

SINISTER WATERS: The Skeleton Coast



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that spans a century."

— *Kirkus Review*

DIANE J DUCA

Sinister Waters takes place in Namibia. Two senior American travelers unwittingly become involved in helping a native tribe discover why someone poisoned their cattle. But the amateur sleuths stumble upon a bigger crime—illegal diamonds.

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By Diane J Duca

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CHAPTER 1

1912 – October, London

BANG! The door slammed against its frame as John rushed inside madly waving a flyer. “Mary, where are you? Come here!”

“Husband, would you please close the door. I feel the cold air all the way back here.” Mary emerged from the kitchen wiping her flour-covered hands down the front of her apron. She stopped short, stupefied at the sight of her overly excited husband. “What are you doin’ home this early? Is something wrong? What is that paper you keep tossing about?” She had to laugh. He looked ridiculous – his face flushed, cap askew, his coat half on, half off.

“I have great news. We gonna be rich! You can buy that blue dress in Ainsley’s store you been eyeing. Oh yes, I seen you yearnin’ each time we pass. And how ‘bout one of them new ‘friges’ to replace our ice box? Won’t that be dandy!”

“Whatever are you talking about? Do you have a fever? Did your boss finally give you a raise?”

“I am quite well thank you, and heavens no, that stingy bastard did not give me a raise.”

“John your language!”

“Sorry Mary, but he is. But never mind, I be goin’ to Africa to prospect for diamonds! Here, read this,” and he pushed the flyer in her hands.

* * *

Present Day – March, Seattle

It was late in March, the early crocus and snowdrops had already faded but daffodils bloomed, and tulip tops peeked from the soil. Dink, a semi-retired senior, yearned to be outdoors working in her garden, but it was raining.

“Enough!” Dink yelled out in frustration, scaring Mr. Kitty, one of her cats, who leapt up from his nap. “I need to get away.”

Pictures spoke to her. Thumbing through a travel catalogue, one particular landscape grabbed her attention. It was a photo of giant sand dunes with one lone climber; his elongated shadow cast a deep purple in contrast to the golden sands. “Where in the world is that?” Dink spoke to Spooky, another of her cats who was curled in her lap, its tail twitching across the page. “It’s gotta be in Africa. Namibia? Never heard of it. Good, someplace new.” She tossed aside the catalogue and the cat, moved to her computer and made a reservation. Excited about her trip, she hoped all would go smoothly and she’d make new friends. She’d lost too many in recent years.

* * * *

September 15 – Johannesburg to Windhoek, Namibia

Dink’s predictable response to her tour company’s flight plan was to reject it. Despite many frustrating hours online trying to mesh arrivals and departures to connect multiple flights, she finally did. But she was on her own if something went awry. Seattle, Paris, Johannesburg, then finally Windhoek was a helluva long distance and Dink wouldn’t breathe easily until touching down in Namibia.

The tour group assembled in Johannesburg where Dink would join them for the flight to Windhoek. The morning after she arrived in Johannesburg, she thought something was odd as she walked down the stairs to the lobby and saw her fellow travelers chatting as if life-long buddies. “Oh crap,” she muttered, feeling back in high school with its various cliques.

Later, at the orientation gathering in their Windhoek hotel, Dink learned all but four of the sixteen group members knew one another from previous trips or from their home towns.

The usually self-confident Dink unexpectedly felt like an outsider and her mood was, for the moment, colored.

The next morning she discovered one person in the group with whom she could relate. It was Marco Corello, a retired physician and a widower. She learned that he, like her, had volunteered in various countries. For Marco it was Doctors Without Borders, for Dink it was Earthwatch's archeological/cultural and environmental programs. Both were passionate about traveling, preferably to unusual places, and not about to stop doing so despite their age.

Dink decided early on that Marco was not only easy on the eyes, but had a sense of humor that she appreciated. A week later in Swakopmund, after sharing a sack dinner by the bird fountain at their hotel, they shared their pasts and a bond was formed.

* * * *

Amsterdam

While Dink and Marco were exploring their new friendship, an engineer and mariner named Rollin, was working on cementing a relationship. He had a dream, and plans to make it happen. All he needed was lots of money from the four people sitting across the table from him in the Savoy Hotel in Amsterdam. Three men – CEOs of major oil companies from Russia, Saudi Arabia, the U.S.- plus a very wealthy, royalty-related, woman from Qatar, controlled his destiny.

“Sea diamonds, gentlemen and lady, are the most precious on earth. Debmarine Namibia has been mining diamonds off its shore since 2002, and within five years extracted 2.6 billion Namibian dollars' worth of high-quality diamonds. And,” he paused for effect, “they have barely tapped into the riches lying on the sea bed. If you will take a look at the proposal I've laid out for each of you, the numbers don't lie. I have already built a spectacular mining vessel, comparable to what South African and Namibian marine miners are using today. My vessel

is paid for, thanks to a generous investor. All I need now is operating funds. Let's get that vessel in the water! I'm ready to launch. Are you on board?' and he chuckled at his witty pun. "This, my friends, could be the most profitable investment you'll ever make!"

Rollin's hands, tightly clenched under the table, waited for three men and one woman to seal his fate, one way or another. He didn't mention the location he'd chosen to mine; they didn't ask.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am an avid traveler, having visited more than eighty different countries, and inspired to write stories based on my personal experiences. On a trip to Namibia, I became particularly intrigued by the Himba people and their tribe's struggle to maintain true to their culture in the 21st century.

Sinister Waters is a work of fiction, but it is also based on various historical accounts. The discovery of diamonds in southwest Africa, the cruelty endured by the native populations under German occupation, and the tragic number of shipwrecks along the Skeleton Coast – none are a figment of my imagination.

Aside from providing a unique setting for my novel, I chose to portray my main characters – Dink and Marco – as senior citizens. In my opinion, elderly protagonists are too often overlooked in general fiction. May we all appreciate that one is never too old for an adventure!

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