

Death in the Long Grass Study Guide

Death in the Long Grass by Peter H. Capstick

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Contents

Death in the Long Grass Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Lion.....	4
Elephant.....	8
Leopard.....	11
Cape Buffalo.....	13
Hippo.....	15
Crocodile.....	17
Rhino.....	19
Snakes.....	21
Underrated Killers.....	23
Characters.....	25
Objects/Places.....	29
Themes.....	33
Style.....	35
Quotes.....	37
Topics for Discussion.....	42



Plot Summary

Peter Hathaway Capstick was born in 1940 and died in 1996. He was a famous hunter and author. Born in New Jersey, he attended the University of Virginia and worked on Wall Street briefly before beginning a series of hunting and travel jobs in South and Central America. Later, he traveled to Africa where he held professional hunting licenses in Ethiopia, Zambia, Botswana and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). He published widely in magazines during his hunting career and, beginning in 1977, published numerous books about hunting. Capstick, a chain-smoker and heavy drinker, died from complications arising from heart bypass surgery.

In the text, Capstick delivers a variety of hunting adventures and misadventures interspersed with personal commentary regarding many aspects of living and hunting in Africa. The text presents a large amount of social commentary and natural history commentary but is clearly not intended to be scientific in these regards. Capstick is quite at ease within his element and offers opinion, experience, rumor, innuendo, and fact mingled together in an eminently readable and exceptionally enjoyable text. The narrative is decidedly non-chronological and dates are unavailable—in fact, sequencing events is often problematic. Chapters are arranged topically and have no chronological relation to each other except as they occurred in the same perhaps decade of time. Likewise, material within a given chapter is not presented chronologically and there is usually no way for a reader to arrange them in order. This does not detract from the reading experience, however, though it may be at times frustrating.

The chapters are generally arranged in descending order of length but this appears to be an artifact of Capstick's topical organization in descending personal interest and narrative appeal. Thus, the book opens with the longest chapter devoted to lion, moves on to the third-longest and second-longest chapters devoted, respectively, to elephant and leopard, and then continues with a presentation of additional animals often taken during sporting hunting including Cape Buffalo, hippopotamus, crocodile, and rhinoceros. Capstick's vast personal experience dwindles rapidly beyond hippopotamus and the segment on rhinoceros, the shortest chapter in the book, contains little personal observation—by the time Capstick hunted, these animals were generally protected and endangered. The text closes with a short chapter on snakes of many sorts—generally poisonous snakes, and then a grab-bag final chapter considering several different animals likely encountered during an extended African hunt. The strength of the text is clearly found in the first four chapters. Although the observations on hippopotamus and crocodile are interesting, they largely are summarizations of others' experiences and lack the first-hand immediacy found in previous chapters.



Lion

Lion Summary and Analysis

Peter Hathaway Capstick was born in 1940 and died in 1996. He was a famous hunter and author. Born in New Jersey, he attended the University of Virginia and worked on Wall Street briefly before beginning a series of hunting and travel jobs in South and Central America. Later, he traveled to Africa where he held professional hunting licenses in Ethiopia, Zambia, Botswana and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). He published widely in magazines during his hunting career and, beginning in 1977, published numerous books about hunting. Capstick, a chain-smoker and heavy drinker, died from complications arising from heart bypass surgery.

Chapter 1 is the longest chapter in the text, running to nearly twice the length of the book's average. Lions are considered by Capstick and most other hunters to be the classic big game animal. The chapter relates numerous human-lion encounters ranging from the casual sighting through lions killing people and people killing lions. The anecdotal accounts are interleaved with commentary about lions. The chapter opens with an account of Peter Hankin, a notable professional hunter, leading a photography-only safari. Because of reserve park regulations, Hankin leaves behind his Cogswell & Harrison in .375 H&H. During one night of the expedition Hankin, while sleeping, is attacked, killed, and eaten by healthy female lion. In the morning, Joe Joubert, one of Hankin's employees; a Zambian game guard; and Samuel Lenher, a hunting client; find the lioness still feeding on Hankin's corpse. The Zambian game guard shoots the lioness with SG buckshot from a single-barrel Greener shotgun, and the lioness runs off into brush. Joubert tracks the lioness in a wide circle and eventually finds her once again feeding on Hankin's corpse; Joubert kills the lion with a 510-grain Winchester soft-point shot from a .458 Brno.

On another occasion, Capstick is armed with a .475 No. 2 Jeffery's double-barreled express rifle and accompanied by two guides, brothers named Silent and Invisible. The three men are leading a group of Italian clients on safari. One night, a lion claws through the hut walls and lunges at Silent, who grabs a nearby unopened bottle of Coca-Cola and smashes it repeatedly into the lion's face until the animal retreats. The abortive attack makes a large commotion. Soon, the camp is awake. Capstick arms Silent with a Beretta over/under 12-bore shotgun, confiscates the Italians' .460 Weatherby magnums for safety, and sits up, armed, inside his own hut waiting for the lion to return. After about an hour, Capstick's hackles raise and he hears the lion prowling about. Soon enough, the lion leaps onto the roof of Capstick's hut. He points his rifle up and discharges both barrels. A tremendous roar is followed by a crash and thrashing around. Investigation finds a dead lion. As killing the lion was legally problematic, an Italian client courteously took the animal on his own hunting license.

On another occasion, Len and Jean Harvey were honeymooning and staying with Willy De Beer. Len and Willy are both experienced hunters. With Willy are also his wife, his



daughter, and Colin Matthews, his son in law. During the night, a large lioness leaps through the window into the cabin where Len and Jean are sleeping, bites Jean in the small of the back and begins to carry her around. Len, unarmed, attacks the lioness, which drops Jean and attacks Len. Jean flees the cabin to the De Beer's nearby house for help. Willy and Colin procure guns and investigate. Willy is armed with a Model 70 Winchester in .375 H&H; he hands Colin, who has never fired a gun, a Parker-Hale .243 bolt action.

Willy approaches the cabin carefully and hears the lioness feeding on Len. Willy peers, gun first, into the cabin to attempt a surprise shot. He has no luck, though, and the lioness paws his forehead and continues eating. Willy wipes the blood from his eyes and again attempts a shot. The lioness is ready and attacks him, getting a paw around the back of his head. Willy drops the big gun into the cabin and escapes with his entire scalp ripped free and hanging over his face, blinding him. He falls to the ground, and the lioness leaps out of the cabin and begins to maul him. Nearby, Colin tries to fire but the gun is on safe. He steps backward into a pail and falls over, dropping the rifle. The lioness leaves Willy and attacks Colin, who shoves his hand down the lioness' throat. Willy staggers to his knees and sweeps the ground until he finds the rifle. Still blinded, he orients on Colin's screams and fires, works the bolt, fires, works the bolt, and fires. The camp is silent, Colin mentions that Willy has shot off his hand inside the lioness' mouth, but the lioness is dead. Final result: Len is dead and mostly eaten. Jean recovers. Willy takes 222 stitches to his head but recovers. Colin loses one hand and partial use of one leg.

On another occasion, John W. Cox and French professional hunter M. Cornon hunt with some other clients. During the first night of their safari, several lions—an entire pride—wander through the camp and inspect the various tents. All of the staff rush to trees and spend the entire night aloft. The big guns are all still packed away but Cox manages to retrieve and assemble an unnamed make of .308 Winchester. Throughout the night, Cox shot at any lion sound. For hours, the lions circled the camp. In the morning, two dead lions are discovered within the camp—shot by Cox's .308. The remainder of the pride left with dawn. On another occasion, professional hunter Paul Nielszen and client Armando Bassi had wounded a lion that escaped into thick cover. Paul followed the lion with a .458 Winchester, converted from .450. The lion attacked him before he could fire. As the lion mauled him, Bassi closed with his own .458 and killed the lion.

The longest and most detailed lion-hunting story related in the text is that of Capstick's stalking and killing of the Chabunkwa man-eater. Capstick is contacted by a local official who requests he hunt down a lion who has killed eight people in and around Chabunkwa. Capstick and Silent travel to the area and investigate the latest kill, recovering only a few fragments of bone. The man had been killed in his tent and then carried three miles. By the time Capstick locates the kill, it is nearly dark. So, he returns to town and spends the night. He is awakened in the middle of the night by screaming. Rushing to the sound, he finds a hut with a terrified man who explains a lion has just attacked his wife and dragged her away. A few hours later, at dawn, Silent and Capstick track the lion. Capstick is armed with a .470 express rifle with a warthog ivory bead. They find the lion but it has cut its own trail and attacks Capstick from the side. He



swings the gun, and it discharges as the lion impacts him, one shot plowing through the lion. As the lion stands over Capstick, Silent attacks it with a spear. The lion knocks the spear aside, knocks Silent over, and begins to maul him. Capstick can't find the gun but picks up the broken spear and stabs it into the lion twice. The second stab pierces the spinal column. Silent's wounds are mainly on his hand, thrust into the lion's mouth. They are treated successfully. Capstick returns and skins the lion, giving the skin to Silent.

Lions are wild, dangerous animals contrary to what is often broadcast in American media. Even lions in zoos and game preserves are dangerous and lethal. African nations naturally minimize reporting of lion attacks as it is bad for the tourist industry. Lion attacks on humans are far more prevalent than the media reports. For example, in one six-month season in a hunting concession of 1,200 square miles, Capstick learned of six definite cases of lions killing and eating people. Lions do not always eat people after killing them. The influence of lions on the history of Africa—particularly since the advent of European exploration and development—is incredible. Capstick cites the example of Lieutenant Colonel J. H. Patterson, DSO, and the construction of the Uganda Railroad as an example; the story is summarized in *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*.

Another case is that of George Rushby, a famed officer who killed a pride of man-eating lions who claimed 249 human kills during the two years in which he hunted them. Rushby later killed another pride who claimed above 1,500 confirmed human kills. Man-killing lions are prevalent across the African continent but are also much more active in certain locales such as the Luangwa Valley of Zambia. Later in the chapter, a recounting of some famous historical lion-hunters are recounted enumerating such persons as Amenhotep III, Amenhotep IV, and Tiglathpileser I. Capstick then discusses several methods of hunting lions through the 19th and 20th centuries. However, details are scant.

A persistent notion exists that man-eating lions are always old and feeble or somehow injured in such a way that they cannot hunt their 'normal' prey. This is simply not true. In most accounts of the past one hundred years, man-eating lions are documented as being healthy and uninjured. For example, in one compilation, over ninety percent of man-eating lions were categorized as being in good or fair condition. Capstick theorizes that epidemics in Africa may explain man-eating behavior. African custom in many areas is to abandon corpses in the bush, where they are scavenged by lions.

