all players in a contest of survival." (219)

"'Fitness' in the term survival of the fittest does not refer to how physically strong an individual is but rather to generations. Any animal, including humans, can increase its genetic fitness in two ways: directly, by producing offspring who carry one half of its genes; and indirectly, by enhancing the survival of its more distant relatives—cousins, nephews, nieces—who carry a smaller proportion of its genes." (267)

"Is there any true selflessness in nature—in man? Why had we come to Africa, worked so hard, for so long, under such adverse conditions? Was it only for the animals? Or was it partially for ourselves?" (269)

"The ecologist cannot remain a voice crying in the wilderness—if he is to be heard and understood." (313)

Topics for Discussion

How were Mark and Delia able to recognize what animals were nearby their campsite in the dark of night?

What are specific animals that fall into the categories of predator, scavenger and undulate?

Mark and Delia determined the reason why the brown hyenas live in clans. What was that reason?

How did Mark and Delia save Bones, the dominant male of the Blue Pride, and what was his eventual fate?

How did the behavior of the lionesses of the Kalahari Desert differ from those studied in the Serengeti?

One of the Owenses favorite campsite visitors was William the shrew. What happened to him?

What were the contributing factors that destroyed a large portion of the vast wildebeest herd that was seeking a water source during the two-year drought?