

AFRICA MAY WELL BE THE **DARKEST** CONTINENT ETCHING EARTH'S VARIED SURFACE...



... BUT **NOWHERE** DOES THE SUN BEAT **BRIGHTER** OR **HOTTER** THAN UPON ITS LUSHLY EXOTIC LANDSCAPE... AS EVIDENCED BY THE SWELTERING DISCOMFORT OF A **JUNGLE CONVOY**...

... A **STRESS-WEARY** EXPEDITION WHICH DEFIES HEAT AND HOSTILE TERRAIN FOR **ONE** REASON ONLY...

...**ARCHEOLOGY**, ROBERTO. YOU'VE BEEN MY AIDE LONG ENOUGH TO REALIZE THE GEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ANCIENT ARTIFACTS WE'RE SEARCHING FOR.

YOU MEAN THE THEORY YOU ADVANCED IN YOUR LAST BOOK, MR. BARRETT...? THAT IF WE FIND ARTIFACTS HERE IN **AFRICA** WHICH CORRESPOND WITH THOSE UNEARTHED IN **EUROPE**, IT WILL PROVE THAT AFRICA AND EUROPE WERE ONCE **CONNECTED**...?

EXACTLY! I BELIEVE THEY SOMEHOW **SPLIT**... DRIFTED APART UNTIL AN ENTIRE **OCEAN** SEPARATED...



GEORGE BARRETT'S WORDS ARE CUT SHORT BY THE STINGING IMPACT OF A **PIERCING DART**... AND THE SUBSEQUENT ERUPTION OF SHREDDING FOLIAGE AND ULULATING HOWLS FROM **NAKED SAVAGES** WRAPPED IN GRIM FLOURISHES OF **WARPAINT**...

NNNGH...!

THITICH

WANDERI TRIBESMEN!! AND NONE TOO HAPPY ABOUT **TRESPASSERS!**



THIS DART'S POISONED, ROBERTO! GET OUT OF HERE WHILE YOU CAN...!

I CAN'T LEAVE YOU HERE TO...

I SAID GET OUT OF HERE ...FAST!

KRAK

ONE FINAL LOOK INTO BARRETT'S HARD EYES, AND THE UNCERTAIN AIDE BOLTS FROM THE CHAOTIC AMBUSH...



BLAM!

...HIS LAST BACKWARD GLIMPSE A SICKENING KALEIDOSCOPE OF DEATH AS THE SAFARI'S LAST FEW PORTERS FALL UNDER A WITHERING HAIL OF SPEARS AND VIRULENT BLOWGUN-DARTS...

THE SLAUGHTER IS SWIFT, MERCILESS, AND INEXORABLE... LEAVING ONLY ONE MAN STANDING...

PAIN... IN MY SHOULDER... DIZZY...



...AND THEN EVEN GEORGE BARRETT PITCHES TO HIS KNEES THROUGH A QUEASY VERTIGO OF MISTY PAIN...

...TO HIS KNEES, AND TO THE GROUND WHICH SEEMS TO SUCK AT HIM LIKE A GREEDY GRAVE...

...A GRAVE IT MIGHT AS WELL BE IF THREE DEMON-FACED SAVAGES ARE PERMITTED BUT SEVERAL SECONDS' MOMENTUM...



...A MOMENTUM WHICH IS DESTINED TO BE DENIED THEM BY A MOST UNEXPECTED OCCURRENCE...



...THE STREAKING BLUR OF GRACEFUL, DYNAMIC FIGURE CLINGING TO A BRANCH SLICING A CLEAN ARC THROUGH THE OPPRESSIVE JUNGLE HEAT... LUANA!

THE ARC TERMINATES WITH **JARRING** IMPACT...



...AND IS **PUNCTUATED** BY THE INCREDULOUS YELPS OF THREE VIOLENTLY SCATTERED WANDERI WARRIORS.

