

#1

ADVENTURE NOVEL OF THE YEAR!

JANISSARIES



THE NEWEST NOVEL BY
THE CO-AUTHOR OF
LUCIFER'S HAMMER!

**JERRY
POURNELLE**

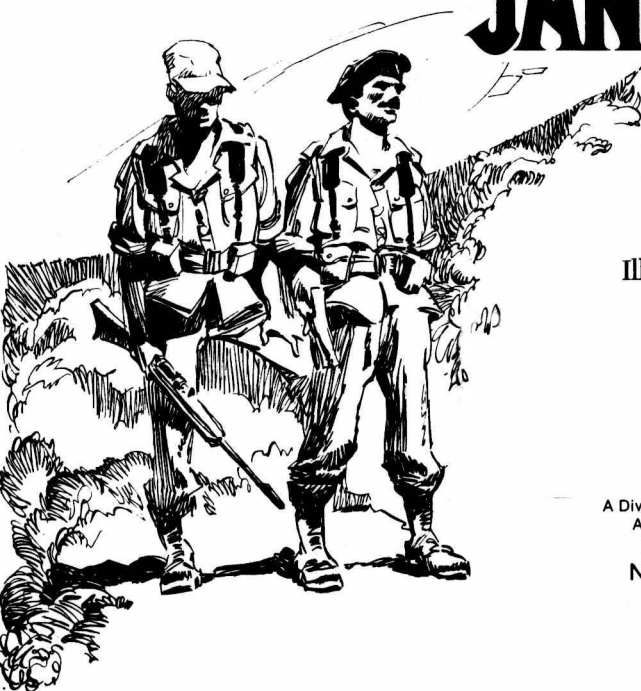
To Tom Doherty



JANISSARIES

by
**JERRY
POURNELLE**

Illustrated by Bermejo



ace books

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PART ONE:

THE MERCENARIES



1

The mortar fire was nearer.

Rick Galloway heard the sharp *crump!* of at least five mortars. Then there was silence for a moment. It was just twilight, and twilight does not last in the tropics. Night came fast, and with it the sound of the African tropic highlands: birds, crickets, unidentifiable creatures calling each other in the sudden dark. A warm breeze rustled the dry grass on the hilltop.

There was a rattle of distant machine-gun fire. It sounded much too close.

"I think the roadblock has gone," Lieutenant Parsons said. His voice was surprisingly calm. "They will be here within the hour."

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"Yeah." Captain Galloway swept his night glasses along the southern slope of the hill, down toward the crossroad where he had left Major Hendrix with the wounded. There was nothing to see. He turned carefully, letting the glasses sweep the perimeter of the hill that for the moment was his entire world. He saw nothing at all except the tiny remnant of his command. The men were digging in and had done a good job with the little they had.

"Where the hell are those choppers?" Galloway demanded. He felt sweat drip from his forehead despite the cooling breeze that sprang up after sundown. "Elliot."

"Sir." Sergeant Elliot was at the other end of the trench where Galloway stood. The trench had not been bunkered, but there was no time to construct better defenses for the command post.

"Can't you raise headquarters?" Galloway demanded.

"No, sir. Warner's trying." The big sergeant turned back to the radio.

"Perhaps we should let the men run for it," Parsons suggested. "Some may escape."

Rick shook his head. "What's to run to?" he asked.

Parsons shrugged. "We sell our lives to no purpose—"

"We're giving our employers another hour," Galloway said. His voice was as bitter as he felt, although he had tried to hide his feelings. "There's no point, André," Galloway said. "We don't speak the language, we're the wrong color, and we're surrounded. I expect half the troops have run anyway. They know the score. Elliot!"

"Sir."

"How many effectives do we have?"

"Maybe fifty, Captain."

"So there you are," Rick said. "About half the number we brought up this silly hill. The rest have run." He knew he was talking too much, saying too many words; but he was young and inexperienced,

and afraid.

Parsons nodded in the darkness. He took a plastic bottle from his belt. "Wine?"

"Sure." Rick took the liter bottle and drank a couple of swallows of the cheap local wine. Parsons always carried a bottle. Rick was certain that "Parsons" wasn't the lieutenant's real name. Parsons spoke French and German and sometimes let slip a few words about Legion experience.

It hardly mattered. Rick wasn't a real captain, either. The operation was CIA, and the Agency had borrowed men from anywhere they could get them.

Galloway handed the bottle back to Parsons, who raised it in a mock toast. "Here's to us. There are damned few left."

"They're taking their own sweet time about coming," Rick said.

"Afraid of us." Parson's voice was a mocking lilt in the dark.

"Sure," Galloway said. But they well might be, he thought. We've broken more than one Cuban mercenary outfit. With any help at all from the politicians who put us out here in Sainte Marie, we'd have won. At that it was a near thing. What was it Wellington said about Waterloo? A near-run thing—as near a thing as you'd ever hope to see. Well so was this, but the difference is it's us who lost it.

Officially they were volunteers, and received no direct support from the United States at all; but most of the men were veterans of the US Army, and the CIA had brought them in. The Cubans and Russians had made no secret at all of their aid to the other side.

"I got headquarters," Sergeant Elliot announced.

"*Mirabile dictu*," Parsons muttered.

Rick crawled over to the radio. Perhaps prayers are answered after all, he thought. There was more automatic weapon fire from the south, and a mortar bomb dropped in fifty yards downhill. Rick esti-



mated the enemy at less than a mile. It wouldn't be long now.

"Galloway here," he told the microphone. "Can you get us the hell out of here?"

"Negative."

The single word was a death sentence. Rick started to say that, then thought better of it. They knew. "Why not?"

