

*General Martin Sibanda seizes Zimbabwe by violence and orders all tourists and foreigners out of the country by any means necessary. Safari Guide Tim Flynn must use all of his resources to get his group of American tourists safely out of Africa after the bloody coup.*

## **Sibanda**

by Tim Farren

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The poster features a man whose head is replaced by a large, textured horned animal head, possibly a buffalo or similar. He is holding a knife with a red cross on the blade. The background is a dramatic, fiery sunset over a savanna landscape with acacia trees. The title 'S/BANDA' is written in a large, red, serif font at the top.

# S/BANDA

TIM FARREN

# Sibanda

The streets and airports of Zimbabwe had erupted into the chaos that much of the world had come to expect from Africa. A continent where bullets, not the ballot box, is the order of succession for its leaders. Tribalism, that inhabits the vacuum of strong leadership in Africa, was the root cause of the uprisings in Rwanda, Kenya, Somalia and many other countries on the continent. It was now in full force in Zimbabwe: all playing into the hands of General Martin Sibanda. Anyone perceived to be an outsider was at risk. The stories of murdered farmers and tourists were not exaggerated—if anything, they were downplayed. Once the pent-up anger of the African native had been released all hell broke loose, and like the cork from a bottle of champagne, it would sit under pressure for years undisturbed; but once uncorked, the stream of anger and pent up aggression released, was unable to be controlled.

Years of oppression by colonialists, and subsequently, their own government, created a pressure cooker of anger and hate that was only waiting for something, or someone, to release the lid. In this case, the liberator of the oppressed was General Martin Sibanda: and he had no inclination to put the lid back on.

“Create a situation so bad that only the government can fix it, and when the people cry out for government to do so, the government will then be their hero.” This was General Martin Sibanda’s motto.

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## Chapter Six

General Martin Sibanda leaned back in his leather desk chair with his back to the desk and a freshly lit Cuban Monte Cristo. He looked over the large courtyard that encompassed the President's personal residence and the barracks for the president's guards along with a parliament building and found himself disconcerted. With the elderly President's health quickly failing, the ninety-two year old despot leader did not have much time left to his reign. General Sibanda had for years, worked out his own succession plan, and now that the time to enact it was upon him, he was questioning his ability to see it through.

General Sibanda had risen through the ranks of the Zimbabwe military rising to minister of defense by showing undying loyalty to now President Joshua Ngaru. He had embraced the struggle of the ZANU PF party to rid the country of colonialism and left his small village to join ZANLA, the military arm of the ZANU PF in his late teens. After a period of training by communist backed soldiers and mercenaries in Angola, he was appointed to a small regiment of soldiers that was led by then Colonel Joshua Ngaru.

Martin Sibanda was not a political man; he simply desired the security he felt he could find by joining other men like himself in the struggle. The promise of regular meals and some kind of pay, regardless of how small, was enough for him to leave the day-to-day subsistence lifestyle of his father and family. The cause, what little he knew of it, was only a minute

justification of his risking his life for a hot meal and a menial amount of money.

During the evenings around the fire, he would listen to Colonel Ngara expound upon the plight of the rural African who had been made a second-class citizen to the white intruders, and were now left without a voice and fertile lands to farm. He would talk of a new government, made up of native black Africans, which would seize the stolen lands from the colonial powers, returning them to their rightful owners. Martin watched the Colonel lead his men on night raids into the border areas of Rhodesia, fighting fearlessly from the front in order to see his dream brought to fruition.

Over time, Martin Sibanda stopped looking at the military group as “something better than nothing” and began to embrace the political purpose that it supposedly held. He would volunteer for the most dangerous missions and became ruthless in extracting information and executing his prisoners. Martin was consistent in delivering valuable information back to the Colonel, extracted from his prisoners by barbarous means. It was Martin’s methods that provided valuable information about the barracks located in Bindura, allowing the Colonel’s soldiers to execute a successful nighttime raid and crippling the efforts of the Rhodesian military in this area. It was Martin that was able to get a captured Rhodesian member of the famous Selous scouts to break and reveal valuable information on troop placements, strengths and strategies. None of this went unnoticed by Colonel Ngara.