GEORGE BARRETT IS CONVINCED HE IS MIRED IN **FEVER-FANTASY... IN DREAM-DELIRIUM...**



...FOR HE HAS WITNESSED THIS BEAUTIFUL GIRL PLUMMET FROM THE SKIES LIKE LIQUID **LIGHTNING**... AND HE WATCHES **NOW**, AS SHE DROPS TO THE GROUND WITH A LITHE TWIST, SNATCHING UP AN ABANDONED SPEAR IN THE SAME SINUOUS MOVEMENT.

...AND HE WATCHES AS THAT SPEAR PLUNGES **ONCE...**



...AND SLASHES DOWN A SECOND, **BRUTAL** TIME...



...AND IS LEFT WHERE IT **FALLS**, UNNEEDED A **THIRD** TIME.!



THEN GEORGE BARRETT WATCHES THIS STRANGE JUNGLE GODDESS SLOWLY PAD **TOWARD** HIM... JOINED BY A DOCILE CHIMP AND A SLINKING **BLACK PANTHER**.

THE BRIEFLY-CLAD WOMAN **FOLDS** HER SUPPLE BODY INTO A CROUCH OVER GEORGE BARRETT'S DWINDLING **CONSCIOUSNESS...**



...AND HE DIMLY WATCHES, AND FEELS A BITING **TWINGE**, AS SHE TENDERLY **EXTRACTS** THE POISON-TIPPED **DART**...

...AND **KNEADS** THE MOISTURE FROM A **LEAF** INTO HIS POISON-POLLUTED WOUND...



IDLY, HIS HAZE-MUTED EYES FASTEN ON A GOLDEN **BRACELET**... UNTIL HE IS ALMOST **HYPNOTIZED** BY IT.

THEN THE GIRL POINTS TO HERSELF AND WHISPERS BUT A SINGLE ODD WORD...



LUANA

YES, GEORGE BARRETT IS **CONVINCED** HE IS TRAPPED IN AN ETHEREAL DREAM...



...THAT, OR...

...DEAD!



BUT **DEAD** MEN DO NOT OPEN THEIR EYES MERE **HOURS** LATER...

W-WHERE...?



IN YOUR **TENT**, MR. BARRETT, I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO **DESERT** YOU..!

ROBERTO ...YOU'RE A **GOOD** MAN... BUT THE **PORTERS**...?

I CAME BACK TO **HELP**... AND FOUND YOU UNCONSCIOUS, BUT MIRACULOUSLY **ALIVE**.

MOST OF THEM... **DEAD!** THE OTHERS ARE DRESSING THEIR WOUNDS NOW... BUT WHY DID THE WANDER! LEAVE **ANY** SURVIVORS?



AND WHY DID THE POISON NOT **KILL** YOU?

ROBERTO, I DON'T THINK **YOU** OR **ANYONE** ELSE...



... WOULD **BELIEVE** THE EXPLANATION.



IN FACT, I'M NOT CERTAIN **I** BELIEVE IT **MYSELF**.

BUT ENOUGH OF THAT, LOOKS LIKE I WON'T BE WRITING MY BOOK AS SOON AS I'D **HOPED** TO. THIS EXPEDITION'S **WASHED UP**.

IT'S BACK TO **NAIROBI** IN THE **MORNING**... JUNGLE GODDESS OR **NO** JUNGLE GODDESS.

MORNING! A BATTERED, BEDRAGGLED CARAVAN LIMPS ITS WAY THROUGH A MESHED SKIN OF NEARLY IMPENETRABLE JUNGLE... RETRACING ITS TRACKS TO NAIROBI...

LAST NIGHT YOU MUTTERED SOMETHING ABOUT A JUNGLE GODDESS...

IT WAS DELIRIUM, ROBERTO... NOTHING IMPOR...

LISTEN ISN'T THAT A PLANE...?

A PRIVATE PLANE... SKIMMING THOSE TREETOPS! DAMN CLOSE, TOO!

WONDER WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR...

MR. BARRETT, ALL I KNOW IS WHAT I'LL BE LOOKING FOR WHEN WE REACH NAIROBI, AND THAT'S...

"...THE NEAREST COOL BAR!"

I MUST CONFESS, MR. BARRETT, I HAD DOUBTS ABOUT EVER REACHING THIS PLACE.