When lions turn to eating humans, they become dedicated to the prey and develop an uncanny ability to take humans in any situation. They often select a particular human and hunt them to the exclusion of other, easier humans. Several minor examples of this are offered. A few anecdotes of 'close calls' are offered. Lions are dangerous as they are likely to charge without hesitation, because they are incredibly silent and hard to see in cover and are incredibly quick. One serious bite can kill a man. Lions typically emit a type of cough, or huff, at the beginning of their charge and this is often the first—and only—sign of a charging lion. The chapter concludes with several amusing but minor anecdotes about lion hunting. One example is of a client who sighted a lion and worked the bolt of his .338 custom Mauser furiously, ejecting all ammunition into a pile, without

remembering to pull the trigger. Chapter 1 includes seven pages of lion photographs. Lion are considered one of the 'big five' African game species.



Elephant

Elephant Summary and Analysis

Capstick's experience with felines, including jaguars and lions, was considerable. Therefore, most safari operators assumed he had some experience with elephants. He finds himself guiding Antonio, an Italian client, on an Elephant hunt. Capstick is armed with a .375 Magnum and assisted by Silent. Antonio is armed with a .475 No. 2 Jeffery's double-barreled express rifle, once owned by Mussolini. The party stalks up to an elephant, and then Silent falls back with Capstick and Antonio close with the animal. Antonio confides that this is his first elephant stalk. Capstick does not confide that it is his, too. The two men advance upon the elephant without seeing it. Suddenly, Capstick realizes they have missed seeing it only because of its size. They have closed to within only a few yards. Capstick asserts that no writing can ever convey the immense size of an elephant. He grabs Antonio's hunting jacket and quietly pulls him back, away from the animal. They retreat five yards, and the huge animal suddenly rears up and begins a charge. Antonio fires both barrels. One impacts in the ground in front of the elephant. The other creases the animal's skull harmlessly. Capstick fires into the animal's head at ten yards, and it piles up just feet from them. Capstick and Antonio wander around trying not to vomit. Antonio looks as if he has just wandered away from a head-on automobile collision.

Elephants are composed of various species but can be divided generally into Indian and African varieties. The Indian elephants are smaller and visually distinctive. They are not discussed in the text. African elephants include two species, *Loxodonta africana* and *L. cyclotis*. Of these, the text is concerned only with *L. africana*, commonly known as the African bush elephant. It is the largest extant land animal and is heavily populated throughout central Africa. Capstick offers a concise discussion of distinctions among various species and sub-species of elephant, noting that numerous classification systems exist, all of which are somewhat wanting. The elephant is incredibly powerful, very fast, and quite intelligent. They can kill humans in a variety of ways but the two most common are using the trunk repeatedly to throw people up to fifty feet in the air, or using the feet and knees to grind people into the dirt with occasional stabs with the tusks. Both forms of attack are entirely lethal. Capstick notes that elephants are herbivores but does include a few brief anecdotes about elephants that ate human flesh. He also repeatedly states that after an elephant is killed it is a good idea to give it one or two extra lethal shots as insurance. Many 'killed' elephants have been merely stunned, and when they regain consciousness are obviously quite dangerous. Because of their innate toughness and their ability to easily kill, many consider elephants to be the most dangerous game animal.

Historically, elephants have been hunted for their ivory tusks. Elephant ivory ranges from blank white to yellow but is always considered valuable. To a large extent, the initial exploration of the African interior was performed by ivory hunters. These largely European men pursued elephants throughout the African interior and almost always



died by elephant attack after careers ranging from a few days to several years. Perhaps the most famous ivory hunter, W.D.M "Karamojo" Bell, survived a prolonged career of hunting with a famously small-bore weapon. The largest elephant recorded was shot by J. J. Fenykovi and stood 13'2" high at the shoulder and weighed 24,000 pounds. Elephant tusks vary enormously in weight. A typical tusk may weigh perhaps fifty pounds whereas the all-time record pair of tusks weighed 226 and 214 pounds. Tusk weight drops post-mortem as ivory slowly dries out. The longest tusks, not the heaviest, measured 10' 4" and 10' 2.5" with girths of 23.5" and 24.25", respectively. Tusks are always claimed as hunting prizes, and any tusk tipping the scales over 100 pounds is considered noteworthy. African elephants are not accurately portrayed in the media. They do not experience musth, or breeding madness. They live only to about their late-fifties and are not afraid of anything. There is no such thing as an Elephant 'graveyard', and there are very few 'rogue' elephants. Also, they are by no means slow or ponderous. Elephants often consume vast quantities of fruit or grain which subsequently ferments inside their digestive tract—intoxicated elephants are typically very aggressive. Wild elephants are unpredictable around hunters. They can only be dropped by a brain shot, and their brain is small in comparison to their massive skull. Further, it is protected by up to a foot of tough, spongy bone.

Capstick participated in several elephant kills as a professional hunter but gained immense experience as a game warden hired to cull herds. As human population expanded in the mid-1970s, the elephant herds were driven into smaller and smaller areas. Elephants are notoriously destructive to the environment, eating up to 600 pounds per elephant each day—usually of bark stripped from trees. Elephant herds can destroy miles of forested land in a very short time which subsequently has profound impact on other animal and plant life. To control this ecological destruction, the Zambian government controlled the elephant population in the Luangwa area. Capstick, under the direction of Bob Langeveldt, killed about 700 elephants. Capstick eventually came to believe that if he continued culling elephants, it would only be a matter of time before a small mistake would prove his last. He, therefore, gave up elephant killing and returned to professional hunting.

Elephant herds are matriarchal and led by a senior female elephant. If she is killed first, the remainder of the herd will mill about in confusion, allowing an entire group of as many as eighteen or so elephants to be killed by one or two riflemen. This assumes the herd can be approached as close as a few dozen yards which requires exacting stalking and a fair degree of luck. It is important to kill all the elephants in a group as if some escape, they generally become very nervous and aggressive around humans. Capstick relates one such hunting experience in considerable detail, in which he and Langeveldt culled fourteen elephants in just a few minutes. Capstick's final kill is against a charging bull. He is down to his last shot in the magazine, and it sounds strange as it discharges. It hits the elephant in the right spot but does not kill it. Capstick leaps to the side as Silent hurls a water bag at the elephant's face. Capstick reloads and kills the elephant as it grinds the water bag into the dirt. He is later able to determine that the errant round must have worked loose in the magazine, the bullet set far back into the case; the increased velocity making the bullet's terminal performance erratic.



The Zambian government built an elephant processing factory near the site of Capstick's culling operations. Capstick and Langeveldt had a quota of thirty elephants each day. The carcasses were transported via truck to the processing plant where they were butchered for meat, leather, ivory, and so forth. None of the elephant carcass was wasted. The meat fed local people. Ivory, leather, and other parts were auctioned on the international market. Other parts were used for various things, and the offal was converted into fertilizer. Thus, the culled elephants were not wasted and in fact provided the economic incentive to retain the wildlife preserve. Even so, Capstick looks upon his days as a culling warden as days of distasteful slaughter. Chapter 2 contains 5 pages of elephant photographs. Elephants are considered one of the 'big five' African game species.



Leopard

Leopard Summary and Analysis

In an African village, July, an older man, watches his only surviving son walk toward the hut from the fringes of town. Suddenly, a big male leopard emerges from the evening shadow and slams into the youth, dropping him to the ground instantly, changing hold in a flash, and then disappearing into the night darkness. July screams out and rushes into the darkness shrieking before friends intervene and delay him. Capstick is in the village for the evening and takes his Evans .470 Nitro in hand. Joined by two trackers, Simone and Deballo, a bushman, Capstick inspects the spoor. The amount and type of blood the find rapidly makes it obvious that the boy was dead seconds after the attack. July receives an injection and is led away. Capstick, Simone, and Deballo wait until morning and then track the leopard. From his pug marks, they judge the leopard to be perhaps 160 pounds and 7'3" in length—an enormous male. After many long, anxious minutes, they find the remains of the boy but not the leopard. Hoping the animal might return to his kill in the evening, the trackers withdraw. Capstick hides motionless nearby suffering through the long hours of afternoon. In the moments of dusk, Capstick's hackles raise, and he somehow knows the leopard has returned. However, the leopard is hunting the hunter. Capstick awaits the right moment and then leaps to his feet, attempting a clear shot. The leopard is too quick and finds shelter. As Capstick approaches, the leopard charges—so fast he hurtles into Capstick askance even as he receives a load of buckshot. Capstick is staggered but delivers two more shots at point blank range, killing the animal. The trackers return and recover the boy's corpse and a shaken Capstick.

Capstick relates the story of the Rudraprayag leopard, active in the 1920s. One night, it broke into a pen, walked through a herd of terrified goats, and killed and ate the shepherd boy. Making other human kills, the Rudraprayag leopard terrorized an entire region of India while legendary hunter Jim Corbett tracked it. One night, the Rudraprayag leopard walked past baits to stalk Corbett directly. Another notable leopard, shot by George Rushby, killed twenty-six humans without eating any of them—apparently for the thrill of killing. Similar examples are rare but not unheard of.

Leopards have been described as the perfect killing machine. They are the most-successful predator in the world by nearly any standard with a vast range. African and Asian leopards are nearly identical. They are elusive, clever, bold and dangerous, though they seldom top 115 pounds and 6 ½ feet in length. The leopard is the smallest animal that routinely kills and eats humans. Aside from impressive strength, leopards move at incredible speeds and demonstrate incredible predatory intelligence. Unlike man-eating lions, leopards take humans as prey generally on an occasional basis only. Few are inveterate man-eaters. A few notable exceptions exist, such as the Panar leopard which killed and ate 400 people in India. Another exception was the Chambesi-area leopard which killed sixty-seven people before meeting an accidental death by leaping onto a man who was carrying his spear pointing back over his shoulder—the leopard's charge ending in impalement. Yet most man-eating leopards also hunt other



prey. This makes hunting man-eating leopards difficult as their hunting efforts demonstrate no predictable pattern. Studies demonstrate conclusively that man-eating among leopards does not arise from illness or wounds. Of seventy-eight man-eating leopards surveyed after death, only one was considered aged and in poor health.

Leopards are often called panthers but this is technically incorrect as *Panthera* describes a genus. Panthers thus include leopards, lions, tigers, and jaguars. Black panthers are leopards, spotted though the spots nearly match the background color. Most notable man-eating leopards are found in Asia. Capstick theorizes this stems more from human population density and governmental reporting structures than from any species variation. Leopards exist in the wilds in huge numbers—often held up as endangered or threatened. They are, in fact, thriving. Capstick cites several reports and authorities to establish that leopards are not in danger of extinction. Instead, they are thought to be rare because of their incredible stealth.

