

DIABLO

By

Douglas Misquita

A Kirk Ingram action thriller

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events, incidents, and businesses is purely coincidental.

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Douglas Misquita is an action-adventure thriller writer from Mumbai, India. His books, *The Apocalypse Trigger*, *Secret of the Scribe* and *Haunted* have been enthusiastically received by fans of the action-adventure thriller genres. *Diablo* is the sequel to *Haunted*.

He has also penned a travelogue, *Impressions of Egypt* and an action short, *Know Thy Enemy* – the prelude to *The Apocalypse Trigger* – available as a free download from his website.

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Fiction

Diablo

The Apocalypse Trigger

Secret of the Scribe

Haunted

Non-Fiction

Impressions of Egypt

eBook Short

Know Thy Enemy

PRAISE FOR DOUGLAS MISQUITA

DIABLO

Highly recommended. A spectacular ripped-from-the-headlines thriller about terrorism and the global migrant crisis. – bestthrillers.com

4 out of 5. Diablo, by Douglas Misquita, is yet another episode of myriad of characters, from varying social and geographic backgrounds, astutely interwoven together, into a gripping action thriller. - [Chicky Kadambari](#)

Fans of political, thrillers, action and suspense genres will find this a fun read. -[Charity Tober](#)

Douglas Misquita has used a great mix of technology and modern day problem to create an entertaining and thought provoking thriller. - [Payal Sinha](#)

Well written ... tight edge-of-the-seat action drama... the story line is well thought out and the book definitely is (sic) a good read. - [Hemantkumar Jain](#)

THE APOCALYPSE TRIGGER

... a wholesome adventure riveted with action, tech and the good ole apocalyptic plan - [Dallyn Misquita](#)

Amazing book with expertly written action scenes and a plot which leaves you craving for more! - [Tulika](#)

Misquita is a prolific author; he is creating his own oeuvre in the action-adventure-thriller genre, and uses history, technology and fiction quite effectively. - [Roshmi Sinha](#)

I felt like watching a Hollywood movie while reading this book!!! Author's vivid narration made reading exciting and fast moving!!! - [Saravan Pandi](#)

It's a perfect Hollywood script, the plot is excellent and the writing style is totally different. - [Nitin Vadher](#)

SECRET OF THE SCRIBE

...reveals the strength of his writing as well as flexibility in dealing with an almost futuristic story. - [Shana Susan](#)

You know you are in the hands of an adequate and efficient writer - [Mandar Talvekar](#)

An excellent read, this book is fast paced and very difficult to put down - [Omstavan Samant](#)

This book is difficult to put down, so I would recommend reading it over the weekend. It has a gripping story-line combined with a fast pace - [Newton Lewis](#)

HAUNTED

Move over CB and the host of writers who think they can write, Douglas is a star story teller. - [Samarpita Sharma](#)

This is most definitely going at the top of my recommendations list. - [Molly Edwards](#)

It's almost impossible to believe that "Haunted" is the first published work of Douglas Misquita. - [Naman Kapur](#)

Non-stop explosive gun-battles, car chases, double-crossing thugs, and a full cast of dispensable characters carry the plot of this emotion-packed story to an unexpected surprise (sic) ending. - [Richard Blake](#)

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For my wife, Shonna; her contagious excitement over the unfolding story and the support she extends to me during the writing process encourages me onward.

[diablo (noun, Spanish): devil]

FOREWORD

In April of 2015, more than 1200 asylum-seekers died when five boats carrying 2000 migrants to Europe sank in the Mediterranean Sea.

And the world was introduced to the European Migrant Crisis.

The year 2014 witnessed an exodus unlike any other since World War II. January to August of 2015 saw a 125% increase in migrants over the *total* migrants for 2014 – and this does not include migrants who crossed into the EU undetected. People are fleeing civil wars, forced labour and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. These migrants are comprised of asylum-seekers and economic migrants. Most the migrants come from Syria and Eritrea, followed by sub-Saharan African nations and Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There are three major routes (among other land routes) into the EU: the Central Mediterranean, Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Balkan. With changing, ad-hoc border controls along these routes, and flourishing human-trafficking operations, the number of migrants entering the EU through these routes fluctuates year-on-year.

There is no consistent operation to detect and control border-crossings. National interests and economic disparity have prevented the member states of the EU from formulating a common policy on migration. The rise of nationalist, anti-immigrant parties within the EU block and increasing security concerns about terrorism in the Schengen Zone are to blame for the protracted response to the thousands-a-month migrant influx. Religion and ethnicity play a strong role in the acceptance of migrants by a member state.