WELL, DRINK UP AND ENJOY IT WHILE YOU CAN, ROBERTO. BECAUSE AS SOON AS WE CAN FORM ANOTHER SAFARI, WE'LL BE SETTING OUT IN SEARCH OF THOSE ARTIFACTS AGAIN.

I'M PREPARED TO PAY YOU A CONSIDERABLE SUM, MR. BARRETT, TO SEARCH FOR SOMETHING OTHER THAN ARTIFACTS.

AND JUST WHAT MIGHT THAT BE, MISS...?

WHILE YOU SEEM TO KNOW ME, I'M AFRAID I CAN'T QUITE RECALL YOUR NAME.

AND THE REASON YOU CAN'T RECALL IT IS SIMPLY BECAUSE WE'VE NEVER MET. I MERELY KNOW OF YOU, MR. BARRETT... AS EVERYONE IN THIS REGION DOES. YOU'RE A WELL-KNOWN FIGURE IN THE CONGO!

...AS WELL AS A WELL-READ AUTHOR IN THE STATES!

HUH?

MY NAME IS ISABELLE SAXON... AND I WANT YOU TO SEARCH FOR MY FATHER, IVAN SAXON. ONE OF YOUR BOOKS INCLUDES AN ACCOUNT OF HIS PRESUMED DEATH IN A PLANE CRASH FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.

HOWEVER, THE PLANE WRECKAGE HAS NEVER BEEN DISCOVERED. I WANT YOU TO FIND IT... OR MY FATHER.

YES, I REMEMBER THE INCIDENT. YOUR FATHER WAS... OR IS... AN EMINENT SCIENTIST WHO CAME TO AFRICA IN SEARCH OF A RARE DRUG-PLANT... A GIANT PLANT STRAIN, I THINK.

CORRECT! HE WAS WITH HIS SECOND WIFE, AN ORIENTAL PRINCESS, AND THEIR DAUGHTER, MY HALF-SISTER. I CHARTERED A PLANE THIS MORNING AND SKIMMED THE AREA OF THE PURPORTED CRASH...

...OBVIOUSLY WITHOUT LUCK!

OBVIOUSLY!



CAN YOU GET A PARTY OF MEN TOGETHER BY TOMORROW, ROBERTO?

I CAN TRY.

THEN WE LEAVE IN THE MORNING, MISS SAXON.