Leopards are hunted differently from other predators. They must be lured in to bait near a prefabricated blind. Hunters must wait in the blind and take whatever shot is presented as the leopard mounts to the bait, usually wired into a tree. Leopards are generally shot in the last moments of daylight, silhouetted against the sky. Their hearing and eyesight are impeccable, but their sense of smell is not well developed. Wounded leopards are incredibly dangerous to follow, especially because they habitually seek out thick cover when injured. Capstick relates a story of a wounded leopard ripping up three sequential professional hunters in a single afternoon before being killed by a fourth. The best weapon for tracking a wounded leopard is a 12-gauge shotgun with buckshot or rifled slugs. Capstick describes his wounded leopard kit which includes body armor, neck armor, disinfectant, and bandages. Charges by wounded leopards nearly always end in attack with a bite to the face or head area and slashing motions with the rear feet which often disembowel victims. Capstick has killed six wounded leopards after stalks through thick brush.

Capstick concludes with a story of leopard hunting. He is guiding an Italian client named Armando. They have a nearly-perfect blind set up near a tree and lure in a trophy leopard. Armando takes a careful shot but nevertheless misses a clean kill. Capstick and Silent track the leopard into thick cover and then hear it growl. Strangely, it does not follow with a charge. Capstick and Silent draw back and hesitate for many long minutes, then proceed having determined the leopard perhaps was too weak to charge. After passing beneath it, they find the animal hiding in a tree after having completed a textbook fishhook trail cut. Fortunately, their earlier hesitation has been long enough that the leopard has bled out; else they would now be the prey. Chapter 3 contains five pages of leopard photographs. Leopards are considered one of the 'big five' African game species.



Cape Buffalo

Cape Buffalo Summary and Analysis

A local man walks along a dusty road on the way home after a day's work. He hears a grunt from the side of the path and sees a cape buffalo charging at him. His body flushes with adrenaline, and he begins to run down the road toward the safety of a large tree. Only feet away from the tree, the flats of the buffalo's massive horns slam into the man, crushing him against the trunk of the tree. The buffalo repeatedly buffets the man against the tree and then uses its horn tips to flip the man into the air several times before chopping him open with its axe-edged hooves. Finally, the buffalo rolls over and over the corpse, grinding it into the dirt of the trail until little more than a bloody pulp remains. An hour later, Capstick, two clients, and his staff drive down the same road, coming across the remains and studying them for several seconds before being able to determine the ragged corpse was once human. Capstick unlimbers his .470 and dunks a pair of 500-grain solids into it. They track the buffalo back to a large thicket. Silent mounts a tree and spies the animal and points toward it. Capstick sneaks in and locks eyes with the buffalo, scarcely fifteen yards away. The first massive slug takes the buffalo in the chest, staggering it; the second slug hits the head, knocking away huge chips of horn boss and knocking the animal down. It rebounds and continues the charge as Capstick instinctively breaks the double gun and reloads. The third and fourth rounds are delivered simultaneously at muzzle-range directly into the buffalo's face. The buffalo dies instantly but his forward motion carries him into and onto Capstick, the massive head plowing into the gun and smacking it up into Capstick's face—knocking him out and causing a severe contusion to an eye. Capstick regains consciousness while Silent and Invisible, the brother trackers, roll the animal off his legs. Later, Invisible recovers a .577 lead ball from the animal's thigh. Delivered from an archaic muzzle-loader, the ball had laid on the animal's bone and festered, driving it into a frenzy of pain and frustration. Later still, Capstick files a report about the unlicensed killing of the buffalo. The photographs of the unfortunate villager are more than enough to convince the officials that nothing illegal was afoot.

The African Cape Buffalo, *Syncerus caffer*, is often erroneously referred to as a water buffalo and enjoys a perhaps not undeserved reputation as being decidedly nasty and cantankerous. Buffalo are impressive as they are skilled in all areas. They have excellent eyesight, incredible hearing, and a nearly supernatural sense of smell combined with high agility, rapid speed, and dominating physical power. Buffalo are impressively armed with horns that can disembowel a rhino, hooves like axes, and a ton or more of muscled bulk that can crush a human like a bug. When charging, their thick horn boss often deflects even solids which had led to many hunters' demise. Contrary to well-intentioned but ill-informed preservationists, buffalo are not mild-mannered and timid. They can and often do charge unprovoked and frequently kill people just for stumbling into close proximity. They also often charge automobiles, frequently doing serious damage. Wounded buffalo, unlike virtually all other animals, do not separate



from the herd. This makes hunting a wounded buffalo even more difficult. There is little in common between dairy cattle and Cape Buffalo.

If a buffalo is shot unaware, and the shot is fair, they will often drop as if poleaxed. Yet, if the wound is not immediately lethal, if the animal is alert and agitated, then the buffalo's amazing capacity to generate and function on adrenaline is realized. Once thus readied, killing an enraged buffalo can be extremely tricky. Capstick relates a few concise anecdotes describing a wounded and enraged buffalo's enormous tenacity of life. In one instance, he approached a downed-but-not-dead buffalo shot through the main neck artery—among other lethal wounds. He discovered that each heartbeat was spraying a thumb-sized stream of blood from the artery to the measured distance of thirty-six feet. On another instance caught on film, a buffalo received a spear thrust directly into the heart; the spear's pulsing shaft demonstrating that the pierced heart kept beating for many minutes. On another occasion, Capstick and fellow-hunter Bob Welch shot a young bull for meat. Welch used a .460 Weatherby Magnum bolt-action rifle to deliver ten full shots—all correctly placed—on a running buffalo before finally stopping it on the tenth shot with a spine hit. The buffalo had absorbed 60,000 foot-pounds of energy, all placed through heart, lungs, and vital organs, before dropping.

Capstick briefly considers the demographics of Cape Buffalo, and briefly considers several species similar to the Cape Buffalo including the now-extinct aurochs, the guar, and the banteng. He has no personal experience with these animals but others assert they are not as conniving nor as dangerous as the Cape Buffalo. The buffalo herds are one of the primary hosts of clouds of tse-tse flies. The herds were nearly made extinct at one point by a rinderpest epidemic but, in modern times, the herds are extensive and healthy. Buffalo meat is excellent table fare, and lions find buffalo particularly good eating, though bringing down an adult is difficult even for a determined team of lions. Capstick presents one anecdote of lions stalking buffalo only to be in turn charged and driven off by the concerted efforts of a few adult buffalo. Capstick estimates that he has hunted between 800 and 1,000 buffalo in his career, including personally shooting about 400.

One time, Capstick's client shoots a buffalo. Moments later, the hunting party is charged, erroneously presuming the attacking animal to be the wounded buffalo. The party is driven into the trees until Capstick is able to drop to the ground, recover his rifle, and kill the rampaging bull. Then they discover it was not the wounded animal, which has died, but another member of the herd. The chapter closes with the description of one night of herd culling. Capstick and Bob Langeveldt are cropping elephants and other game. They use a parachute-flare to hunt buffalo, reasoning that the animals will be startled by the intense illumination. They sneak into a herd and fire the flare. As predicted, the light paralyzes the animals. Each man kills nine buffalo at short range, and then the plan fizzles as the light sputters out. The startled herd suddenly bolts. Capstick and Langeveldt leap into the trees as the stampede passes them by. They decide that flare culling is perhaps more dangerous than not. Chapter 4 contains three pages of buffalo photographs. African Cape Buffalo are considered one of the 'big five' African game species.

Hippo

Hippo Summary and Analysis

Capstick and his Texan client have concluded a successful day of lion hunting. They sit around the fire and drink and talk, then Capstick retires to his hut for the night. On the walk, as on all walks, he loads his Evans .470 Nitro Express double rifle and slings it. This night, he walks into the darkness and then hears a snuffling grunt. Capstick runs backwards about ten feet and then the beam of his flashlight catches a charging hippopotamus crossing the path where he had just stood. He discharges both barrels from the hip, breaking the flashlight filament and plunging him into complete darkness. Capstick then rushes through the dark to his hut where he retrieves another flashlight and returns to find a monstrous dead animal only a few yards from the path. One shot broke the animal's spine and, humorously, the other shot went wild. Capstick compares missing a hippopotamus at six feet to missing a barn when shooting inside. Hippopotami are territorial and likely to attack anything entering their personal space. Several hundred human fatalities are caused each year by hippopotamus attack.

Capstick quotes a lengthy newspaper article written by Alan Root, a Kenyan nature photographer and filmmaker. In the article, Root describes how he and his wife Joan, along with cameraman Martin Bell, were scuba diving and filming hippopotami underwater. The river's edge was turbulent and fairly shallow, making visibility during egress very limited. Shore party members watched in horror as a male hippopotamus charged the diving unit—who remained unaware because of the visibility. The animal bit Joan in the leg and then flung her to shore, continuing on to attack Root. The animal bit Root in the leg and then scissored the meat from the bone with its huge tusks. As quickly as it had begun, the attack ended. Root staggered to shore where he was assisted by the injured Joan, Bell and others. A doctor provided first aid. Joan's wound was somewhat light but Root's was severe including a fractured bone and requiring skin grafts. After several weeks of recuperation, Root wrote the quoted article.

Capstick describes another hippopotamus attack. Crocodile hunter Bryan Dempster, with assistants Albaan and Joseph, returns home on a small watercraft in the dark. The craft is set upon and upset by a huge male hippopotamus. Dempster and Joseph clung to flotation but Albaan, unable to swim, panicked and started flailing about. Dempster and Joseph watched in horror as the male hippopotamus closed on Albann, bit him heavily in the head and chest, and, thrashing his head from side to side, worried him into tatters before dragging him underwater. Dempster and Joseph floated quietly downstream to safety. Most hippopotamus attacks do occur on the water, often after a small watercraft is overturned. However, hippopotamus feed on land during the night and therefore some attacks occur well away from water. In one example, Capstick relates how a native family was walking along a well-traveled pathway about a dozen yards from a river. Without warning, a male hippopotamus charged from the water, up the embankment, and severed the woman's leg at the hip, killing her instantly but



leaving the infant she had been carrying unharmed. After the single savage bite, the animal immediately returned to the river.