Many countries within the EU are already debt-ridden and reeling under an economic crisis. Indigenous citizens are moving within the EU in search of better prospects. The arrival of migrants only adds to the economic problems and widens the social and civic chasm. There is a difference in opinion on the need for migrants to compensate for an aging European population, boost economies through increased tax revenue and a larger workforce; and the need for EU member states to provide employment and health, housing and education benefits to their own citizens.

The floodtide of immigration (legal or illegal) out of over-populous 'third-world countries' is inevitably causing a shift in demographics and has applied severe pressure on the EU. Problems of cultural, religious, socioeconomic disintegration and discrimination arise when vastly differing – and sometimes 'shocking' – cultures and traditions are forced to co-exist against the backdrop of a recession.

This implies a highly probable occurrence of increasing dissatisfaction with the existing beliefs, the status-quo, treaties and agreements, distribution of resources and benefits.

Certain individuals and factions fear that a rising migrant population can expedite a scarcity in all resources – and can upset the very balance of power.

Therefore, amid the migrant and economic crisis and associated concerns, there is a more sinister agenda:

How to maintain superiority and power?

A news article from a leading Barcelona daily in 2009

IMMIGRANT TERRORISM ARRIVES IN SPAIN?

58 people – many tourists among them – were killed, and more injured when 4 Improvised Explosive Devices, IEDs, exploded at the popular tourist destination of Plaça Reial, Barcelona. The deadly attacks are believed to be part of a well-thought-out operation: As police and emergency services rushed to the plaza, armed gunmen stormed the Barcelona Star hotel where delegates for the EU Summit on Social and Economic Reform are staying. After indiscriminately opening fire on people in the hotel's lobby, the gunmen have taken hostages in the ballroom. The leader of the gunmen – an immigrant Libyan – has put forth their demands: release imprisoned immigrants who (he claims) were wrongfully accused of rioting at the Plaça Reial Immigrant Demonstrations, punish Spanish authorities for mismanagement and harmful discrimination, and representation for the immigrant community at the Summit.

The international community has denounced this blatant act of Immigrant Terrorism. These incidents will only deepen the schism between an overly-cautious and an overly-humane solution to Spain's rising immigrant-problem.

PROLOGUE

INDIAN OCEAN, 10 AUGUST 2014

Once upon a time, Eid Abudin had been a fisherman. That was before a military coup in Somalia consumed the government. In the absence of a recognized state, the nautical boundaries of Somalia in the Indian Ocean were meaningless. Large fishing vessels flying Asian and European flags intruded upon the traditional fishing grounds. Eid and his kin could not compete with these modern floating fishing-factories that literally sucked the waters clean of anything that swam, and deprived the poverty-ridden Somali fishing folk of their livelihood.

At first, the Somalis believed they could reason with the intruders, make them aware of their plight, and surely they would leave. A flotilla of Somali fishermen set out to meet with the ships. Eid remembered the day they intercepted a Chinese trawler. All attempted communication with the Chinese crew went unheeded. The trawler blasted its horn warning the small boats out of its way. And then something horrific happened: Eid saw one of the boats break upon the Chinese trawler's massive bulbous bow. Before their stunned eyes, the trawler punched *through* the fishing boat and callously squashed the wreck under-keel. The other boats fled before the juggernaut and circled back in its churning wake to recover survivors. None were to be found. With a taunting blast of its horn, the Chinese vessel brazenly went about its business.

Humiliated, angry and desperate, the Somalis contemplated vengeance. At the first opportunity, some exchanged their boats for smaller and faster speedboats; and their fishing gear for Kalashnikov rifles. They began patrolling the coastal waters, more not than often, boarding ships and taking the crew for ransom. While the world condemned these acts of piracy the fishermen rejoiced that they had a means to strike back at the intruders and earn a living.

Besides piracy, there was another – relatively safer – profession that offered easy money. Eid and his friends pooled their savings, bought a bigger boat and began offering ferry services to the burgeoning people-smuggling industry in Somalia and East-African countries.

This voyage would be like the others, Eid thought, as he stood, feet braced apart, at the helm. They were heading north to Egypt. Eid kissed the photograph of his wife and daughters and replaced it on the dashboard. His touch lingered for a moment on the well-creased, faded photo.