Martin Sibanda’s ability to extract information was not simply based on physically painful tortures, which was the normal tactic by the guerilla groups. Martin, over time, had become an expert in psychological techniques, which combined with conventional torture,

would eventually cause even the toughest adversary to break.

Martin's father had drilled into him from the time he was young to listen to his elders and learn from them. "If you are around someone that is the best at what they do, regardless of color, stay close to them and learn from them," his father would often say.

Martin found someone that fit his father's description during his training in Angola: Tim Kelly, a mercenary of Irish descent. Tim Kelly, or "Shiny" as they referred to him, had been a member of the British Special forces and story had it that he was "asked to leave" for reasons he never divulged. He supposedly then joined the French Foreign Legion for a time before being recruited by a private military group out of South Africa. Tim Kelly's nickname was definitely not assigned due to his bright shining personality, or his mouth full of gleaming white teeth, so alien to most of the British. It was reputed that he was named Shiny due to fact that he refused to wear a hat or helmet. His receding hairline revealed a long forehead that allowed the sun and full moon to announce his presence readily. He refused even the standard black charcoal camo paint used by all the other white soldiers. Before going on a mission everyone would paint themselves up with the camo sticks, when one was passed to Shiny he would nonchalantly say, "Nay, I want them to see me coming for em".

During Shiny's tenure in the British Special Forces he was trained as an interrogation specialist. His current employer utilized this skill, and he was tasked with choosing the brightest of the groups they were training and school them in his trade.

Shiny had paid attention to the new recruits that had arrived in the most recent group from Rhodesia and Martin Sibanda caught his eye. Martin was quick

to assess a situation, adept at reading body language and easily made friends—all traits that are very useful to an interrogator. Shiny took Martin under his wing for the next several weeks and did his best to transfer his interrogation skills along to the young man.

During this period Shiny and Martin had been torturing, mostly physically, a soldier captured while doing re-con into Angola from Namibia. For several weeks Shiny and Martin had worked him over without getting any useful, or near truthful information. Shiny's experience told him the man was on the edge of breaking but physical pain wasn't going to push him over. Shiny and Martin woke the man early one morning with a dousing of cold water. Once he had cleared his head the man was shown a hometown newspaper dated the day before. Shiny quickly flipped to the local news page and showed him a story of his mother and sister being killed in an auto accident two days prior. The same man that had held his tongue during severe beatings and days of sleep deprivation started sobbing and screaming incoherent babble. Shiny calmed him down by telling him he would be allowed to go home to the family and attend the funeral if he simply provided answers to a few questions, the man was nodding yes rapidly even as shiny was still making the statement. Shiny proceeded to obtain what appeared to be credible and truthful information from the man over the next hour and a half. Shiny, with questions asked and suitable answers given said, "There, wasn't that easy?" Then he quickly drew his Beretta nine-millimeter and shot the man twice in the face. The newspaper was a forgery and Martin never forgot the lesson. The real key to power is in controlling a mind not its body. A man impervious to physical pain can be controlled and or broken through his emotions; whether it be fear, love, hate, or otherwise. It is your



job to find what emotion controls the mind and the body will follow.

Colonel Ngara appeared out of the shadows and into the light of the cooking fire the soldiers were seated around. Each of them had a metal plate holding *sadza* cooked in a pot over the open fire. "Private Sibanda," spoke Colonel Ngara, "I need to speak with you privately."

The other soldiers' eyes turned to Martin with a combined look of fear and *I don't really know him that well*, in the case this summons was due to bad conduct or something worse. Martin hesitated briefly as he put down his plate of *sadza* and rose to salute the colonel with a military sounding, "Yes, sir."

"Walk with me," said Colonel Ngara.

Martin made his way around the back of the circle of soldiers and joined up with the colonel as he had already striding down the path towards his tent. Martin was tense and his mind was dashing back and forth between, *Had he been falsely accused by another?* or if there was bad news from home. Neither was the case.