Male hippopotami often engage in vicious dominance battles, and the wounds received during these fights are severe and sometimes fatal. The lacerations caused by tusk slashing are deep, long and painful. Often, severely wounded animals are driven into a frenzy of pain by the wounds. These animals are far more likely to charge and attack humans than specimens in good health. Hunting hippopotamus from the shore is routinely dull. The animals are simply brain shot in the river. Capstick flatly states that such shooting is execution, not hunting. Instead, clients desiring to take a hippopotamus should approach the animals on a sandy embankment and then attempt to provoke a charge, taking a bull as it rushes from the water in the attack. Even so, Capstick feels hippopotamus shooting to be largely contrived sport. Hippopotami are vitally important to the ecosystems where they are found. Their movement keeps river beds from choking with algae and weeds, and their dung is a primary source of nutrients. Capstick considers hippopotamus meat to be excellent eating, though in some areas eating the meat is considered taboo. Another common reason for shooting hippopotami is to garner the corpse for use as bait to draw in lions or leopard. Chapter 5 contains five pages of hippopotamus photographs.



Crocodile

Crocodile Summary and Analysis

The chapter opens and closes with two parts of a single crocodile-hunting story which comprises the bulk of the chapter's length. Capstick and Paul Mason eat scrambled eggs and impala liver for breakfast, and they watch a local woman walk by carrying what looks like a birdcage. Capstick explains that it is really a fish trap. The woman plunges it into the river and gathers out any fish which might be entrapped. As the two men chat and order more food, the woman proceeds to the river, begins to fish, and suddenly screams out in pain and shock. Grabbing their rifles, they run toward the river, crossing the 100 yards quickly enough to see a long, thin arm waving above a watery turmoil for a moment before vanishing. Both men shoot toward the spot where they imagine the crocodile to be, and the water's surface calms to a dead still. Mason, visibly shaken, is reassured by Martin, the local assistant: "There is nothing for it, Bwana...It has always been so. Always has Ngwenya been waiting; always will he wait" (p. 205).

For several days thereafter, Capstick and Mason hunt the crocodile. They do not sight the animal often, but do find its enormous tracks from time to time. Capstick's staff erects various bait traps along the river, and finally the entire staff stakes out likely areas on the river to watch for the gigantic crocodile. Many of the locations are baited with dead hippopotamus corpses. Finally the animal is spotted, and Capstick and Mason rush to the location and sneak up to the bank. They get a clear shot on the animal, and Mason takes a prolonged sight before squeezing off what proves to be a fatal brain shot. The crocodile is dragged ashore and measures 15' 2 ½", topping an estimated one ton. The local villagers quickly assemble as Silent slices open the animal's stomach. Although expected, the sight of a deliquescent severed human arm within the beast causes Capstick's stomach to heave. The arm's bracelets identify the victim as the woman taken only a few days before. Capstick is happy to have taken one more human-eating crocodile but realizes the cycle has continued for a million years and is likely to continue for many, many more years.

Crocodiles are master ambush assassins, catching prey at water's edge with lightning quick charges. Gripping prey in their massively powerful and armored maw, they pull prey into the water to drown. Crocodiles have existed for about 170 million years in an essentially unchanged form. Crocodiles are perhaps the leading human predator in the world today, killing an estimated ten or more humans every day in Africa alone. Crocodile attacks are quick, violent, and usually leave no trace whatsoever. Crocodiles largely are subject to hyperbole regarding their size and weight. Capstick gives twelve feet in length as large for a crocodile, with the largest specimen he personally saw measuring fifteen feet, and the largest mount measuring sixteen feet. The largest official measurement is 19'9"; such a crocodile would stand nearly to a human's chest. A fifteen foot crocodile would weigh perhaps one ton. The ever-present danger of crocodiles had exerted an enormous but understated and poorly studied influence on human development in Africa. Capstick quotes several historical anecdotes of crocodiles killing



humans. What makes crocodile attack so uncanny and unnerving is the usually lightning quick death followed by a complete disappearance of the victim. There is literally nothing left as they are dragged underwater. In one case, the remains of William K. Olson, a Peace Corps Volunteer, were recovered from the stomach of a crocodile—but even such partial recoveries are fairly rare.

Crocodiles swallow many peculiar things besides the obviously edible. Capstick cites examples including bottles, smaller crocodiles, porcupine quills, brass arm rings, wire armllets, wire anklets, necklaces, fiber bundles and stones. The likely but unsavory explanation is that the various wire rings, armllets, anklets, and bracelets recovered were swallowed while still adorning a human limb, since digested. Additionally, human leg and arm bones, human spinal columns, and animal bones are frequently recovered. Crocodiles view humans as simply another prey item. As women usually draw water or wash clothes, women are commonly crocodile victims. Capstick repeatedly states that African natives have an entirely fatalistic view toward crocodile predation. It is viewed simply as an inescapable fact of life. If women are repeatedly taken by crocodile at a particular location, the location is still used to draw water or wash clothes.

Crocodiles have several close relatives, including alligators, and there are several types of crocodiles including some that live in salt water. In general, alligators are considerably less dangerous than crocodiles whereas all types of crocodiles routinely kill and eat humans. Minor or rare exceptions exist, and Capstick notes a few. Crocodiles are surrounded by myth, legend and hyperbole. For example, a common belief is that a crocodile uses its powerful tail to knock victims into the water. Capstick flatly states this never occurs. Instead, the animals are simply lightning fast and strong predators capable of taking nearly any game, even a large rhinoceros.

Shooting crocodiles is made difficult by the relatively small and well-armored brain area, required for an instant kill. Even brain-shot crocodiles can demonstrate an alarming, if amazing, tenacity of life. Capstick relates how one crocodile continued thrashing around and snapping its jaws for hours after its entire brain had been shot away. The animals, quite simply, are tenacious of life. Chapter 6 contains five pages of crocodile photographs.



Rhino

Rhino Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 is the shortest in the text, only one-half the size of the average chapter. Rhinoceros hunting receives less attention even than the snake wrangling considered in Chapter 8. This is for two reasons. First, Capstick has limited experience hunting the animals, and second, because wild rhinoceroses have become rare. Capstick finds little sporting quality in rhinoceros shooting, and many of his kills have been necessitated by self-defense rather than as sporting trophies. In any event, rhinoceros trophies are generally restricted from import into many countries regardless of whether they are legal trophies or not.

The chapter opens with a rhinoceros charge. Silent, sick with malaria, has been replaced by the young tracker Charlie. Capstick, the client, and the trackers hear a charging animal well in advance and take up defensive positions behind trees. Three rhinoceroses burst through the area—a female pursued by a wounded male pursued by a larger, highly agitated, male. The rhinoceroses charge through camp and, for a moment, Capstick supposes the danger is passed. Yet, the last male has in fact turned around and is circling around the base of a tree wherein Charlie has taken refuge. The rhinoceros then charges Capstick who fires a single .470 slug into the base of the animal's second horn, staggering it but not dangerously wounding it. The rhinoceros stumbles around and then charges off in a random direction. Minutes later, Capstick realizes Charlie has not rejoined the party. They backtrack and find the unfortunate man stuck far up in an umphafa or 'buffalo thorn' tree. The tree's numerous and sharp thorns did not prevent Charlie's ascent but do prevent his descent. The group watches with laughter as Charlie picks his way slowly down the tree, hacking at it with a machete, until he reaches the ground where he is swathed in Mercurochrome-soaked bandages.

Hunting in rhinoceros habitat is like hunting in a minefield. Rhinoceroses apparently have a philosophy that is simple—if it moves, charge it and trample it. Their charges are incredibly destructive, and the rhinoceros is therefore a dangerous and unpredictable animal. They are, Capstick asserts, singularly stupid animals. Their horns, composed of fused hair, are highly prized as possessing aphrodisiacal qualities. This, coupled with their naturally violent tempers, has led to their remarkable decline in the past few decades. Today, most rhinoceroses are protected and when killed—even in self-defense—will lead to a legal nightmare. Capstick states "The rhino, if we want to bite the bullet and face it, is an unsuccessful species in the face of modern encroachment by man." As late as 1880, rhinoceroses were common across Africa. However, since then they have suffered precipitous decline. There are two primary species of rhinoceros, the so-called white and the so-called black. Capstick briefly considers the species and briefly describes the species' histories. He also briefly recounts the demographics of similar but now extinct species.



Capstick considers the career of professional hunter J. A. Hunter, who participated in a vast rhinoceros cull even though the animals were endangered. Hunter killed over 1,000 rhinoceroses and considered them to be exceptionally dangerous to hunt. While Capstick obviously agrees, he also remarks that many mock rhinoceros hunts are provided to rich but stupid clients. In these, a captured rhinoceros is driven toward the vapid hunter who takes his anticipated charge on film without much real danger and without any sport. Capstick deplores the practice. A true rhinoceros license cost, all told, about \$30,000 in 1975. Chapter 7 contains three pages of rhinoceros photographs. Rhinoceroses are, for historical reasons, considered one of the 'big five' African game species, though today they are rarely hunted.



Snakes

Snakes Summary and Analysis

African snakes become plentiful in October when the water pans are low and fouled with alkali and mud. Insects abound, dangerous game is irritable, and the snakes appear in large numbers. For much of the year, snakes are not a constant nuisance, but those on safari must be ever-careful to avoid them. Africa features a variety of poisonous and dangerous snakes, including the black mamba, the green mamba, the Boomslang, adders and cobras. A single bite from many of these snakes is fatal. Nor do the snakes care to remain outside always. Capstick's friend Peter Seymour-Smith's house bears a shotgun blast on one wall subsequent to his dispatch of a large and most unwelcome visitor. On another occasion, Seymour-Smith was driving with his wife and child and screeched to a stop to avoid running near a huge black mamba. The snake struck at Jane but, most fortunately, its tail was pinned by a tire and its lunge was cut short by a foot. The black mamba, *Dendroaspis polylepis*, is impressive, large, and terribly poisonous. The colloquial name is derived from the snake's black mouth interior, not from its dull gray scales. Capstick relates several concise anecdotes about black mamba fatalities.

Capstick then tells about entering a grass-thatch restroom one evening to discover a large black mamba in residence. He quickly retreats, obtains a shotgun, and again advances only to find the restroom empty. He fires into the cesspool with predictably explosive results, but the snake is not there. He carefully searches the entire structure to no avail. Thoroughly on edge, he has the restroom fired and waits for the snake to flee the flames—but it doesn't emerge. Unable to relax, he then orders his personal hut emptied, searched, and fired—still no snake. Confused, Capstick spends the night tossing and turning. The next day, he finally solves the mystery. The restroom is located on an overhang near the river, and the overhanging vertical cliff is full of tiny eroded caves, one of which houses the big snake. Capstick finally sets his mind at ease by shooting the snake and watching its body fall into the river and wash away.

