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# FREDERICK FORSYTH

# THE DOGS OF WAR

# The Dogs of War

Frederick Forsyth

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THE DOGS OF WAR

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Frederick Forsyth
**THE DOGS OF WAR**

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*For Giorgio, and Christian and Schlee,*
*And Big Marc and Black Johnny,*
*And the others in the unmarked graves.*
*At least we tried.*

Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war.
—William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

That . . . be not told of my death,
Or made to grieve on account of me,
And that I be not buried in consecrated ground,
And that no sexton be asked to toll the bell,
And that nobody is wished to see my dead body,
And that no mourners walk behind me at my funeral,
And that no flowers be planted on my grave,
And that no man remember me,
To this I put my name.
—Thomas Hardy

# Contents

# PART ONE

# The Crystal Mountain

# 1

There were no stars that night on the bush airstrip, nor any moon; just the West African darkness wrapping round the scattered groups like warm, wet velvet. The cloud cover was lying hardly off the tops of the iroko trees, and the waiting men prayed it would stay a while longer to shield them from the bombers.

At the end of the runway the battered old DC-4, which had just slipped in for a landing by runway lights that stayed alight for just the last fifteen seconds of final approach, turned and coughed its way blindly toward the palm-thatch huts.

Between two of them, five white men sat crouched in a Land Rover and stared toward the incoming aircraft. They said nothing, but the same thought was in each man's mind. If they did not get out of the battered and crumbling enclave before the forces of the central government overran the last few square miles, they would not get out alive. Each man had a price on his head and intended to see that no man collected it. They were the last of the mercenaries who had fought on contract for the side that had lost. Now it was time to go. So they watched the incoming and unexpected cargo plane with silent attention.

A Federal MIG-17 night fighter, probably flown by one of the six East German pilots sent down over the past three months to replace the Egyptians, who had a horror of flying at night, moaned across the sky to the west. It was out of sight above the cloud layers.

The pilot of the taxiing DC-4, unable to hear the scream of the jet above him, flicked on his own lights to see where he was going, and from the darkness a voice cried uselessly, "Kill de lights!" When the pilot had got his bearings, he turned them off anyway, and the fighter above was miles away. To the south there was a rumble of artillery where the front had finally crumbled as men who had had neither food nor bullets for two months

threw down their guns and headed for the protecting bush forest.

The pilot of the DC-4 brought his plane to a halt twenty yards from the Superconstellation already parked on the apron, killed the engines, and climbed down to the concrete. An African ran over to him and there was a muttered conversation. The two men walked through the dark toward one of the larger groups of men, a blob of black against the darkness of the palm forest. The group parted as the two from the tarmac approached, until the white man who had flown in the DC-4 was face to face with the one who stood in the center. The white man had never seen him before, but he knew of him, and, even in the darkness dimly illumined by a few cigarettes, he could recognize the man he had come to see.

The pilot wore no cap, so instead of saluting he inclined his head slightly. He had never done that before, not to a black, and could not have explained why he did it.

"My name is Captain Van Cleef," he said in English accented in the Afrikaner manner.

The African nodded his acknowledgment, his bushy black beard brushing the front of his striped camouflage uniform as he did so.

"It's a hazardous night for flying, Captain Van Cleef," he remarked dryly, "and a little late for more supplies."

His voice was deep and slow, the accent more like that of an English public-school man, which he was, than like an African. Van Cleef felt uncomfortable and again, as a hundred times during his run through the cloudbanks from the coast, asked himself why he had come.

"I didn't bring any supplies, sir. There weren't any more to bring."

Another precedent set. He had sworn he would not call the man "sir." Not a kaffir. It had just slipped out. But they were right, the other mercenary pilots in the hotel bar in Libreville, the ones who had met him. This one was different.

"Then why have you come?" asked the general softly. "The children perhaps? There are a number here the nuns would like to fly out to safety, but no more Caritas planes will come in tonight."

Van Cleef shook his head, then realized no one could see the gesture. He was embarrassed, and thankful that the darkness hid it. Around him the bodyguards clutched their submarine carbines and stared at him.

"No. I came to collect you. If you want to come, that is."

There was a long silence. He could feel the African staring at him through the gloom, occasionally caught a flash of eye-white as one of the attendants raised his cigarette.

"I see. Did your government instruct you to come in here tonight?"

"No," said Van Cleef. "It was my idea."

There was another long pause. The bearded head was nodding slowly in what could have been comprehension or bewilderment.

"I am very grateful," said the voice. "It must have been quite a trip. Actually I have my own transport. The Constellation. Which I hope will be able to take me away to exile."

Van Cleef felt relieved. He had no idea what the political repercussions would have been if he had flown back to Libreville with the general.