"Private Sibanda," the colonel began, "I have been watching you. You are the first to volunteer and the most successful in gathering intelligence regarding the enemy. You have proven yourself to be an important asset and cannot afford to be lost. I therefore am appointing you to oversee intelligence gathering in Mozambique and promoting you to the rank of Captain." This was significant as all ranks in the guerilla forces were simply symbolic until the rank of captain. As a captain you were a real soldier with the pay and respect that came along with it.

Mozambique, a neighboring country to Rhodesia had become a refuge for the ZANLA and was where guerilla soldiers sought refuge and important prisoners

were housed and interrogated. Martin put forth the obligatory objections such as, "I want to stay with my friends, and, this is where I belong, in the fight." This was purely rhetoric, as Martin already knew that this meant he was part of the new government if the war was won.

After hearing his half-hearted objections Colonel Ngara said, "I know you want to be here with your comrades and feel this is where you can contribute the most, but I assure you, the greater good will be served by utilizing your special talents at a higher level."

Martin felt his ego rise and he eagerly accepted the accolades and promotion with a smartly executed salute followed by, "I will do my best to assist in the struggle Colonel."

Colonel Ngara returned his salute and with a big smile told Martin that he would be leaving in the morning for Mozambique. Now, Martin was no longer in the war for food and pay, he was wholly committed to the cause.

Martin, now with a cause and the knowledge that if the Colonel were successful in overthrowing the current white government, he would have a role in that government, threw himself whole-heartedly into the cause.

Not content to sit back and miss the fighting, he would, between interrogations, lead nighttime raids across the border into Rhodesia. He and his men mined roads frequented by white farmers, attacked farms killing the inhabitants and livestock. His men were incentivized by allowing them to rape women and take the spoils found in the wealthy white's homes. He would often bring back white men of military age to interrogate before allowing his men to machete them to death, a favored method of the ZANLA. His success in terrorizing the border towns and farms, along with bits

of important intelligence gathered through the interrogations, made its way back to the Colonel who rewarded Martin with a promotion to major. With each step up the rung of the ladder Martin became more motivated and determined to see the ZANU PF come into power. He began studying books on parliamentary politics, the British form of government that Rhodesia had been formed under. He studied each minister's role and duties, focusing on the ministry of defense, his true desire. As his knowledge of the workings of government increased so did his thoughts on how to manipulate it for personal gain. Yes, he would one day be powerful and rich.

## Chapter Seven



I had finished my mushroom starter before anyone initiated any conversation. Ben, Dr. Walsh's son, asked, "What are we doing tomorrow?" with excitement. I always preferred a guest to initiate conversation on the first evening as it gave me an idea of what was important to them. It was evident from Ben and Kathy's excitement at the airport, and now being the first to ask about tomorrow, that they were very excited to be on safari. This was my entrance to start to lay out the activities of the next eight days in a way that was accommodating to all of the guests.

"We usually have breakfast around seven and try to head for the bush by seven-thirty. I know you all have been travelling for several hours and may want to sleep in later than that your first day"?

All acknowledged approval for the morning departure time and I continued, "Great! It's cool in the morning so be sure to bring a jacket or pullover that you can wear until it warms up. We will have blankets on the truck so you should be fine. We will all be on one truck, there is a cooler with water soda and beer on the truck so no need to bring bottled water with you. We will be out until about eleven-thirty and come back here for lunch. After lunch we will relax until about two-thirty. We will meet back here at two-thirty for tea and biscuits and then head back out until about six. It gets dark shortly after six and we do not like to be out in the bush after sundown."

Francis had finished placing the salad, gnocchi and beef tenderloin on the side table. I interrupted myself and asked everyone to please help themselves. I stood behind my chair waiting for everyone to be served with myself to be last. A few of the guests were complimenting Francis on the mushroom starter as they waited in line to get their main courses.

While in line, Lisa turned to Francis and asked which piece was well done. Without speaking a word he took a pair of tongs and took a piece of the tenderloin towards the kitchen on a plate. As he walked briskly away he said, "This one, it will be back just now."