The black mamba is predominantly a ground-dwelling snake. Other mambas, the Boomslang, and the bird snake are arboreal. The Boomslang and the bird snake rarely bite but are poisonous. Some cobras, such as the ringhals cobra, *Hemachatus hemachatus*, can 'spit' their venom and are very accurate at directing the flow of venom toward the eyes of a potential enemy. Capstick relates how one day his tracker received a spurt of cobra venom in the eyes. His gunbearer Chagga pinned the man down, pried his hands from his eyes, and urinated into them. Presumably, the sterile urine washed away and neutralized much of the venom. Capstick then dripped anti-venom into the man's eyes and, within several hours, his sight began to return.

For all their glamour and intrigue, the black mamba and the cobra are not, in Capstick's considered opinion, the 'most-dangerous' snakes in Africa simply because they are relatively rare. Instead, the common African puff adder, *Bitis arietans*, holds the dubious



honor. The snake is nocturnal and seeks out the heat of footpaths during the night hours. Their bite delivers poison into deep tissue, and they are prone to bite when disturbed. Their bite causes hemorrhage of the mucous membranes and death within about twenty-four hours. Surviving victims often suffer gangrenous infection and tissue destruction. The python, too, is found in Africa but like many other animals most 'facts' about pythons are hyperbole. Capstick has seen rock pythons up to about eighteen feet in length. Pythons kill by gripping their prey so firmly that they cannot breathe and thus cause death by asphyxiation. Many hunters routinely kill all snakes they see. Capstick does not, finding them to be simply another aspect of nature and feeling that wanton snake killing does not alter the local population noticeably in any case. Chapter 8 contains three pages of snake photographs.



Underrated Killers

Underrated Killers Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 contains a grab-bag of potential human-killing animals instead of remaining focused on a single type of animal. In this sense, it is a deviation from the normal structure of the text but in tone, texture, and style it is entirely consistent. Although about as lengthy as Chapters 7 and 8 combined, fully one-third of chapter 9's pages are devoted to photographs. The chapter opens with an introspective segment considering the relatively commonplace event of death in Africa; in essence, Capstick notes that Africa is a wild place full of dangerous animals and all animals, including human, are considered to be food by some other animals.

One evening, Capstick and his unnamed wife sit with Jan and Lassie Allen at the Khwaai Lodge. Suddenly, several hundred antelope burst from the edge of the vegetation some 300 yards distance and stampede toward the lodge. The antelope flee around the lodge, one of them colliding with Jan's hammock. The antelope herd is pursued by a pack of wild dogs, small-bodied, big-eared, brindled animals that hunt in yipping packs. The dogs drive one antelope away from the herd, then slash its belly open with their fangs while it is still on the hoof, wolfing down its intestines even before it collapses. As the dogs gather around the kill, Jan leads Capstick out to the pack where they are entirely unmolested. Capstick exposes a roll of film on the feasting predators. Such wild dogs drive nearly all African game into a panicked frenzy. The dogs hunting success rate is at least fifty percent, which is remarkably efficient. Most who view a wild dog pack hunt find the spectacle revolting, concluding that wild dogs are somehow 'evil'. In truth, they possess an elaborate social structure, are unquestionably very intelligent, and apparently never hunt humans.

The most-essential African bush sound is the chortling whoop of the hyena. To Capstick, the hyena's gibbering means "you're just meat after all and your day will come" (p. 273). Hyenas are incredibly efficient scavengers but also predators. Hyenas are not cowardly, nor stupid, but are preeminently suited to their environment. Able to gag down and survive on rotting tissue, they prefer fresh meat and can run down most antelope. Their jaws are powerful and can mangle binoculars as easy as they cut through heavy bone. Once, Capstick's client's elephant tusks suffered damage when a hyena chewed one like a bone. Capstick unequivocally states that more human flesh had gone down hyenas' throats than any other land animal. Many African tribes dispose of the dead, or even the elderly and weak, by abandoning them in the brush. There, they nearly certainly are devoured by hyenas. For example, the spotted hyena, *Crocuta crocuta*, accounts for four to five deaths every month in the country of Malawi. Hyenas often take single large bites out of sleeping or drunk humans, apparently preferring to bite off the face or buttocks. Their hunting ability is enhanced by their obvious intelligence and adaptability. The hyena is so omnipresent in Africa that most superstitions focus on the animal. For example, witches are said to take hyena form or raise and control broods of hyenas.



The vast majority of safari shooting is done on a variety of African antelope. Capstick considers the sable antelope to be the noblest, fiercest, and most handsome horned game on the African continent. They are large animals, often topping 500 pounds, and their upper bodies are black. They have thick manes and war-paint facial markings. The horns of the adult male sable, considered the *pièce de résistance* of African antelope trophies, are tightly knurled, long, and end in rapier-sharp points. Sable antelope are among the most-aggressive antelope and frequently attack predators. One evening, Capstick was at the Khwaai Lodge when two lions chased a large sable into the pool area. Capstick grabbed his rifle and investigated to find the large sable, one antler broken off, sauntering away; a large female lion floating in the pool, dead, with an 18" piece of sable horn sticking through her head; and a large male lion severely wounded and slinking off. The male lion's stripped carcass was located two days later. Wounded sable antelope demonstrate a remarkable tenacity of life and infrequently attack hunters. Other antelope demonstrating a fighting spirit include the roan antelope, the waterbuck, oryx, and even the wildebeest. Bushbucks, too, are widely dispersed and frequently aggressive.

Capstick opines that by definition anything unpredictable can be dangerous, and the most unpredictable animal in Africa is obviously the highly emotional client. The text concludes with six pages detailing close calls caused by Capstick's clients' behaviors. The most interesting involves a client's wife who apparently has some type of nighttime fugue, believing herself to be a predatory animal. Asleep but demonstrating incredible strength, she attacks and bites her husband and three other men. Aside from reporting the incident, Capstick offers no explanation. Chapter 9 contains seven pages of photographs.



Characters

Peter Hathaway Capstick

The text offers virtually no biographical data about any of the individuals named beyond perhaps a concise description of their participation in a particular anecdote. Capstick offers precious little auto-biographical information in the text, beyond some personal notes in the Foreword. Capstick offers his 'African' name as Nyalubwe.

Peter Hathaway Capstick was born in 1940 and died in 1996. He was a famous hunter and author. Born in New Jersey, he attended the University of Virginia and worked on Wall Street briefly before beginning a series of hunting and travel jobs in South and Central America. Later, he traveled to Africa where he held professional hunting licenses in Ethiopia, Zambia, Botswana and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). He published widely in magazines during his hunting career and, beginning in 1977, published numerous books about hunting. Capstick, a chain-smoker and heavy drinker, died from complications arising from heart bypass surgery.

Capstick clearly held a deep connection with the African wilderness and enjoyed hunting, tracking and guiding. He found the thrill of the hunt and the real danger of big game exciting and enticing. He was particularly fond of hunting lion and leopard. Much of Capstick's hunting experience was derived during official culling operations where he, along with others, would kill a daily quota of a given species in an effort to control local populations. Capstick's favorite rifle appears in the text to have been a .470 Nitro Express double rifle built by Evans. The rifle was frequently augmented by a pump shotgun loaded with SG buckshot for close-in work in thick cover.

Silent and Invisible

Silent works as Capstick's tracker during most, but not all, of the anecdotes described in the text. Silent is the brother of Invisible, and the two appear to remain on staff throughout most of the narrative events though Capstick relies on Silent far more than Invisible. They speak Fanagalo, among others, and usually carry a spear while tracking. One night, Silent and Invisible are attacked by a lion which breaks through the grass wall of their hut. Silent uses a Coca-Cola bottle to repeatedly smash the lion in the face which drives it off. Silent is one of the few individuals throughout the narrative that Capstick trusts enough to arm during crises. In all respects, Silent is portrayed as the quintessential African tracker—able to locate nearly any animal in nearly any condition and exceptionally wise, nearly prescient, in predicting various animals' behavior. Unfortunately, virtually no biographical data are offered about Silent or his brother Invisible.



Peter Hankin and Joe Joubert

Peter Hankin was a professional African hunter and close associate of Capstick during some of the time considered by the text. Hankin operated a hunting concession which bordered that operated by Capstick for at least some time period and when Hankin was unavailable on one occasion Capstick acted in his stead. After a long and successful career as a professional hunter, Hankin led a group of photographers into a nature preserve where rifles were prohibited. He was subsequently attacked, killed, and partially eaten by a lion. Joe Joubert, a professional hunter on Hankin's staff, tracked and killed the man-eating lion the day after the fatal attack on Hankin. On another notable occasion, Capstick and Hankin were driving together in a Land Rover when they were charged by a bull elephant.

Len and Jean Harvey, Willy De Beer, and Colin Matthews

The four named individuals are attacked one night by a single lion which kills Len, seriously injured Willy and Colin, and injures Jean. Len and Jean, on honeymoon, stayed with Willy De Beer and slept in a cabin near the De Beer's main house. Colin, Willy's son-in-law, was staying with the family. One night, a lioness leapt through the cabin window and attacked Jean. Len, a professional hunter and Rhodesian game warden, attacked the lioness with his bare hands and drove her from Jean. Jean fled the cabin seeking help while the lioness killed and partially devoured Len. Summoned from the house, Willy and Colin approached the cabin with rifles. Willy looked through an open window and was attacked; the lioness nearly scalped him and threw him to the ground, outside the cabin. While the lioness attacked Willy Colin, unfamiliar with firearms, attempted unsuccessfully to fire and drew the lioness' attention. The lioness then attacked and severely injured Colin while Willy gained his feet and, firing by sound along, shot the lion off Colin. At the time of the writing, Willy and Colin were expected to survive their grievous and crippling injuries, including the loss of Colin's hand. Jean recovered from her wounds completely.

Paul Nielssen and Armando Bassi

Paul Nielssen was a professional hunter and associate of Capstick during the period of time considered by the text. Armando Bassi was Nielssen's Spanish hunting client during one hunting misadventure described in the narrative. Bassi wounded a lion which subsequently ran into thick cover. Nielssen followed up the lion, which doubled back and cut its own trail. The lion surprised Nielssen and bit him through the shoulder, knocking him down, and then began to savage Nielssen's leg. Bassi, a particularly resolute client, heard Nielssen's screams and ran into the cover, shooting the lion off Nielssen. Capstick states "Lord, give us more clients like Armando Bassi!" (p. 41). Nielssen is mentioned in passing a few times throughout the narrative in connection with other anecdotes.



George Rushby

George Rushby was a professional hunter and sportsman who held several posts as a culling officer and who also hunted several man-eating lion. He is, historically, probably most remembered for hunting and killing the Njombe man-eating lions. It is unclear from the text how closely acquainted Rushby and Capstick were, but Capstick reports several incidents involving Rushby. For example, Rushby is noted as surviving a fifty-five foot throw inflicted by a wounded elephant, subsequently killing the elephant which, as Capstick dryly comments, "takes a sense of humor" (p. 80).