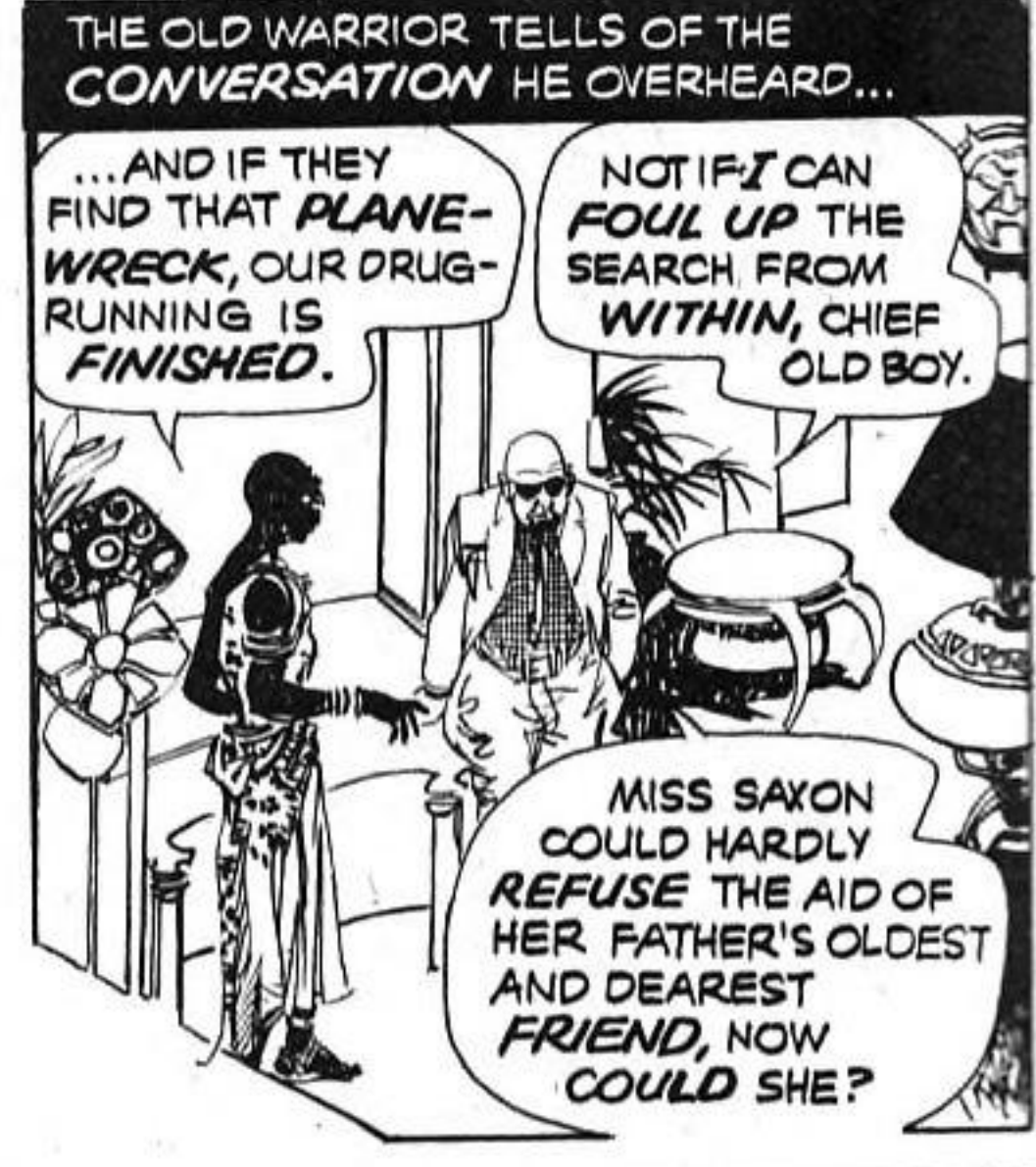


BAK
BAK
BAK



WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE? YOU KNOW I TOLD YOU NEVER TO COME HERE REGARDLESS OF...

SHUT UP, ALBRIGHT. THE NEWS I HAVE HOLDS MORE DANGER FOR OUR OPERATION THAN MY PRESENCE HERE.



THE OLD WARRIOR TELLS OF THE CONVERSATION HE OVERHEARD...

...AND IF THEY FIND THAT PLANE-WRECK, OUR DRUG-RUNNING IS FINISHED.

NOT IF I CAN FOUL UP THE SEARCH FROM WITHIN, CHIEF OLD BOY.

MISS SAXON COULD HARDLY REFUSE THE AID OF HER FATHER'S OLDEST AND DEAREST FRIEND, NOW COULD SHE?

DAWN ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF NAIROBI! THE SUN IS A BLOODY RED SMEAR STAINING THE HORIZON, SEDUCTIVELY BECKONING UNWARY TRAVELERS...



MR. BARRETT, THIS IS NORMAN ALBRIGHT, A FORMER ASSOCIATE AND GOOD FRIEND TO MY FATHER. I HAD NO IDEA HE WAS STILL IN AFRICA...

... BUT WHEN HE VISITED ME LAST NIGHT AND ASKED TO JOIN OUR PARTY, I COULD SCARCELY REFUSE IN VIEW OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES.



GLAD TO HAVE YOU ALONG, ALBRIGHT. I CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR CONCERN FOR ISABELLE'S FATHER.

ALBRIGHT'S EYES GLEAM WITH APPARENTLY SINCERE GRATITUDE, BUT THOSE EYES, NEVERTHELESS, REMIND BARRETT OF THE OILY STARE OF A WEASEL...

IT IS A FLEETING OBSERVATION... ONE SOON FORGOTTEN AMONG THE MYRIAD PREOCCUPATIONS OF LAUNCHING A SAFARI...