His trawler had been stripped of its aft fishing gear. The accommodations below the forward superstructure and the storage holds were crammed with 72 illegal migrants. He would offload them under cover of the night along the Egyptian coast from where they would make the land-journey, north-west to Libya, and then across the Mediterranean into Europe. Eid, at the lowest rung of the people-smuggling ladder, was making a small percentage of the \$1000 to \$7000 per-head that his passengers shelled out. Even that would see him and his family through the year. He guiltily prayed that the situation in Somalia would not improve because people-smuggling was more lucrative than fishing.

He made a course correction and then stepped out onto the open deck to enjoy the afternoon breeze. There was not a vessel in sight on the Indian Ocean. The waves rolled gently under the keel, the bobbing of the boat was almost soothing.

Abruptly, the skies were torn apart by the scream of jet engines. Eid turned his weathered face to the sky, shielded his eyes from the glare of the sun... and instinctively ducked.

The sky above his boat was filled with the wide underbelly of a large aircraft. The roar of its jets was deafening as it passed a mere thirty feet over the foremast. The exhaust of the jets rocked the trawler violently, yawing the boat 30 degrees off the normal. Eid was knocked down to his face. He craned his neck and turned to watch, his jaw open in incredulity. He discerned the airlines insignia – a gold cherub – emblazoned on the tail-fin.

The jets churned the surface of the water as the aircraft rapidly descended. It impacted the ocean's surface, bounced once, twice, like a skipping stone, and then crash-landed with a colossal splash.

The backwash tossed Eid's fishing boat about. He was certain there would be injuries among his passengers. He got to his feet unsteadily. A part of him wanted to mount a rescue operation but another part of him wanted to get out of there. Anyway, he argued with his weak conscience, he could not take on many survivors; his boat would be inundated.

He turned to run into the helm room and increase forward speed when he was overwhelmed by a coughing fit that lasted fifteen seconds. When it subsided, he clutched his chest in agony – it was as if someone had taken a searing-hot iron to his lungs. Eid fell to his knees, gasping. His eyes bulged, his chest heaved like billows. He put out a trembling hand. Ironically it appeared he was reaching out to the sinking aircraft for help. Then he keeled over and blackness enveloped him.

That same day, the Internet and world news media were abuzz with the disappearance of the jetliner:

ETHIOPIA'S AXUM AIRLINES BOEING 777 AIRPLANE VANISHES

Air traffic control and ground stations lost all contact with an Axum Airlines Boeing 777 four hours into its flight. The plane was in regular communication with ATC and there appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary, or any cause for concern. When Mogadishu Traffic Control lost the jet's transponder signal they tried to raise the crew over the normal and mayday channels to no avail. A Turkish fishing vessel was alerted and changed course to the last known position of the Boeing but reported no signs of wreckage. East-African nations have pledged to mount a search and rescue operation for the aircraft. Though it is too early to speculate, parallels are already being drawn to the mysterious disappearance of a Malaysian Airlines flight in 2014.

Seven days later, the story of the missing Axum Airlines flight was still making the news. Another story made smaller news in some countries:

INDIAN COASTGUARD INTERCEPTS PEOPLE-SMUGGLING BOAT OFF THE COAST OF MUMBAI

The Indian Coastguard boarded a fishing trawler when all orders to heave-to were ignored. The boat was carrying 72 illegal migrants and 5 crewmen. All souls were found dead. Preliminary investigations indicate that all souls succumbed to deplorable hygiene and living conditions on the boat. Asylum-seekers pay an average of \$4000 a head and are often unaware of the perilous nature of these voyages.

The story did not receive much attention. After all, nobody cared much for asylum-seekers.

Half-a-world away, a group of men and woman known innocuously as The Council convened secretly to assess the progress of their nefarious plan.

"The test was successful," the convener stated. "The virus works and is undetectable. The remote radio trigger works, too."

"Except that, it took down a Boeing 777."

"That was simply unfortunate."

"Can we change the trigger frequency?"

"Maybe in a future revision of the virus," was the reply.

"What about the Boeing investigation team?"

"If they recover the wreckage they will not glean anything from it."

"And Axum Airlines?"

"They too will not glean anything from the wreckage... *if* they locate it."

There was a moment's silence.

The convener said, "I propose we move to real targets."

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

CHAPTER 1

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA. 12 AUGUST 2014

Kinhasa Abasi sat at an outdoor café in Bakaara Market. His makeshift 'office' made him easily accessible to refugees and asylum-seekers. He conducted business in plain view, unafraid of local authorities. Well-placed bribes and a network of informants ensured that he would never see the inside of a court or prison. Aware of Kinhasa's reputation, the owner of the café allowed him free use of a table for as long as he desired and plied the people-smuggler with a steady beverage service.