Bob Langeveldt

Bob Langeveldt was a professional hunter and, later, the full cropping officer in the Luangwa area. For a time, Capstick worked as Langeveldt's partner in culling operations. Together the men culled many hundreds of elephants and Cape Buffalo as well as taking a large number of antelope. Langeveldt is noted as being particularly fond of elephants. On one occasion, he contrives to use a parachute-flare to hunt Cape Buffalo at night. The light works well enough by paralyzing the buffalo and illuminating them enough to be shot. Yet, when it sputters out Langeveldt and Capstick realize their mistake as they are caught in a stampeding herd of terrorized buffalo. On another occasion, Langeveldt and Capstick, accompanied by Silent, cull an entire herd of fourteen elephant—the two hunters shoot seven each, Langeveldt using a .470 and Capstick uncharacteristically confining himself to a Winchester Model 70 African in .458 Magnum. Langeveldt is mentioned in passing a few times throughout the narrative in connection with other anecdotes.

July and Xleo

July is an older African villager, and Xleo is his sole surviving son. One night, July watches Xleo walk home across the village and then sees a huge male leopard bound from the shadows, seize Xleo in a killing grip, and haul the boy away into the nighttime. July cries out and searches for the boy—but he is gone. Capstick, his tracker Deballo, and his gunbearer Simone, happen to be in town the evening of the attack and on the next morning, they hunt the leopard. On the evening after Xleo is killed, Capstick waits near Xleo's decomposing body, hoping for a shot on the man-eating leopard. The leopard does appear but turns the tables on Capstick and begins to stalk him. Capstick finally gains the upper hand, shooting the leopard. Xleo's body is recovered, and his remains are delivered back to July. July and Xleo are not mentioned again in the narrative but stand as a representative family for all those in Africa suffering from human depredation.



Paul Mason

Paul Mason, described as mid-thirties and very fit and tough, is one of Capstick's clients for an extended safari. One day, Mason and Capstick eat breakfast and watch a woman walk by on her way to fish in the nearby river. The woman is attacked and taken by a crocodile, Mason and Capstick arrive too late to do more than see the woman's arm wave feebly and go under, and shoot desultorily at the fading ripples. Mason is aghast at the spectacle and over the next several days, focuses, along with Capstick, on locating the gigantic crocodile. They use hippopotamus bait and enlist Capstick's entire safari staff on a prolonged stake-out which finally locates the giant crocodile. Mason and Capstick sneak up on the huge crocodile, and Mason delivers a single, fatal, brain shot using an iron-sighted .404-caliber rifle. The crocodile measures 15' 2 ½". Mason feels little consolation after taking the crocodile. Silent opens the animal's stomach to discover deliquescing remains of the unfortunate native woman.

Dr. M. P. Kahl

Dr. Kahl took most of the photographs presented in the text. Kahl and Capstick were acquainted in Africa though the nature and extent of the relationship is not discussed in the text. Kahl provides to Capstick a newspaper article written by Alan Root, wherein Root describes a hippopotamus attack on himself and his wife. Aside from this brief mention and the photography credits, Kahl is not otherwise considered in the text.



Objects/Places

Lions appears in non-fiction

A lion (*Panthera leo*) is a large-bodied predatory feline with a historical range covering most of Africa. They are today limited to sub-Saharan Africa. A bewildering variety of sub-species have been proposed by various authorities, but the acceptance of any one scheme generally is controversial. The most distinctive feature of most male lions is the thick mane. They hunt alone or in packs and are considered by Capstick to be the quintessential African big game animal. Needless to say, they are exceptionally dangerous. Lions are the topic of Chapter 1 of the text.

Elephants appears in non-fiction

Elephants are composed of three living species, two of which are endemic to Africa and one to India. Capstick mentions all three species but focuses nearly exclusively on the African bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*). Elephants today range over much of sub-Saharan Africa though their numbers have suffered precipitous decline in recent decades. Although predominantly herbivorous, elephants can inflict horrible damage and death quite easily due to their enormous size, strength, and natural weaponry. They usually travel in herds and many hunters—though not Capstick—consider them the very apex of African big game animals. Elephants are the topic of Chapter 2 of the text.

Leopards appears in non-fiction

A leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is a medium-bodied predatory feline with a historic range covering most of Africa and southern Eurasia. Their range today is diminished though still impressive. They are considered by Capstick to be the ultimate form of predatory animal, though generally somewhat too small to routinely feed on humans—notable exceptions exist. Melanistic leopards are not uncommon and are usually referred to colloquially as 'black panthers'. Leopards are solitary and private animals and are hunted usually from blinds constructed at likely feeding locations. Leopards are the topic of Chapter 3 of the text.

African Cape Buffalo appears in non-fiction

The African Cape Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) is a large-bodied bovine often exceeding one ton in weight. Cape Buffalo are enormously strong animals and demonstrate a remarkable tenacity of life, often prosecuting a charge subsequent to grievous injury. Their eyesight, sense of smell, and hearing are all highly developed, and they carry an array of impressive natural weaponry including heavy horns which protect the brain case during frontal charges. Cape Buffalo are the topic of Chapter 4 of the text.



Hippopotamuses appears in non-fiction

The Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) is a large, primarily herbivorous, mammal demonstrating a semi-aquatic lifestyle. During the day, they remain in water or deep mud. However, during the night, they travel often long distances to feed on plant matter. They are highly territorial and often attack other large animals which they perceive to be threatening. Capstick considers hippopotamus hunting to offer little true sport but does find their meat delicious. Hippopotamus are the topic of Chapter 5 of the text.

Crocodiles appears in non-fiction

A crocodile is one of a variety of species, and the word is often used to indicate related animals such as alligators. Capstick limits his comments primarily to the Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*) though he does discuss other crocodilians to some extent. Nile crocodiles are large-bodied aquatic ambush predators that frequently surprise and take game from the river's edge. Capstick suggests that about ten humans are killed and eaten by crocodiles every day in Africa—which would make them the predominant human predator extant in the world. Crocodiles are the topic of Chapter 6 of the text.

Rhinoceroses appears in non-fiction

The family Rhinocerotidae is composed of five extant species and numerous extinct species; Capstick discusses only two species—the white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) and the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), both endemic to sub-Saharan Africa. The common names focusing on color are somewhat misleading. Although the black rhinoceros is darker than the white rhinoceros, both animals are generally gray. The English name 'white' rhinoceros is a corruption of the Afrikaans name 'wyd', meaning wide, not white, and referring to the animal's upper lip, contrasting it to the pointed upper lip of the black rhinoceros. Once considered among the 'big four' game animals of Africa, the rhinoceroses' precipitous decline into endangered status had made modern hunting all but impossible. Capstick considers them stupid, violent, dangerous, and otherwise uninteresting. Rhinoceros are the topic of Chapter 7 of the text.

Poisonous Snakes appears in non-fiction

Africa is home to a variety of poisonous snakes, and their constant presence forms one of the great 'un-romantic' dangers of safari life. Capstick states that any imprudent hunter is likely to receive a snakebite, and notes that all hunting expeditions carry numerous anti-venom kits for the nearly unavoidable eventuality of a snake-bit client. The text focuses primarily on two species of snake; the black mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) and the puff adder (*Bitis arietans*). Capstick concludes that, due to large



numbers and common encounters, the puff adder is the most dangerous snake in Africa. Snakes are the topic of Chapter 8 of the text.

African Wild Dogs appears in non-fiction

African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) are small-bodied, carnivorous, pack-hunting predators. Their diminutive size belies their fierce predatory skills, and they can and often do bring down game as large as large antelope. Capstick details a successful wild dog hunt in the text and the description is vivid and somewhat disturbing. He asserts that most people witnessing a wild dog hunt find it somehow difficult and often later describe the animals as 'evil' due to their cool and violent efficiency. African wild dogs are considered in Chapter 9 of the text.

Hyenas appears in non-fiction

A hyena is a small- to medium-bodied member of a large group of species including several extant species. Capstick limits his comments almost exclusively to the African spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*), also often called the laughing hyena because of its distinctive call. Hyena is carnivorous scavengers though Capstick asserts them to be proficient predators—making them the most common predator in sub-Saharan Africa. Often compared to felines or dogs, hyenas are in fact neither but form a distinct animal family. Capstick believes that more human flesh has been consumed by hyena than by any other organism, largely because of the African native custom of disposing of dead or dying humans by abandonment in the brush—where they are found and devoured by hyenas. Hyenas generally are not considered a sporting animal, and they are considered in Chapter 9 of the text.

Antelope appears in non-fiction

Antelope are herbivorous bovines and enjoy a vast geographical range, being composed of about 90 distinct species. Antelope in their various forms are the most common animals in sub-Saharan African and are the most-often hunted game on the African continent—though seldom considered dangerous, per se. Capstick briefly considers several species of antelope and focuses somewhat more on the Sable Antelope (*Hippotragus niger*). Antelope are considered in Chapter 9 of the text.

Evans .470 Nitro Express appears in non-fiction

Capstick's preferred rifle for most of the hunting described in the text is an iron-sighted Evans double-barreled break-open gun chambered in .470 Nitro Express. Such guns are typical for African hunting but would be vastly overpowered for North American game. Guns of this type are enormously expensive, relatively rare, and a definite status symbol for African hunters. The .470 Nitro Express cartridge delivers a 500-grain bullet

at a muzzle velocity of 2,150 feet per second for a muzzle energy of 5,140 foot pounds. Such a rifle would be, as they say, punishing at both ends (due to recoil).



Themes

Safari Adventures

At the most basic level, the text is a collection of anecdotes relating to safari adventure in Africa. Most of the stories involve Capstick as either a game culling officer or, more commonly, as a professional hunter guiding a more-or-less faceless client on an African hunting trip. A fair amount of information is delivered about the process of going on safari, including comments about various legal arrangements and the costs involved. The types of conditions in and around camp are recorded as are the various types of equipment used. Special focus is given to rifles and ammunition. None of this material, however, is intended to be a formal introduction to safari preparation or participation. It simply forms the irregularly-presented backdrop against which the main theme of the text—safari hunting—occurs.

Nearly every person presented in the text is a professional hunter, a staff member, or a client. The rare exceptions are the occasional relative of a professional hunter or the unfortunate victims of human-eating 'big game' animals. Nearly every anecdote reported in the text revolves around an incident wherein a human is either killed and consumed or at least attacked by an animal intending to do grievous bodily injury. This dominant theme of dangerous adventure in sub-Saharan Africa forms the foundation of the text and provides an exciting and memorable collection of stories which are entirely readable and exceptionally intriguing.