...A SAFARI WHICH GRADUALLY SNAKES ITS TORTUOUS WAY THROUGH THE DENSE VEIL OF AFRICAN FOLIAGE...

...SOON JOINED BY A STEALTHY OBSERVER...

WE'LL HAVE TO PASS THROUGH A WANDERI VILLAGE SOON. AFTER THAT ATTACK, IT'LL BE RISKY... BUT I WANT TO ASK THE CHIEF...

...WHY DID YOUR MEN ATTACK US?

MY TRIBESMEN DID NOT ATTACK YOU.

THEY WERE WANDERIS... PLUMED AND PAINTED FOR WAR.

YOU CLAIM MY WORD OF HONOR IS LIKE A DROP OF DEW... WHICH VANISHES BEFORE THE SUN IS OVERHEAD?

I AM CALLING YOU A LIAR... PLAIN AND SIMPLE!



YOU DESERVED THAT, CHIEF...

...AND YOU'D BETTER STOP YOUR MEN...



...BEFORE THEY DO SOMETHING THEY'LL HAVE ONLY A SPLIT-SECOND TO REGRET.

YOU GET ONLY ONE CHANCE TO AMBUSH A SAFARI OF MINE! 'CAUSE THE SECOND TIME, WE'RE ARMED TO THE TEETH.

ALL RIGHT! LET'S MOVE ON... WITHOUT ANYMORE TROUBLE.



STOP HIM, ALBRIGHT! STOP HIM AND KILL HIM...

...IF YOU DON'T KILL HIM, I SWEAR TO YOU I'LL CUT OFF THE SUPPLY OF DRUGS, EVEN IF HE DOESN'T DISCOVER OUR OPERATION.



NIGHT... AND THE FLICKERING CAPER OF A CAMPFIRE AT ONCE REPELS NOCTURNAL PREDATORS AND ATTRACTS HUMANS WHO WOULD OTHERWISE SERVE AS THEIR HELPLESS PREY...

YOUR BOOK STATED THAT THE SITE OF THE REPUTED CRASH WAS NEAR A RIVER, MR. BARRET...?

THE ZAMBEZI... WHICH IS WHERE WE'RE HEADED.



HERE! TAKE SOME COFFEE... AND CALL ME GEORGE. IT'S THREE SYLLABLES SHORTER THAN MR. BARRET!