Kinhasa sipped his tea and turned a steely gaze upon the mouse-faced customer sitting across from him. Mouse Face had both his hands on the brown paper bag containing his passage fee, hesitant to push it across to Kinhasa. "Having second thoughts?" Kinhasa asked. He was always accompanied by two cronies: his accountant who handled the paperwork, making everything a wee bit official; and a burly bodyguard. At his question, the bodyguard leaned forward intimidatingly and Mouse Face pushed the money across.

"Is it safe?" Mouse Face asked timidly while the accountant thumbed through the soiled notes.

Kinhasa relaxed visibly. Had the customer asked about the ill-fated boat discovered by the Indian Coastguard, Kinhasa was ready with a cooked-up explanation that it was the captain's fault, though he knew that Eid Abudin was one of the finest boatmen he had contracted.

"Yes, it is safe," Kinhasa lied. In the back of his mind, a worry resurfaced. He recalled the days prior to the boat's departure: Kinhasa had been approached by a skinny Somali with a bad case of bromhidrosis. In exchange for a sum of money, the local had asked that Kinhasa sends some immigrants his way on the pretext of vaccination. Kinhasa had greedily acquiesced but had taken precautions and had the local followed. Kinhasa was glad he had done so because whatever had happened on Eid's boat, the foul-smelling local had answers. Kinhasa's brother, Mwenge, was following up that trail. Mwenge was predisposed to interrogation techniques that would swiftly bring matters to light.

Kinhasa was jarred out of his thoughts by a squeal of brakes. A dusty Toyota Land Cruiser ground to a halt near the café and a muscular youth jumped out with a Kalashnikov slung across his chest and a Beretta pistol in his hand. He strode purposefully to Kinhasa. Passers-by scattered and suddenly Kinhasa and his cronies were the only people on the sidewalk. Even the café doors slammed shut. If Kinhasa was uneasy when he saw the armed man

approach him, his uneasiness climbed up several notches when he saw the insignia on the man's military fatigues.

These boys belonged to a mercenary outfit headed by General Karim Mahmud, known otherwise as The General. The General's only allegiance was money, and currently, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was able to afford him with the African Mission for Somalia's (AMISOM) financial support. The General operated autonomously but he got results. For that, TFG and AMISOM turned a blind eye to The General's little illicit businesses provided he did not get out of hand. In the eyes of TFG and AMISOM, General Karim Mahmud was a necessary evil.

The mercenary pointed the Beretta at Kinhasa, "Come with me. The General wants to talk to you."

Kinhasa's bodyguard made no move to intervene. Kinhasa found his voice and attempted to sound unfazed. "About what?"

"The General's sister was on the boat that was found by the Indian Coastguard." Kinhasa felt the life drain out of him. Then the mercenary waved the Beretta and screamed, "Come!"

Kinhasa jumped out of his chair, knocking it over, trying to muster a calm voice. "Okay, okay." He looked at the accountant. "I will meet you later. Get out of here; call Mwenge!"

Kinhasa was bundled into the back seat of the Toyota and with a squeal, the Toyota leaped forward in a cloud of dust.

Kinhasa's escorts looked edgy; he suspected they were high on something. All questions to them were met with silence. The driver sped through the streets without a care for pedestrians, keeping one palm firmly on the horn. The Toyota weaved between slower vehicles and handcarts, nearly mounting the sidewalk at one time. Kinhasa was thrown about in the backseat.

They exited the crowded Bakaara Market-proper and the driver mashed the pedal to the metal, racing toward an intersection. They were in an awful rush. Kinhasa could almost imagine The General waiting for him. The mental image made him gulp. He hoped Mwenge could get answers soon. He had heard stories of –

The Toyota's right-hand windows filled up with the front grille of a Mercedes-Benz Arocs dump truck. The impact was bone-jarring. The truck rammed into the side of the Land Cruiser with momentous force, crumpling the doors and imploding the windows. The lighter Toyota was

shoved laterally across the intersection and launched on a trajectory and sent it – out of control – onto the opposite sidewalk. Pedestrians shrieked and scrambled out of the way. The Toyota ploughed into the wall of a shop, smashing through inside in an explosion of glass, metal, and stone. The shopkeeper narrowly escaped death as the front fender whipped past his head with inches to spare. The Toyota slammed into the inner wall of the shop and came to a halt so sudden that its rear-end was lifted into the air and then banged down squeezing the suspension to its limits. Oil, water and coolant pooled to the floor from the ravaged engine compartment. The driver was whiplashed into the steering column, the impact snapping his sternum. The mercenary who was sitting beside Kinhasa had suffered the brunt of the collision: the right half of his face was a mangled mess; his ribs and right arm were broken. He had fallen into Kinhasa's lap. His eyes were glazed over; blood flowed from his slack jaws. Kinhasa's head had smacked hard into the window – he was bleeding from behind the ear – and his left shoulder was dislocated.