"I'm sorry, Rick." Galloway recognized Colonel Blumfeld's voice. Blumfeld was one of the men who'd talked him into volunteering for this mission. "Washington has canceled all support. Highest level. I'd send the choppers anyway and to hell with my career, but I don't have any to send. They came and took them away."

"They?"

"Higher command." Blumfeld sounded unhappy. Rick thought he damned well ought to be unhappy. "Your orders are to surrender," Blumfeld said.

"Bat pockey. The Cubans will have us in a show trial as mercenaries," Rick said. "Then they'll shoot us."

"They say they won't."

"Sure. Colonel, are you sending me any support? Anything at all?"

"No."

"Then go to hell." Galloway handed the mike to Sergeant Elliot, then went back to where Parsons stood.

Parsons listened with a half-smile that barely showed in starlight. Then he took out his wine bottle. "We had a good run," he said.

Rick reached for the bottle. "I'll drink to that."

"And now what?"

Rick shrugged. There were few choices. They were white men in a black country. Rick had always been quick to learn languages, but even he hadn't enough of the local patois to do more than buy groceries. They would be spotted easily wherever they went.

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Major Jefferson had taken all the black troops on an infiltration raid. Rick hoped they'd escape, but without the black troops, there wasn't even the pretense of an integrated army. No blacks to speak and front for them. Rick wondered if that would matter. It might, depending on who captured them.

It was his first command, and very likely the only one he'd ever have. He wasn't experienced. He'd begun as a junior lieutenant, just out of ROTC from the state university, and his promotion to brevet captain was due to being in the right place and time; he knew better than to think it meant more.

Rick thought it didn't mean very much at all. Parsons was a career man, but the military wasn't Galloway's career. ROTC had been an easy way to pay for the college education he couldn't afford.

The other alternative was football. Rick was quick and wiry. Had he gone out for football, he could have got a scholarship, with all the other perquisites of a star. But he didn't like the game. It required too much commitment.

Instead, he had joined the track team and won his letter. Track didn't have the glamour of football; the football jocks got first choice of the girls. On the other hand, they often couldn't enjoy their opportunities because of injuries or training rules. Being a runner was definitely superior in Rick Galloway's view. He told himself that quite often. But track hadn't been important enough to the alumni; there weren't all those easy jobs available. ROTC had provided Rick's spending money.

When he graduated, Rick realized that he'd never committed himself to anything. He had neither joined a fraternity nor opposed them. He had few political opinions. He was a professional neutral, and he wasn't sure he liked the image.

A classmate, John Henry Carter, had been a career military man and had volunteered for the CIA operation in Africa. He had talked Rick into coming along; an adventure, something to do while he was



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young before he settled into a dull job and duller life. He'd known there was a possibility of being killed, but he'd never been seriously threatened in his life. He could outrun any danger.

Carter was the only black man Rick had ever known well, and the only friend he'd had in the outfit. Now Carter was off with Major Jefferson. Major Hendrix was missing a leg and had stayed behind to hold the roadblock south of them. Parsons and Galloway were the only officers left.

The plan had been for Galloway to take the hilltop and hold it until the helicopters came; then they could go back for the wounded. Rick hadn't like the idea, but Hendrix made it an order. Someone had to hold the roadblock and someone else had to capture a landing area; Hendrix couldn't move, which left the hilltop to Galloway.

But Hendrix hadn't held the roadblock very long—and now there wouldn't be any helicopters.

And that's that, Rick thought. He had no choices left. For the first time, he couldn't even run . . .

Something caught his attention. Rick looked up. "What the hell?" He pointed toward the ink-black sky. A bright light moved among the stars. It seemed to come closer, and it made no sound at all. "Where did Labon get aircraft?" Rick demanded.

Parsons shrugged. "From the Cubans, I suppose—Rick, that is no aircraft."

He was right. The silent light moved closer, and in strange patterns like no airplane Rick had ever seen before. There was only the one light; it was impossible to make out the size or shape of the craft, but it blotted out stars. Too many stars. He realized with a shiver that it was *big*. It moved too fast and turned in weird patterns, and it moved in total silence. He felt the hair rising on the back of his neck.

It came lower, and a bright light stabbed down to illuminate the crest of the hill. There was enough light reflected upward to show what the tropical night had hidden.



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"A goddamn flying saucer!" one of the troops shouted. There was a shot.

"Hold your fire!" Rick screamed.

Parsons looked at him curiously.

"That's nothing of Labon's. Why shoot at it? And—I'm not sure we can hurt it. . . ."

"It is landing," Parsons said.

"Of course." Rick felt an inane urge to giggle. Why not? he thought. We're defeated, surrounded, every one of us marked for a firing squad within the week, so why not flying saucers too? He felt light-headed, and it was not just the wine. He was glad that he hadn't tried the local equivalent of pot.

Flying saucers weren't real. They weren't even science fiction. The girl he liked to think of as his mistress—he knew she'd have resented the label, and he'd never used it in her hearing, but he liked to think of himself as a man who'd once had a mistress—had been interested in science fiction, and had got Rick to read some of the classics; but neither she nor her friends "believed in" flying saucers.

The thing settled on the hilltop. It was very large, as big as a 707, and it wasn't precisely saucer-shaped, although seen edge on at a distance it might give that appearance. It was more like half a football sliced lengthwise, nearly flat at the bottom. It did nothing for a moment. Then a bright orange rectangle opened in the center of one side.

Sergeant Elliot caught up to him. Other troopers crawled into the CP trench. "What do we do, Captain?" Elliot demanded.

"Keep the men at their posts. There are still a thousand Cubans out there," Rick said. He studied the bright opening. Nothing happened. The only sounds were mutters from his own troops, and no one—or no *thing*—came out. "Take over," he told Parsons. "I'm going to have a look."

Parsons spread his hands in a wide gesture, a typical French shrug. "You are mad. But I will go