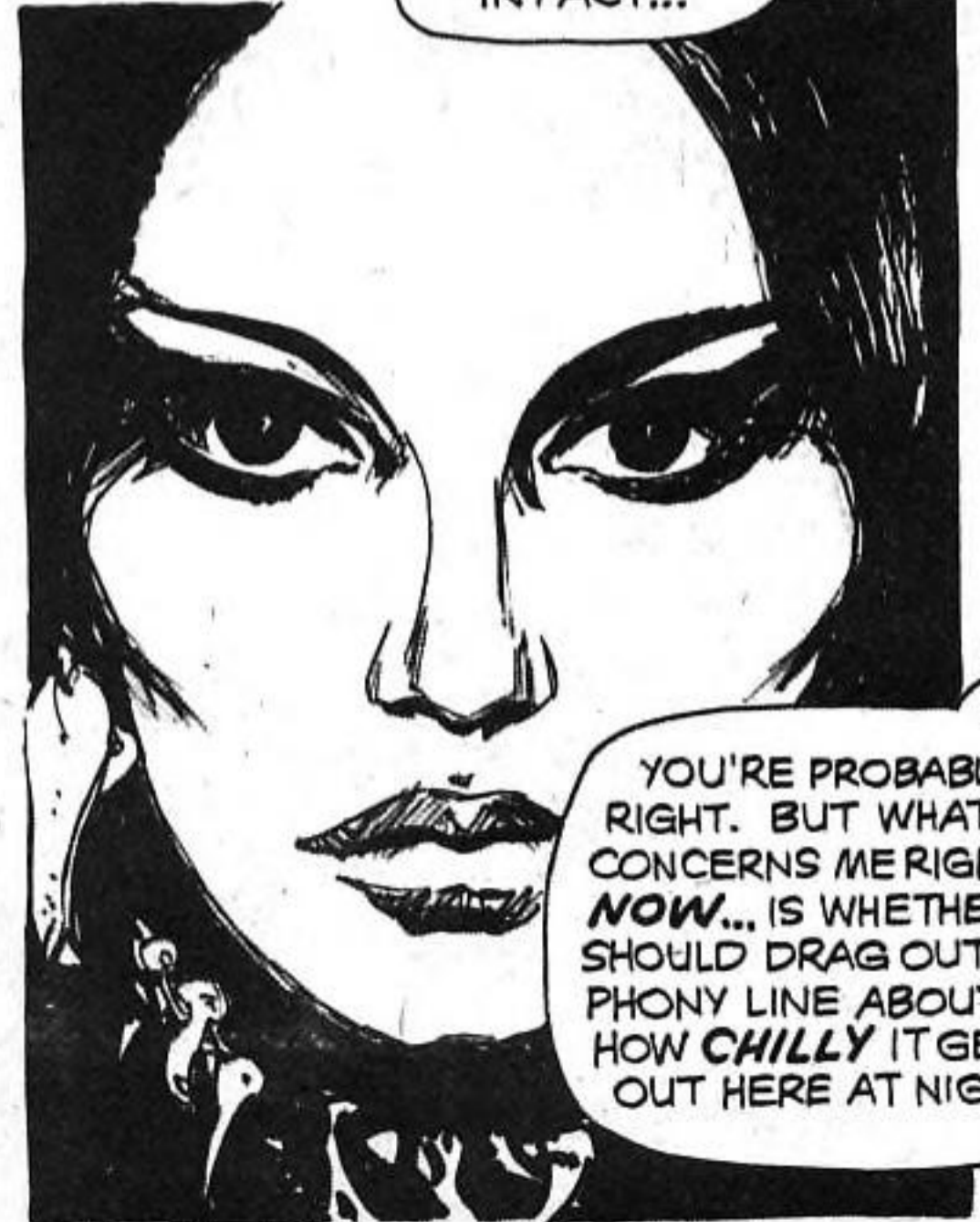


YOUR BRACELET IS VERY BEAUTIFUL... VERY DISTINCTIVE. IN FACT...



...I'M ALMOST CONVINCED I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE.

I DOUBT THAT. IT WAS A GIFT FROM MY FATHER... HE HAD IT MADE FROM HIS OWN DESIGN.



YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT. BUT WHAT CONCERNS ME RIGHT NOW... IS WHETHER I SHOULD DRAG OUT THE PHONY LINE ABOUT HOW CHILLY IT GETS OUT HERE AT NIGHT...



...OR JUST PUT MY ARM AROUND YOU BECAUSE I WANT TO.

EITHER WAY... IS FINE WITH ME... GEORGE.

FOR ISABELLE SAXON, **SLUMBER**
THAT NIGHT IS DEEP, **CONTENTED...**
AND...



...POTENTIALLY **FATAL.**



BUT **ONLY POTENTIALLY...**



...AS THIS **STEALTHY** AND **BEAUTIFUL**
GUARDIAN HAS **ASSURED...**



AND ONCE **ASSURED**, SHE **EXITS** THE
TENT...

LISTEN, ALBRIGHT,
OUR PARTNERSHIP HAS
WORKED **FINE** SO FAR!
I'VE SUPPLIED THE **CRUDE**
DRUGS! AND YOU'VE
REFINED AND **SMUGGLED**
THEM INTO AMERICA. BUT IF
BARRET FINDS THAT PLANE
WRECK...

YOU THINK
I DON'T **KNOW**
THAT? I'LL **STOP**
HIM! BUT I CAN'T
JUST GO UP AND
BLOW HIS **HEAD**
OFF!

I'VE GOT TO WAIT FOR
AN **OPPORTUNITY...**
AND **YOU'VE** GOT TO QUIT
BEING SO **IMPATIENT** JUST
BECAUSE HE BELTED YOU
IN THE **MOUTH.**



WHAT THE...?
WHO IS **SHE?!**

LUANA!!