"I'll wait till you're off the ground and gone," he said and nodded again. He felt like holding out his hand to shake, but did not know whether he ought. If he had but known it, the African general was in the same quandary. So he turned and walked back to his aircraft.

There was silence for a while in the group of black men after he had left.

"Why does a South African, and an Afrikaner, do a thing like that, General?" one of them asked.

There was a flash of teeth as the general smiled briefly. "I don't think we shall ever understand that," he said.

A match spluttered as another cigarette was lit, the glow setting for a parting instant into sharp relief the faces of the men in the group. At the center was the general, taller than all but two of the guards, heavily built with burly chest and shoulders, distinguishable from others at several hundred yards by the bushy black beard that half the world had come to recognize.

In defeat, on the threshold of an exile he knew would be lonely and humiliating, he still commanded. Sur-

rounded by his aides and several ministers, he was as always slightly aloof, withdrawn. To be alone is one of the prices of leadership; with him it was also a state of reflex.

For two and a half years, sometimes by sheer force of personality when there was nothing else to employ, he had kept his millions of people together and fighting against the central Federal Government. All the experts had told the world they would have to collapse in a few weeks, two months at most. The odds were insuperable against them. Somehow they had kept fighting, surrounded, besieged, starving but defiant.

His enemies had refuted his leadership of his people, but few who had been there had any doubts. Even in defeat, as his car passed through the last village before the airstrip, the villagers had lined the mud road to chant their loyalty. Hours earlier, at the last meeting of the cabinet, the vote had asked him to leave. There would be reprisals in defeat, the spokesman for the caucus said, but a hundred times worse if he remained. So he was leaving, the man the Federal Government wanted dead by sunrise.

By his side stood one of his confidants, one of those whose loyalty had not been changed. A small, graying professor, he was called Dr. Okoye. He had decided to remain behind, to hide in the bush until he could return quietly to his home when the first wave of reprisals had ended. The two men had agreed to wait six months before making the first steps to contact each other.

Farther up the apron, the five mercenaries sat and watched the dim figure of the pilot return to his plane. The leader sat beside the African driver, and all five were smoking steadily.

"It must be the South African plane," said the leader and turned to one of the four other whites crouched in the Land Rover behind him. "Janni, go and ask the skipper if he'll make room for us."

A tall, rawboned, angular man climbed out of the rear of the vehicle. Like the others, he was dressed from head to foot in predominantly green jungle camouflage uniform, slashed with streaks of brown. He wore green canvas jackboots on his feet, the trousers tucked into them. From his belt hung a water bottle and a Bowie knife,

three empty pouches for magazines for the FAL carbine over his shoulder. As he came round to the front of the Land Rover the leader called him again.

"Leave the FAL," he said, stretching out an arm to take the carbine, "and, Janni, make it good, huh? Because if we don't get out of here in that crate, we could get chopped up in a few days."

The man called Janni nodded, adjusted the beret on his head, and ambled toward the DC-4. Captain Van Cleef did not hear the rubber soles moving up behind him.

"*Naand, meneer.*"

Van Cleef spun round at the sound of the Afrikaans and took in the shape and size of the man beside him. Even in the darkness he could pick out the black and white skull-and-crossbones motif on the man's left shoulder. He nodded warily.

"*Naand. Jy Afrikaans?*"

The man nodded. "Jan Dupree," he said and held out his hand.

"Kobus Van Cleef," said the airman and shook.

"*Waar gaan-jy nou?*" asked Dupree.

"To Libreville. As soon as they finish loading. And you?"

Janni Dupree grinned. "I'm a bit stuck, me and my mates. We'll get the chop for sure if the Federals find us. Can you help us out?"

"How many of you?" asked Van Cleef.

"Five in all."

As a fellow mercenary, Van Cleef did not hesitate. Outlaws sometimes need each other.

"All right, get aboard. But hurry up. As soon as that Connie is off, so are we."

Dupree nodded his thanks and jog-trotted back to the Land Rover. The four other whites were standing in a group round the hood.

"It's okay, but we have to get aboard," the South African told them.

"Right, dump the hardware in the back and let's get moving," said the group leader. As the rifles and ammunition pouches thumped into the back of the vehicle, he leaned over to the black officer with second lieutenant's tabs who sat at the wheel.

"We have to go now," he said. "Take the Land Rover

and dump it. Bury the guns and mark the spot. Leave your uniform and go for bush. Understand?"

The lieutenant, who had been in his last term of high school when he volunteered to fight and had been with the mercenary-led commando unit for the past year, nodded somberly, taking in the instructions.

"G'by, Patrick," the mercenary said. "I'm afraid it's over now."

The African looked up. "Perhaps," he said. "Perhaps it is over."

"Don't go on fighting," urged the white man. "There's no point."