The Unique African Experience

All continents have endemic dangerous animals but nowhere are they present in such variety and concentration as throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Capstick notes lions, elephants, leopards, Cape Buffalo, hippopotamuses, Nile Crocodiles, rhinoceroses, a plethora of poisonous snakes, and a variety of other animals are all present and more than capable human-killers. For example, he states that an average African day sees ten people killed and eaten by crocodiles and yet for that, the hyena eats more human flesh than any other animal. Every month, dozens of additional humans are killed and eaten by lions and leopards. Dozens more are killed by enraged elephants, hippopotami, or rhinoceroses. Scores more die from poisonous bites of snakes or attacks by smaller predators such as hyenas. Clearly, the life of a human in the African bush bears little resemblance to the life of a human in the American countryside. The African experience is unique.

One of the repetitive themes of the novel is Capstick's criticism of and objection to the portrayal of African animals as little more than over-large cattle. On several occasions, he refers to this as the Disneyesque media with its erroneous portrayal of lions as big peaceful kitties, and elephants as really big shy hamsters. Such is not the case, and frequently animals must be killed to stop their human depredation. This flies in the face



of the opinion of many well-intentioned but seriously misinformed animal-loving conservationists. This unique African experience is hammered home by Capstick's portrayal of numerous human kills by various animals. Obviously, African animals require culling and control in a way that is entirely foreign to North Americans.

The Nature of Nature

Capstick's narrative occurs entirely in the midst of African natural splendor. His many camps are usually crude affairs on the range; even when he retires to resort surroundings, such as the Khwaai Lodge discussed in Chapter 9, he is surrounded by vast vistas of African vlei. Capstick devotes much attention to a description of nature; to a consideration of terrain, geography, and plant life. Numerous types of trees are described, the weather and the seasons are considered, and even the geopolitical situation is contrasted against the predominant backdrop of unbridled nature. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in Capstick's extensive portrayal and description of the several species of big game which form the focus of the novel's topic. Each animal species is presented with background information including evolutionary history, geographic dispersion, and a basic analysis of closely related species. Scientific names are provided for most animals presented in the text to aid in identification. Finally, the habits of the animals are developed in detail. For example, through the chapter on leopards, the reader feels as if they are on a leopard hunt, hunching in a crude shooting blind beside Capstick, smoking cigarettes fifty yards from the impala haunch wired to the perfect leopard tree. This intriguing and well-constructed theme runs throughout the entire text and forms the most enjoyable element of the narrative.



Style

Perspective

Capstick, the author and primary actor in most of the incidents recorded in the text, was a professional hunter and game culling warden in several regions of sub-Saharan Africa for a period of many years. With about 700 elephant kills, 800 Cape Buffalo kills, and tremendous numbers of lion, leopard, and hippopotamus kills, Capstick is beyond question a master of the topic considered in the text—that of hunting dangerous game in Africa. In fact, Capstick's fame has led to a modern African game cartridge being named in his honor—the .470 Capstick (this is not the same .470 Nitro Express cartridge preferentially used by Capstick throughout his hunting career, however).

While still engaged primarily in professional hunting, Capstick wrote numerous articles for serial publication. His engaging tone and entirely authentic 'been there, done that' presentation led to wide popular appeal, and the book itself delivers topical material right on target. The narrative discusses hunting in blunt, visceral terms. Capstick does not apologize to the anti-hunting crowd. He dismisses them with the established authority of a master hunter writing to his audience. His numerous accounts of human-eating animals and the sporting lifestyle easily and effectively counter any objection to his life's passion. The narrative is constructed from the point of view of a professional hunter pursuing his chosen career and is eminently enjoyable and easily accessible.

Tone

Capstick's tone is entirely unassuming and almost conversational in nature. He presents a large amount of facts and assertions but does not attempt to put himself forward as a scientist or even a natural history expert. He is preeminently a professional hunter and makes no excuses about it. For example, the novel presents scientific names of various species but Capstick does not present these in such a way as to appear ostentatious or superior. Rather, his primary information source is his own eyewitness experiences with animals in a somewhat limited area of sub-Saharan Africa. As such, his narrative is unassailably authentic, and the tone is simultaneously engaging and informative. Indeed, the 'guy-to-guy' tone constructed in the text ensures a popular appeal which is durable and engaging. Capstick is obviously at home with a variety of hunting men and was no doubt a first-rate guide and an enjoyable companion in difficult circumstances.

To establish his credentials Capstick makes various factual statements about his experiences. For example, statements such as "After shooting something like 700 elephant, I came to the conclusion that (1) nobody would believe how scary it is, and (2) if I didn't get the hell out of there, one fine morning I would make one of those teensy, tiny errors that elephant cropping does not permit" establish beyond the shadow of a doubt that when Capstick talks about killing elephant he knows what he is talking about.

His recorded numbers of kills on several other animals are equally impressive. There is no doubt that the author is a master of the subject, and this is reflected in the tone.

Structure

The 297-page text is divided into nine enumerated and named topical chapters of uneven length. The chapters generally become shorter as the text progresses and range from the longest 58-page chapter about lion to the shortest 16-page chapter about rhinoceros. Each chapter has several pages of black and white photographs of the animal forming the primary topic of the chapter. Most of the photographs are interesting and of good quality. However, the strength of the book is absolutely the first-hand gritty detail and experience provided by Capstick's conversational presentation of safari adventure and misadventure. Capstick occasionally allows himself to lapse into fictive recreations of un-witnessed events such as the Cape Buffalo attack on the villager which opens Chapter 4; that is, many of the details presented—such as the villager's state of mind—could obviously not be discovered by examining his ragged remains.

The organization of chapters in descending order of length appears to be an artifact of Capstick's topical organization in descending personal interest and narrative appeal. Thus, the book opens with the longest chapter devoted to lions, moves on to the third-longest and second-longest chapters devoted, respectively, to elephants and leopards, and then continues on with a presentation of additional animals often taken during sporting hunting including Cape Buffalo, hippopotamuses, crocodiles, and rhinoceroses. Capstick's vast personal experience dwindles rapidly beyond hippopotamus and the segment on rhinoceros, the shortest chapter in the book, contains little personal observation. The text closes with a short chapter on various poisonous snakes and a grab-bag final chapter considering several different animals likely encountered during an extended African hunt. The strength of the text is clearly found in the first four chapters. Although the observations on hippopotamus and crocodile are interesting, they largely are summarizations of others' experiences and lack the first-hand immediacy found in previous chapters.



Quotes

"Over the next hour the lioness inscribes a large circle through the heavy riverine cover and incredibly, despite her wounds and the men following her, returns to the man she has killed and resumes feeding. Joubert, half-retching with horror and disgust, executes her with a shot from his .458 Brno, the 510-grain Winchester soft-point dropping the man-eater lifeless across the body of her victim. Inspection establishes that the lioness is in the prime of life and previously uninjured or disabled although very lean and, with macabre obviousness, hungry. A post-mortem on the body of Peter Hankin determines that, mercifully, he died instantly of a broken neck from the lioness' first bite." (p. 5)

"Although barely conscious, Willy De Beer had the presence of mind to try to cover his mutilated head with his hands, a feat he accomplished just as the man-eater grabbed his head in her jaws and started to drag him away. Perhaps covering his head was a conscious gesture, perhaps reflex. Whichever, it probably saved his life. As the lioness lay chewing on his head, she may have thought that the crushing sounds she heard beneath her teeth were the breaking of the skull bone instead of those of the man's hands and fingers. De Beer, completely blind and helpless, could only scream as the lioness ate him alive.

"Ten feet away, petrified with terror, Colin Matthews stood watching the cat ravage his father-in-law. In his white-knuckled fists was the .243 rifle, loaded with four 100-grain soft-point slugs and a fifth in the chamber. Colin could have easily shot the man-eater, but he did not. Never having fired a rifle before, he did not know where the safety catch was or even that there was one. As he fought with the little Parker-Hale to make it fire, the incredible, unbelievable, unthinkable happened: Colin Matthews put his foot into a galvanized bucket hidden in the shadows, lost his balance, and fell, dropping the precious rifle." (pp. 17-18)

"Swell. So what's next? You have the same feel of rising panic as realizing your fly is open while lecturing to your wife's garden club. You can't simply stand there and tell Antonio to shoot him in the arse. Just not done. Completely un-pukka. Think now. If you try to shunt your shivering carcasses around to the flank for a side brain shot, he'll probably either see you or hear your teeth clacking out the accompaniment to Malaguenã. But, you had better think up something clever pretty quick, chum, because he's too close. Way too close. And the wind may shift or he'll take a look astern, and things may become intensely unpleasant.

"Grabbing \$50 worth of Antonio's tailored bush jacket in one fist, you decide to back off a touch for more shooting room. You don't like the unnerving way Silent is starting to show too much white around the eye, either. With the casual grace of a landslide, the bull shifts a few feet, opening the angle between you. You freeze. Look at the bloody size of him! He's gained at least four tons and five feet at the shoulder in the past fifteen seconds. You see the great pads of cartilage in his feet expand with his shifted weight until they are bigger than coffee tables. If only you weren't so damned close. Still ruining Antonio's crease, you start to drift back with infinite care, avoiding each dry leaf and



branch as if they were the wire trigger prongs of teller mines. You actually manage to cover five big yards before it happens." (pp. 63-64)

"Softly, we crept to within 300 yards of the grove. At the edge of a tall termite heap I carefully glassed each tree with the little eight-by-thirty binoculars, looking through the gaps in the thin bush ahead. I probed each dark cranny of shadowy limbs for the giveaway of a lolling tail tip, but there seemed to be no sign of life at all, which further convinced me that the man-eater was, indeed, lying up in the trees. There should have been birds and monkeys. He had to be there, I thought; his trail had led directly to the place. Rifle ready, I inched forward a few more yards and my heart fell as a flowing dapple of ebony and amber drifted down the trunk of a big tree in an oily-smooth movement, then disappeared into the high grass like ground fog. 'Christ,' I said between clenched teeth, 'Blew it.' Our chance for a shot at the killer unawares as he lay up, digesting his ghoulish meal, was gone, but in spaces. Yet, we might not have spooked him too badly; he might not have even associated us with the dead child. We moved closer, glassing the trees until I caught the flash of sunlight on a drop of dark blood, falling slowly to splat on the ground under the tree. Finally, I picked out the boy's body, wedged tightly in an upper crotch, well obscured by foliage. Most of his buttocks and part of his side had been eaten away, I noted, trying to keep my breakfast from rising above my throat. Motioning the men back, we retreated to consider the situation." (pp. 118-119)

"Terror grabbed his chest with the first grunt, short and hard from the tangle to his right. It was close, too close, the man knew as he froze, watching the branches shake as the snorts came nearer. He found his legs in a burst of adrenaline panic as the buffalo broke cover, black, hooked head up, pale gray eyes locked on his. Too frightened to shriek, the man dropped his spear and ran for his life, the thunder of flatiron hooves hammering just over his shoulder. Thirty yards a head a large muSassa tree overhung the path with fluffy, green arms, and hope flooded into the terrified man. He was only two paces from the leap that would save him when the flats of massive horns smashed into the small of his back, driving him against the base of the tree with terrible power. Instantly, the bull hit him again, crushing his upper chest against the rough bark, splintering ribs and clavicles like a lizard under a heavy boot. The man was probably dead before his shattered form could fall over. That was just as well.