All of the beef was medium to medium rare but Francis read the impending complaint and headed it off with his intuition developed from years of pleasing clients. I looked towards Lisa and said, "Going forward we will have all meat dishes served with one well done." She nodded and only half smiling said, "Thank you," almost as though she was disappointed that we accommodated her before she could complain. With everyone served and Francis having returned the well-done tenderloin to Lisa and placing it on her plate, I served myself, and sat down.

The wine and pre-dinner cocktails were beginning to kick in and conversation started to increase. Dr. Walsh started by asking me, "How did you end up working in Africa?" I knew this question was going to be one of the first asked of me by any group of clients and always dreaded it. It required me to skim over the whole truth, not really lying, but skipping the low points as to what really drew me here. Dr. Walsh's first name was Tom. I asked, "Dr. Walsh, may I call you Tom?"

He said, "of course" and I began.

“I was working as a stockbroker in my early thirties and had a lifelong dream of visiting Africa. Not being able to find anyone to come with me, I decided to go by myself. I had done a lot of research and concluded that Zimbabwe held the best prospects of seeing the real Africa of old. Thousands of square miles of unfenced free ranging wildlife, rural native villages and a Third World country. I booked the trip with Brian Walker, a third-generation Zimbabwean whose family ran the company. When I arrived, I found Brian and I were the same age and immediately formed a friendship.

“Africa was everything and more that I thought it would be. I instantly fell in love with the culture, the wildlife and the people. If I had been a single man with no commitments I would have never returned to the States, but I had a wife and young daughter at home. After three weeks on safari, Brian and I had become good friends and he asked if I would represent them in the States. I said sure and Brian began forwarding me requests for information that originated in the States. I began arranging safaris for Brian’s company and shortly after, began handling the money and all the paperwork. This resulted in many more bookings than previously and allowed me to return to Africa each year for three or four weeks. After his family lost their farm to the government they left Zimbabwe with the exception of Brian. He refused to leave his home country and tried to make the best of it. Brian and I then started our own safari company.”

This well rehearsed story blew over most of the real reasons I was sitting here in Africa, but most of the time, was sufficient enough of an answer to allow me to move on to another subject, which I took the initiative of doing. “Tom, what made you decide to come to Africa?” I said, in an effort to end answering the previous one.

Tom smiled, knowing that he now had the floor and began. "A couple of other surgeons in the hospital where I worked had gone on safari and came back saying that I just had to go. Their only complaint was that in Tanzania, where they had gone, was that there were too many vehicles out in the bush and often times you would stop to watch a group of lions and there would be six other cars waiting for their turn so you would have to move along. What intrigued me about Zimbabwe was the private safari experience. We are the only ones here correct?"

"Yes," I answered. "We have over a thousand square miles on our concession and we will be the only ones out there. You can stop and take pictures of anything you want as long as you like."

He continued, "That's perfect because I don't want to be rushed with the camera, this is a once in a lifetime trip you know?"

"You can take all the time you need," I replied.

I was curious to know what the common thread was that tied this group together. Ritchie had been the one initiating all of the correspondence during the planning stages of the safari, so I looked to him and asked, "How do you all know each other?" I was glad to be in control of the conversation as it allowed me to avoid questions about me personally, while allowing me to dig into the guest's personalities.

Ritchie put down his wine glass and with his Boston accent began. "I got to know Tom when I was the administrator of the hospital where he works. I retired three years ago. Tom invited his son Ben and wife Kathy. They married three months ago and this is kind of their honeymoon."

"Congratulations, Ben and Kathy!" I said.

Ritchie paused and took a sip of his wine. Ritchie continued, "Nathan is the head of an MRI group that

provides and services MRI machines to ours, as well as several other hospitals, in the Northeast. Lisa is Tom's nurse practitioner and Rob is a CPA in Newton, just outside of Boston. Tom, looked a little perturbed at Ritchie taking the initiative of filling me in on his son and nurse, it was obvious he wanted to gain back control of the conversation. Ritchie surprised me with the fact that he had been the administrator of one of the most prestigious hospitals in the Northeast. He came across more of someone that had built a large construction company, one that had started as one man and a pick up truck with a magnetic sign on the door. I had learned to read people very well over the years and was not usually this far off in my assessment. I liked him more with every moment. I took quickly to successful white-collar executives that presented themselves like a blue-collar guys. This type of personality was usually the most fun and relaxed to be with on safari.