"Not now," the lieutenant agreed. He nodded toward the steps of the Constellation, where the leader and his group were saying good-by. "But he is leaving for safety. That is good. He is still the leader. While he lives, we will not forget. We will say nothing, do nothing, but we will remember."

He started the engine of the Land Rover and swung the vehicle into a turn. "Good-by," he called.

The four other mercenaries called good-by and walked toward the DC-4.

The leader was about to follow them when two nuns fluttered up to him from the darkness of the bush behind the parking apron.

"Major."

The mercenary turned and recognized the first of them as the sister he had met months earlier, when fighting had raged in the zone where she ran a hospital and he had been forced to evacuate the whole complex.

"Sister Mary Joseph! What are you doing here?"

The elderly Irish nun began talking earnestly, holding the stained uniform sleeve of his jacket.

He nodded. "I'll try, I can do no more than that," he said when she had finished.

He walked across the apron to where the South African pilot was standing under the wing of his DC-4, and the two of them talked for several minutes. Finally the man in uniform came back to the waiting nuns.

"He says yes, but you must hurry, Sister. He wants to get this crate off the ground as soon as he can."

"God bless you," said the figure in the white habit and gave hurried orders to her companion. The latter ran

to the rear of the aircraft and began to climb the short ladder to the passenger door. The other scurried back to the shade of a patch of palms behind the parking apron, from which a file of men soon emerged. Each carried a bundle in his arms. At the DC-4 the bundles were passed up to the waiting nun at the top of the steps. Behind her the co-pilot watched her lay the first three side by side in the beginning of a row down the aircraft's hull, then began gruffly to help, taking the bundles from the stretching hands beneath the aircraft's tail and passing them inside.

"God bless you," whispered the Irish nun.

One of the bundles deposited a few ounces of liquid green excrement onto the co-pilot's sleeve. "Bloody hell," he muttered and went on working.

Left alone, the leader of the group of mercenaries glanced toward the Superconstellation. A file of refugees, mainly the relations of the leaders of the defeated people, was climbing up the rear steps. In the dim light from the airplane's door he caught sight of the man he wanted to see. As he approached, the man was about to mount the steps while others waited to pull them away. One of them called to him.

"Sah. Major Shannon come."

The general turned as Shannon approached, and even at this hour he managed a grin.

"So, Shannon, do you want to come along?"

Shannon stepped in front of him and brought up a salute. The general acknowledged it.

"No, thank you, sir. We have transport to Libreville. I just wanted to say good-by."

"Yes. It was a long fight. Now it's over, I'm afraid. For some years, at any rate. I find it hard to believe my people will continue to live in servitude forever. By the way, have you and your colleagues been paid up to the contract?"

"Yes, thank you, sir. We're all up to date," replied the mercenary. The African nodded somberly.

"Well, good-by, then. And thank you for all you were able to do." He held out his hand, and the two men shook.

"There's one more thing, sir," said Shannon. "Me and the boys, we were talking things over, sitting in the jeep. If there's ever any time— Well, if you should ever need

us, you only have to let us know. We'll all come. You only have to call. The boys want you to know that."

The general stared at him for several seconds. "This night is full of surprises," he said slowly. "You may not know it yet, but half my senior advisers and all of the wealthy ones are crossing the lines tonight to ingratiate themselves with the enemy. Most of the others will follow suit within a month. Thank you for your offer, Mr. Shannon. I will remember it. But how about yourselves? What do the mercenaries do now?"

"We'll have to look around for more work."

"Another fight, Major Shannon?"

"Another fight, sir."

"But always somebody else's."

"That's our way of life," said Shannon.

"And you think you will fight again, you and your men?"

"Yes. We'll fight again."

The general laughed softly. "'Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,'" he murmured.

"Sir?"

"Shakespeare, Mr. Shannon, just a bit of Shakespeare. Well, now, I must go. The pilot is waiting. Good-by again, and good luck."

He turned and walked up the steps into the dimly lit interior of the Superconstellation just as the first of the four engines coughed into life. Shannon stepped back and gave the man who had employed his services for a year and a half a last salute.

"Good luck to you," he said, half to himself. "You'll need it."

He turned and walked back to the waiting DC-4. When the door had closed, Van Cleef kept the aircraft on the apron, engines turning, as he watched the dim droop-nosed shape of the Super Connie rumble down the runway through the gloom past his nose, and finally lift off. Neither plane carried any lights, but from the cockpit of the Douglas the Afrikaner could make out the three fins of the Constellation vanishing over the palm trees to the south and into the welcoming clouds. Only then did he ease the DC-4 forward to the take-off point.

It was close to an hour before Van Cleef ordered his co-pilot to switch on the cabin lights, an hour of jinking from cloudbank to cloudbank, breaking cover and scooting