"Foam flowing over his boiler-tank chest, the buffalo sprang back for a moment, then charged, hooking the cadaver on an icpick horn and dragging it back onto the path. For long minutes he chopped the man like chicken liver with axe-edged hooves the diameter of salad plates. Then, the way a dog will act with a dead snake, he methodically ground what was left of the corpse into the earth by rolling his ton of weight upon it again and again. Satisfied, the gory hulk grunted again and backed off a few paces, watching to see that his victim did not move. Ten minutes passed before he turned and made his way back into the thicket where he lay down, pondering the maggot-crawling, festering wound on his hip." (pp. 155-156)

"Despite what you may have heard, the greatest skill of a seasoned professional hunter



is not the H. Rider Haggard, Hollywood business of nerving out charges and placing bullets precisely at the last second. It is the ability to get the hell out of the way. I am legendary in this field. Over the next six seconds I shattered the world record for one-man heavy-grass crashing and hauling up with two thorn-studded feet at the door of my hut. I scrambled around by feel locating two more rounds for the Evans and even found my other flashlight. With caution that defies description, I ignored the shouting and general uproar back in camp and retraced the path of my recent withdrawal. Sure enough, up loomed a 5,000-pound lump of deflated hippo, a huge bull with long, deep, suppurating tusk lacerations on his back and flanks from a free-for-all with a rival. Waving the beam in the air, I called for my men, who appeared like dusky jinns from the grass." (p. 182)

"The inside of a croc's stomach is sort of an African junkyard. I have found everything from human jewelry to whole wart hogs to Fanta bottles and three-pound rocks inside them. One ten footer I shot in Ethiopia even had a four-foot brother tucked in his belly. According to a reliable writer-hunter, one east African man-eater contained the following horribilia: several long porcupine quills, eleven heavy brass arm rings, three wire armllets, an assortment of wire anklets, one necklace, fourteen human arm and leg bones, three human spinal columns, a length of fiber used for tying firewood, and eighteen stones. I wasn't there, but that sounds just a touch exaggerated if only for the simple amount of the inventory. Stones are commonly found in the stomach of crocs, but whether they are picked up accidentally when the croc lunges for a fish or whether they are meant as an aid to the digestive process like the grit in a bird's crop is unknown. Maybe they're used for ballast." (p. 212)

"The salt-water crocs of Asia are lumped under several types, including the marsh or mugger crocodile and estuarine types, all considered very dangerous. In fact, one of the greatest clashes between man and croc took place during World War II. At the time that Burma was being retaken by the Allies, about 1,000 Japanese infantrymen became caught between the open sea and the island of Ramree, deep in mangrove swamps crawling with crocs, expecting to be evacuated by ships that never arrived. Trying to retreat, they found themselves cut off by the British Royal Navy in such position that they could not regain the mainland. When night came, so did the crocodiles. Witnesses on the British ships have told of the horror of the mass attack on the men, of the terrible screaming that continued until dawn when only 20 men out of 1,000 were left alive. Certainly, some were killed by enemy fire and others by drowning, but all evidence points up that most were slaughtered by the big salt-water crocs." (p. 214)

"We all heard it at the same time, a strange sound like a distant locomotive chuff-chuffing, then another joined with it. I felt a shiver of apprehension as it dawned on me what the sound was: rhino, and coming this way fast. We got to our feet, straining to locate the noise exactly, the thudding of thick, short feet now audible with occasional squeals, muffled by the grass. Grabbing the rifles of the Americans, I handed them to my men and started them climbing with a boost up the tree. We had no rhino license, and I didn't want one of my buckos belting one of them in possible self-defense. I kept the .470 and got behind the wide trunk as my men dispersed similarly. Fifty yards away the grass waved wildly, stirring as the surface of the sea would just over the back of a



couple of big sharks. As I watched from behind the tree, the grass exploded with a cow rhino, then a big bull, then yet another bull. The first bull had a nasty gore wound on his flank and the second began to overhaul him, slashing at his rump with his thick front horn. I held my breath as the cow thundered right by the tree, oblivious to our presence, followed by the males, snorting and foaming, to disappear into the brush thirty yards away. I mentally wiped my brow at our near involvement and was about to step back into the open when there was a particularly savage snort and a shout of fear from some body in the direction the rhinos had passed. I immediately ran into the cover, the big rifle ready, hoping to hell I wouldn't have to use it." (pp. 233-234)

"October in south-central Africa is like a coy woman, a tease full of empty promise. From the first week the heat builds up like a kiln, the smooth daytime breeze of August and September a memory but for the dust-devils, those rude, insulting fingers that probe obscenely at the parched earth in whirling columns of airborne filth and ashes. As the spring days pass, even the scant shade offers little respite from the swelter of midday, which turns blush jackets alternately into muddy maps of moisture and stiff, crackling salt patches. It is very different from the winter, when the sun is warm and the shadows actually cold in the arid air. Now, the humidity grows slowly from the tie-dyed dawn, building like a filling bowl until your brain feels squeezed by the hot band of your skull." (p. 249)

"Sneaking up to the toilet seat, I pushed the muzzles of the double-barreled shotgun up to the edge and levered them downward. There was no movement. In a flash I leaned over the seat and pulled off both barrels, one after the other, straight down the drop-hole. The secondary results were not unlike dynamiting a septic tank while sitting on it, and I certainly got a solid dose of the basic contents of the hole. After, as the British say, purging myself, I managed a cold shower from last night's water, shouting to my understandably confused staff (who might have been wondering what the bwana was doing blowing up the crapper) to keep an eye out for the snake until I was no longer hors de combat from my sneak raid on the can." (pp. 257-258)

"As we sat there in the cool of the late afternoon, a sudden shiver seemed to run through the herds, a signal we could not detect. Then, in an instant, every one of the several hundred antelopes swung about to face the thick bush bordering the vlei some 300 yards away. I grabbed my binoculars in curiosity and turned them on the area. From the distant shadows movement flagged, and a small herd of impala burst out onto the plain, racing and jumping in soaring bounds straight at us. Forty yards behind them a dozen wild dog, big-eared and brindled, streamed in their dust, eating up the distance with inexorable certainty. We stared, open mouthed, as the moving tableau grew closer and one of the impala ewes with a half-grown calf at foot was wedged away from the rest of the herd, eight of the wild dogs swerving after her as four others continued straight for us, singling out a yearling for the touch of death. Fifty yards from the terrace, one of the lead dogs closed on the calf, snapped for a hind leg and dissolved in a boil of dust as it pulled the little fellow down. Realizing the inevitable end of her calf, the mother stopped short, another dog whipping past her in a twisting turn. In a split second the others were on her, her stomach and intestines spilling out, ripped into red flags and partially eaten even before she fell over, swarmed by the powerful, rending jaws. Within



heartbeats, she was literally torn completely apart, legs, body, and head, some of the wild dogs dashing in different directions with scarlet chunks of her still-twitching flesh staining the grass." (pp. 268-269)

"The sound of Africa is not the thundering rumble of a distant lion, nor is it the hollow trumpet of a bull elephant. If Africa has a voice, it is the hyena. Deep in the blackness of night it gropes through the bush in rising and falling echoes that come from nowhere, yet everywhere, insane choruses of whoops, chortles, chuckles, giggles, shrieks, and howls that have a way of reaching out into the guts of a man as he sits by a lonely, dying fire and of raising the hackles of ancient, long-forgotten apprehension. From the first, faraway woouoo-uppp of the pack gathering to the sniggering chitter of the kill, the hyena is telling you something you don't want to be reminded of: you're just meat after all and your day will come." (p. 273)

"Realizing he could get no closer, Selous rose slowly to his knees and fired the huge 4-gauge at the center of the chest. The sable staggered to his knees at the strike of the four-ounce ball but rebounded instantly and galloped full speed for a hundred yards, where he fell. Selous' bearers speared the bull to death. Selous was pleased with the shot: 'Considering my weapon, a smooth-bore elephant gun, carrying a four-ounce round bullet, backed by fifteen drams of coarse powder...the ball, after entering the chest rather low, and passing through the whole length of the body...made its exit by the left thigh, grazing the heart on its passage.' If the ability to travel a hundred yards after having had a .93-caliber ball driven completely through the body lengthwise isn't a fair demonstration of resistance to bullet energy, I'm sure I don't know what is!" (pp. 289-290)



Topics for Discussion

After reading the book, which animal would you consider to be the quintessential African 'big game' animal?

Capstick routinely uses a .470 Nitro Express double-rifle for his hunting. Why do you think he would limit himself to only two rapid shots by selecting such a weapon? What other aspects of his typical gun might make it more desirable than, say, a bolt-action magazine repeater?

After establishing himself as a professional hunter, Capstick was offered a job as a game culler. He found the offer very flattering but in the end turned it down. Why?

The photograph on the back of the dust jacket shows a weary Capstick sitting in the African countryside. Of the various anecdotes related in the book, which one do you most associate with this photograph? Why?

Capstick repeatedly asserts that most Americans have no factual basis on which to make valid statements about African hunting practices. After reading the book, do you find yourself agreeing with the author?

If you could go on safari in Africa, would you? Why or why not?

Of the various big game animals described in the text, which one in particular would you most like to take as a hunting trophy? Why?

Capstick states that the sound of the spotted hyena's weird call connects with humans on a mystical, almost magical, level. Do you think that it is possible due to millions of years of aggressive co-existence? Or is Capstick just up in the night?

Assume that you are going to be attacked, killed, and devoured by one of Africa's big game animals—that you are about to experience first-hand 'death in the long grass'. Which of all the animals considered in the text would you find to be the most horrific in such an encounter?

The text presents many photographs; which of them do you find to be the most intriguing and compelling? Why?