Ritchie, after connecting all the dots relating to the guests, looked at me and asked, "You said you had a wife and daughter. Where are they now?"

Shit! Ritchie threw the ball back into my court. My wife is home in Maine and my daughter is now twenty-four and married with a two-year-old daughter.

Anxious to defer the line of questioning again I turned to Rob and said, "What kind of accounting do you do?" Rob seemed pleased to have an opportunity to jump in. "I am a forensic accountant. I go into companies that suspect embezzlement and dissect the books. I was genuinely interested so asked him to go on.

Lisa, his wife, piped up with, "It's a boring topic. How hot is it supposed to get tomorrow?"

I ignored her and asked Rob to go on, my first chance to delicately rein in Lisa a tad.



Rob, looked at Lisa, as if for permission before continuing and said, "Much of my time is spent providing litigation support in cases of embezzlement and implementing internal controls to prevent fraud going forward. The real fun is when a company calls that suspects fraud and cannot prove it. That's when you really have to become an investigator.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"For instance a large chain of Laundromats suspected someone was skimming cash but could not prove it. I asked them how many gallons of water were needed for a load. They provided the info and I crosschecked it with the water district and found they had used enough water for thirty percent more loads than they had been paid for. We now had proof of fraud and it was down to simply finding out whom.

"That is a first," I said. I never knew such a career field existed.

The guests finished their main course and the dishes were cleared and replaced with the lemon cake and warm custard dessert. I allowed the conversation to subside while turning my attention to dessert.

As I scraped the remaining custard from my dish, a loud series of barks and howls shattered the cool African night air. All heads looked up and

Marlene dropped her dessert spoon into her plate with a heavy clink. "What was that?" while looking directly at me with wide eyes?

"A troop of baboons sounding the alarm, probably spotted a lion or leopard out on its evening hunt-sounds like beyond the dam about a quarter of a mile away, nothing to worry about."

Everyone seemed satisfied with the answer and went back to their eating and drinking except Marlene. "You said lion or leopard?"

"Yes," I said.

“Will they come around the lodge?”

“As I stated earlier this is unfenced free ranging Africa that’s why we don’t go wandering outside the lodge at night.” Regardless of how many times I briefed clients on the dangers of the African bush they never took you seriously, as if it’s some kind of theatrics to enhance the experience, until its real.

Roy, the head tracker stepped into the doorway of the dining room, “Boss, Mr. Moyo is on the satellite phone asking to speak with you.”

I dismissed myself and walked to the staff break area where we kept the satellite phone, picked it up from the coffee table and said, “Hello Samuel, what can I do for you”?

“Tim, President Ngarira is rumored to be very ill and expected to die soon. His wife Rachel has appointed herself president and riots are starting to break out here in Harare.”

Not really knowing what to expect when a vacuum in power was created in Zimbabwe, I pointedly asked, “what can I expect and what would you like me to do?” “I assume the group has arrived?” Samuel asked. “Yes, we were just finishing dinner when you called.” “There is no need to do anything at this time. I simply wanted you to be aware as many of the government workers will be more hostile in their attempts to extract bribes and gather cash, not knowing if they will have a job under a new regime.”

I relayed the story of the roadblock earlier that day and he cut me off by saying, “That is the type of behavior I am referring to.”

“Should I expect problems with Parks and Wildlife?” I asked. Parks and Wildlife was the authority that oversaw the more than nine thousand square miles of the safari area in which we were located, known as the Matetsi/Hwange Safari Area.

“No worries Tim.” Samuel replied. “They will most likely be calling on me for advances on the annual concession fee, road fees and so forth”. If one of them stops by the lodge simply have them call me. Tell them you have no authority.”