Outside on the road, the dump truck came to a halt. Two masked gunmen climbed out and strode toward the trapped Toyota.

Kinhasa turned his neck and a sharp pain stabbed at him bringing tears to his eyes. His vision swam but he saw the gunmen approaching the shop. They brought their Heckler & Koch G36 rifles to bear. That spurred him into action. Biting his lip against the pain, Kinhasa reached for the mercenary's Beretta which had fallen to the floor. His straining fingers curled around the grip and he raised it, fired through the shattered windows.

His aim was off because his body was still in shock. But he sent the gunmen ducking for cover. Silence descended on the scene of the accident. Kinhasa fought against losing consciousness. He fumbled for the door but the weight of the mercenary dying in his lap restricted his movement. He had to put the gun down if he needed to get sufficient leverage to lift the mercenary's body. A masked head appeared in the shop and Kinhasa fired again, snapping off four shots in succession. Kinhasa's ears were still ringing from the initial impact but in the close confines of the Toyota, the gunshots were loud. The gunman's head snapped back with a spout of blood. Kinhasa waited for the other head to appear. The Beretta wavered in his hand.

Then the other gunman who had been in concealment stepped into view, his G36 spitting bullets. Rounds pinged and dinged off the body of the Land Cruiser, punched holes into doors, punctured the tires. Kinhasa cried weakly and returned fire until his Beretta ran dry. With no threat of return fire, the surviving gunman stepped through the rubble of the shop, walked up to the Toyota, and poked his G36 through the shattered rear window.

The Beretta fell from Kinhasa's grip as he stared at the G36's barrel that was pointed at his face with grim finality.

The gunman pulled the trigger at point-blank range and Kinhasa's head exploded. Blood, gore, and brain matter splashed all over the interior of the Land Cruiser.

Kinhasa's desire to stay out of courts and prisons had come true in a macabre sense.

CHAPTER 2

DANAU CITY, VIENNA, AUSTRIA, TWO YEARS EARLIER

Dr. Phillip Maxwell was one of the brightest minds, and foremost economic and social thinkers of his generation. He had been awarded the Nobel Prize for his innovative ideas on economic and social reform. His theoretical models were globally recognised, and solutions derived from these models continued to be applied to contemporary situations. His books had been standard references at universities and he toured regularly, lecturing and speaking to sold-out conventions. When he was not engaged in academic events, Dr. Maxwell was engaged as a consultant by many developing countries in Asia and Africa. Financially beleaguered European states like Spain and Greece were exploring his ideas. It was rumoured that he had been offered an atrocious six-figure *booking fee* by the Greeks to develop a plan to save them from financial doom.

But everything changed at the EU Summit on Social and Economic Reform in Barcelona, Spain in 2009. One evening, gunmen stormed the Barcelona Star hotel where Maxwell and other delegates and speakers were staying. They overpowered the hotel's security in a brief gun-battle. 20 civilians in the hotel's bustling lobby lost their lives as collateral damage. The gunmen took 50 guests hostage in the ballroom. The attack cost Maxwell his right eye. The hostages were held for three days while their countries argued through bureaucratic ego and red-tape on the best way to rescue them. The gunmen treated their prisoners with disdain, never hesitating to strike or torture the men (using the hotel's electricity). Worse, they even had their way with the women, taking them in groups to the hotel's suites and returning them hours later bruised, humiliated and psychologically damaged. The leader was familiar with Maxwell's work and singled him out to parley.

Maxwell was stunned to learn that the leader, a soft-spoken Libyan youth, had travelled all the way from a small village in North Africa and attacked the Summit to negotiate the release of 62 immigrants, and put the discrimination and oppression faced by immigrants in Europe before the world media.

Maxwell remembered the news footage from two weeks ago:

The gathering of migrant demonstrators from all over Europe in Barcelona's Plaça Reial a fortnight before the EU Summit was the largest ever witnessed by the Spaniards. To many who were watching the drama unfold on national television, the show of strength was greatly disturbing because for the first time they could comprehend how large the migrant population

had grown. Riot police patrolled the plaza on foot and horseback ready to squash any trouble. As the organizers of the demonstration shouted out their demands for equal rights to chorused responses from the multitude, the atmosphere grew more and more charged.