I answered, “Will do” and “Cheers,” signing off from the call. I wasn’t concerned after the call, only tuned in to be aware. After all, this is Africa and part of its appeal.

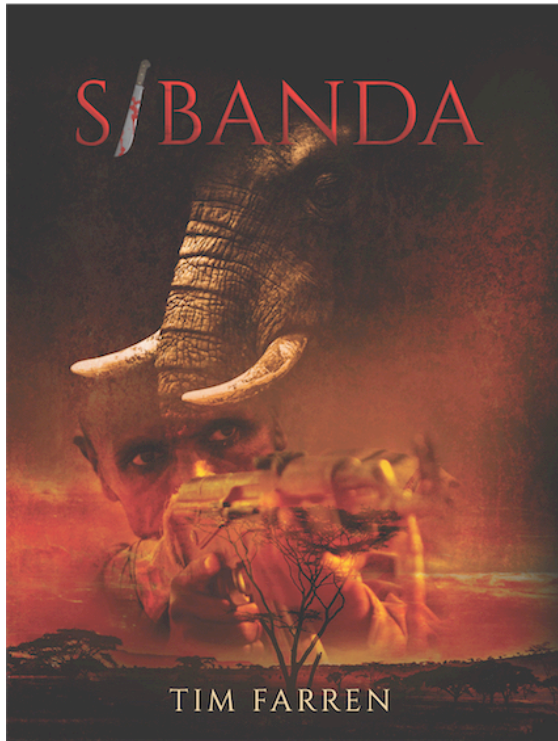
By the time I walked back into the dining area, I had all but forgotten about the call from Samuel Moyo. The guests had finished eating and were sitting and standing around the lit fireplace enjoying drinks. Marlene turned to me and asked, “Is everything OK?” First rule is never let the clients know there is a problem until it affects them. I replied lying, “Nothing at all, simply the lodge owner checking in to make sure you all had arrived safely.”

I poured myself a Scotch and moved to an opening in the group around the fire. Ben and Kathy were the only ones that appeared to want to keep the party going. The others were in varying states of fatigue from the previous days flights and the wine and cocktails were causing them to fade fast. Ben and Kathy had topped off a couple of glasses of vodka tonics and had settled hip to hip on the leather sofa to the left of the fireplace. I dismissed myself briefly to ask Francis to come in one more time to take the orders for breakfast. Francis followed me back into the lounge area with a small note pad and pencil.

After each person had relayed to Francis his or her orders, he turned to me and asked, “What time should I have breakfast ready, boss?” Turning to the group I asked, will seven thirty work for breakfast?” The guests in unison indicated that seven-thirty was fine and with that I dismissed Francis with a thanks and goodnight.

Tom and Marlene were the first to dismiss themselves for the night, thanking me for a wonderful evening and indicating they were turning in. The rest of the group followed, leaving myself and Ben and Kathy alone in the lodge. It was common courtesy as the guide and host to stay up with guests until the last one had turned in. Being the first up in the morning and the last one to bed, often sipping cocktails to well after mid-night, was not as easy for me at fifty-five as it was when I was forty. Ben and Kathy were showing no signs of slowing down and it was well after nine. The multiple glasses of vodka were showing its effects on the couple. They were slurring their speech and their earlier guarded language was now interspersed with an increasing use of expletives. I was hunkering down for what I thought would be at least a couple of hours of idle conversation and a barrage of questions regarding the safari when Kathy whispered something with a giggle in Ben's ear. Ben broke into a grin, finished his vodka tonic in one long drink and said, "I guess Kathy's hitting the wall. We're going to turn in as well."

Being newlyweds I could pretty much figure out what was whispered. I stood, wished them both a good nights sleep and asked if they would like me to walk them to their chalet. Ben replied with, "We're good but thanks." and they both walked towards the stone pathway leading to their room. Ben missed the small step down from the cement floor of the lodge to the path and just managed to catch himself before falling. He looked back to study the obstacle for future reference, never letting go of Kathy's hand, and said goodnight once more. I smiled, said goodnight, and headed for my chalet.



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