Despite the number of TV cameras on the plaza, there was confusion about what triggered the clash between the demonstrators and the police. The official investigation concluded that a mob of incensed migrants taunted a mounted police officer and yanked him off his steed. Other eye-witnesses claimed that the police officer brandished his truncheon at a girl and provoked her father. Whatever the truth, other police officers rushed to the fallen officer's side and a fight broke out. The mob threw themselves as one at the police who retaliated. Before long, the police force was overwhelmed and reinforcements had to be called for. Smoke bombs and tear-gas were employed to disperse the demonstrators. The air was filled with the criss-cross of smoke trails, making it difficult to see who fired the first shots. But within a minute the staccato sound of repeated gunshots were clearly audible. As TV reporters and crew ducked for cover and the crowd stampeded, television viewers saw lopsided images of running feet and heard screams amid the smoke. One particularly disturbing image was a young boy crying bitterly for his parents before being trampled underfoot. Eager to quell the rabble, the police went on rampage rounding up demonstrators, clubbing others, hounding the demonstrators out of the plaza.

When it was over, the plaza was littered with bodies, some lying grotesquely in the fountain pool. The official figures were 46 dead, 98 wounded and 62 arrested. Curfew was put in effect, and police and immigration officials began combing the city for migrants who had arrived in Barcelona in support of the demonstration.

Maxwell came face-to-face with the harsh reality that these people were disinterested in any social or economic reform proposed by the Summit. They demanded a way of life and *those demands had* to be met – without compromise – by the very nations which had given them refuge or asylum. Maxwell's proposals for reform were meaningless to them.

"I am willing to lay down my life for this cause," the Libyan told Maxwell. "For centuries the European colonial powers ruled over Africa. Now we will flood your borders, threaten the balance of the socioeconomic and demographic landscape and throw the EU into anarchy." Then he signalled his henchmen to take the reformist away.

On the second day of the hostage crisis, the intensity of their beliefs was apparent to Maxwell and it dawned on him that they would persist until they had dragged the rest of humanity to their way of life. Maxwell began to reconsider many of his ideas and beliefs. He would lie awake at night, hugging his knees, listening to the lamentations of the other hostages and

the occasional squawk of police radios outside the hotel, ruminating over the leader's words. On the third day, he was made to watch as one of his fellow-delegates was beaten on video all to send a *message* to the world. "This is what your police are doing to our countrymen who were arrested in Praça Reial," the leader ranted as he punched the delegate in the face. "We want justice!" Then to any migrants who might be watching, "Now you know what is happening in the prisons! Rise up, brethren!"

Maxwell survived the ordeal – a joint military task force rescued the hostages in a bloody daylight raid. Maxwell cowered by a chair, a foot away from the dying Libyan leader. With his last breaths, the leader muttered through a blood-laced smile, "You cannot stop this. You, people, are too confused by human rights to act. More will come after me." Maxwell's thinking was irreversibly scarred. For the first time in his life, late in June of 2009, Phillip Maxwell began to entertain the notion that the world needed to be *culled* of certain *kinds* of people. Snatches of his radical beliefs began to manifest in academic lectures and conferences. His colleagues and peers began to distance themselves from him; the media had a field day showing the transmutation of the White Knight of Social Reform into the Black Knight of Genocide. His books were taken off shelves, his consultancy contracts were cancelled; Greece asked for her money to be returned. His wife left with their two children after their house was attacked by activists. Maxwell's world was slipping from his grasp; he began dressing in black and worked himself into a depression.

But unknown to Maxwell, he was being silently observed by the old-moneyed aristocratic families of Europe and radical anthropologists who believed his *big-brain* ideas could be incorporated into their endeavours and schemes to eradicate 'races that were detrimental to peaceful co-existence' and 'nations that were a burden on the planet's limited resources'.

One night, Maxwell attempted suicide. It failed – the bullet tore through his cheek instead of going up into his brain. As he lay on the floor with blood pooling around his head they came for him. He was taken to an undisclosed location and his injury was treated. As he recovered, they met with him and he found solace in their acceptance. They were his new family. They offered to introduce him to others (like him) who wished to *purge* the planet of the plague of *unnecessary* humanity.

Dr. Phillip Maxwell accepted their offer.

"We have been indoctrinated," Maxwell told Abeda Isniina over tea at the Freyenstein restaurant, "with ideas of tolerance and equal human rights for over 50 years." The Austrian

businesswoman was prematurely grey-haired, but her features were still youthful and striking. She walked with a limp, an old leg injury that had never healed correctly. Maxwell watched her as she primly stirred her tea, the little silver spoon clinking around the inside of her cup. Maxwell sipped his tea, not taking his one good eye off Abeda. "But we passed through the fires of two World Wars to reach that state of awareness and compassion. The Geneva Protocol has rendered our governments indecisive, inept, and hesitant in the face of the present migrant crisis. We argue if it is against human rights to scientifically determine the age of an immigrant, and wonder about the proper protocol to handle a group of shouting migrants in our streets. A government that drags its feet on such petty matters is proclaiming its weakness. We must get around to the fact that these are desperate people from strife-torn lives and nations. They come from a society where it is natural to fight, cajole and connive for basic amenities. Whereas we are so complacent with law and order, we are not equipped to handle the lawlessness they inherently carry along with them... we don't know what to do if they jump a queue or set up a slum outside our homes. They know that our governments are obliged to be humane toward them. They can sniff out weaknesses and will use it to their benefit. Case in point: an immigrant has access to better healthcare than a legal citizen! We have shouldered a responsibility for them from their countries. Is that fair?"

Abeda cast a shrewd look upon him. "Someone has to provide for those who do not have." She was testing him.

"At any other time, I would agree," he concurred, "But we are headed for anarchy. It is inevitable. You know that. *They* intentionally want to make it *our* problem. They have learned that they can express dissatisfaction in the land of their benefactors and our governments will respond with kindness, debates, and harmonious laws, instead of with *gunfire*! Such freedom has been handed to them on a plate and they will take advantage of it! It's like coming into wealth by stumbling upon a treasure chest. You wouldn't know what to do with all that money. Just look at the financial burden any integration or humanitarian effort has upon us. I ask you, are they truly worthy of our efforts or our benevolence?"

Abeda Isniina was the bastard daughter of an Austrian civil engineer and a Nigerian illegal who worked in Gürtel Road, the biggest red-light district in Vienna, to pay off the debt she owed the traffickers. Abeda had accompanied her father to Somalia on a business posting because his wife would have nothing to do with her and her biological mother could not afford to keep her. Her father was killed in clashes between al-Shabaab and the Transitional Federal Government military. Now a child-refugee from the al-Shabaab conflict region of southern

Somalia, Abeda, like many others, made the exodus into Kenya. She worked her way south to Eastleigh, a business district near Nairobi, nicknamed 'Little Somalia' because of its predominantly Somali population. Determined to make a better life for herself, Abeda shrewdly attracted the attention of Hussein Shaikh, a prominent and forward-thinking member of the Eastleigh Business Association. Shaikh adopted the teenaged-Abeda and sponsored her education within and outside Kenya.

After graduating from Cambridge University, Abeda returned to Kenya. As a welcome-home gift, the heir-less Shaikh bequeathed – as prescribed by Islamic law – one-third of his business empire to her. Under Abeda's leadership, revenues increased, and through a series of brilliant moves she legally acquired the remaining two-thirds of her guardian's businesses and moved her headquarters to Vienna, Austria.

One of the first things Abeda set about doing was fudging her birth records to erase all trace of her biological mother. Then, out of a sense of guilt, she poured relief money into migrant rehabilitation programs. To increase acceptance, she appointed settled migrants in charge of these programs. But corruption and greed plagued the programs and the money or aid was subverted to finance the people-trafficking mafia. The very migrants she sought to alleviate were preying on each other and were an embarrassment to her social standing. Abeda silently withdrew from the rehabilitation programs and underwent cosmetic surgery and gene therapy to suppress the migrant side of her genetic inheritance. Her disdain for 'these peoples' came to light at a televised BBC debate. The offensive statements were frantically edited out before the broadcast but it caught the attention of Phillip Maxwell who was in attendance.

"The world order is already collapsing," Maxwell continued, "because they are now flooding into cities across boundaries and across state borders." He presented the non-disfigured side of his face to her and said, "I hear the investigations into the Praça Reial Demonstrations are heading toward you." Maxwell noted that this struck home with Abeda and explained, "I am well-connected, Ms. Isniina. You do know what will happen to your business empire when the EU discovers that instigators of the riot entered the EU through your establishments."

"I have distanced myself from those programs," Abeda retorted defensively.

"But they still continue to function... for the worse. The EU will hold you responsible for the Praça Reial bombings and the Barcelona Star tragedy." It was time to throw in the clincher.

"It is up people like you and me, to ensure that we reverse the unfortunate situation once

and for all. My associates and I have a business proposition for you... if you are interested, of course. We can kill the investigation. In return, we want something from you."

It had the required effect: Abeda leaned forward interested. "What do you have in mind?"

"You have recently established an R&D facility for your Advanced Sentinel Program Systems in Nairobi."

"Yes." While in Kenya, Abeda had grown fascinated with wildlife and dreamed that one day she would manage every wildlife conservation program in Africa. To her mind, the indigenous programs were fraught with ineptitude, lack of resources and corruption. But first, she needed to showcase that she possessed the best conservation technology in the world. Her ASPS was a revolutionary step toward realising her dream.

"My associates and I need a facility for our research and development. I will be upfront with you: we want to take our work away from the prying eyes of inquisitive governments and regulatory bodies... until they are ready to understand its benefits."

Abeda had to ask, "What research are you doing?"

They had been conversing softly so that the other customers at the upscale restaurant could not hear them. Maxwell lowered his voice even more. "We are talking of a purge, Ms. Isniina." And then he told her everything she needed to know.

CHAPTER 3

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA, 14 AUGUST 2014

Nagana Banto was strung up from the rafters by a stout braided rope that was wound tightly around his wrists. The rope had cut into his skin and a trickle of blood seeped between the bonds, ran down his forearms and dripped off his elbows to the ground. His bare feet were inches from the ground; the entire weight of his body was borne agonizingly by his shoulders. His naked body rotated slowly on the rope's axis until he was face-to-face once again with his captor, Mwenge Abasi.

Mwenge sat on a low wicker chair, running a thumb along the business edge of a wicked scimitar. The blood-stained blade gleamed in the light of a small fire that he had kindled nearby.

Mwenge had tracked down the foul-smelling local when he received news of his brother's murder. He was so infuriated that he had been particularly merciless in his interrogation. Mwenge gutted the man with the very same scimitar that he now caressed. The Somali had squealed like a pig and revealed a name: Nagana Banto. Mwenge had left the man to die slowly and began hunting for Banto.

He had tracked Banto to Hamar Weyne, the old part of Mogadishu. The ancient Fakr ad-Din Mosque was just a street away.

"I am a patient hunter," Mwenge said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I watched you for three days, studying you, understanding you." Banto struggled to keep from rotating. He heard Mwenge continue, "You are ex-CIA, albeit disavowed and hiding from your government, and you think you will not talk." The flames cast his face into flickering light and dark, giving him a terrifying appearance. He did indeed appear like a hunter who waited concealed in the underbrush for his unsuspecting prey to saunter by.

Banto completed another 360-degree turn, facing Mwenge again. Mwenge was standing, his eyes glinting in the dark, like a big cat's. Under Banto's gaze, he went over to the fire and placed a small earthen vessel over it. Into this vessel, he poured powders from vials that he fished out of a cloth bag. Then he poured water into the vessel and stirred it with a finger. The mixture was odourless but produced vapours. "When I heard that my brother did not arrive at The General's residence, I was sure that someone," he looked pointedly at Banto, "did not want him to talk. I was not as... what is the word? Refined? Yes, refined. I was not

as refined with the pig you hired. His blood stains refuse to be cleansed from my blade. I made him watch his entrails spill out of his belly.”

Banto did not flinch. His training kicked in; he knew that Mwenge was attempting to scare him first before the actual interrogation.

“But you will be tougher, won’t you?” Still stirring the mixture, Mwenge brought the earthen vessel to where Banto was suspended. “You *think* you will be tougher.” He placed the vessel beneath Banto’s nose.

The fumes rose into Banto’s nostrils. It was a heady concoction and he felt his senses clouding. “This is a narcotic,” Mwenge explained, “discovered by the Dervishes. Whatever you consciously try to keep from me will be revealed. And the most satisfying part is you will *know* that you are telling me your secrets and will be helpless to resist. In the time of the Dervishes, the prisoner was allowed to lament on his unwilling betrayal for days before he was executed.” His eyes turned deadly. “I do not have days; you will be dead before daybreak.”

That aroused a fresh bout of struggling from Banto.

“Breathe!” Mwenge droned. His voice slowed down, stretched into infinity. “Breathe!”

Banto could no longer feel the weight of his body. The strain in his shoulders vanished. It was as though his mind was separate from his physical being. The cloudiness returned with a vengeance that no CIA training had prepared him for.

“Breathe!”

Outside, the call to prayer sounded from the mosque, resonating across the Old City.

Banto was appalled when he heard a name escape his lips. He shook his head and unsuccessfully tried to stem the torrent of jumbled thoughts that formed words from his mouth.