THAT BRACELET..!
IT'S **IDENTICAL** TO
THE ONE ISABELLE
SAXON WEARS!

AND THIS...THIS
LUANA IS PART
ORIENTAL! SHE
MUST BE IVAN
SAXON'S **DAUGHTER**
BY HIS **SECOND**
WIFE!... THE
3-YEAR-OLD WHO
WENT DOWN IN THE
CRASH, AND
SOMEHOW
SURVIVED..!





...WHICH MEANS SHE MIGHT BE ABLE TO LEAD THEM TO THE PLANE WRECK..!

AND THAT MEANS WE'VE GOT TO STOP HER!

ALBRIGHT!! THAT PANTHER! LUANA CONTROLS IT...!



THEN IT'S GOT TO BE STOPPED TOO...

BLAM



MISSED THE BLOODY CAT. AND THAT SHOT'LL BRING THE WHOLE CAMP RUNNING! MAKE YOURSELF SCARCE, CHIEF!

AND YOU, ALBRIGHT... YOU MAKE SURE OF BARRETT'S DEATH!

YOU CAN RELAX, BARRETT! THE EXCITEMENT'S OVER.

I SPOTTED A PANTHER PROWLING AROUND THE CAMP... TOOK A POTSHOT AT IT... MISSED.

THAT'S RIGHT.

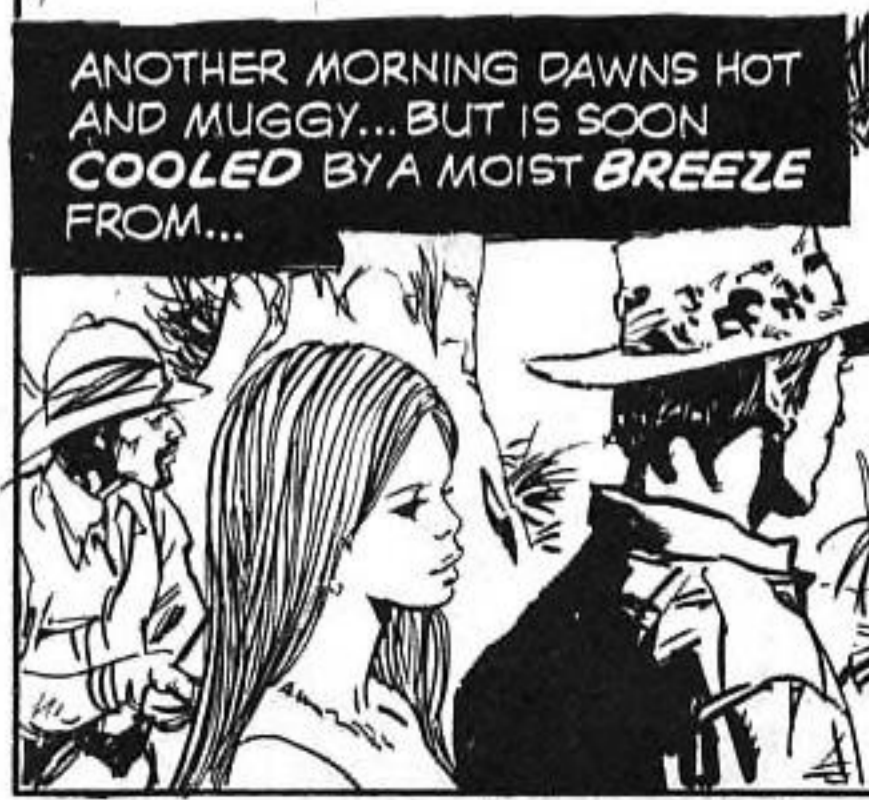


A PANTHER, HUH?



WAS IT, MIS-TER ALBRIGHT?

I WONDER...



ANOTHER MORNING DAWNS HOT AND MUGGY... BUT IS SOON COOLED BY A MOIST BREEZE FROM...

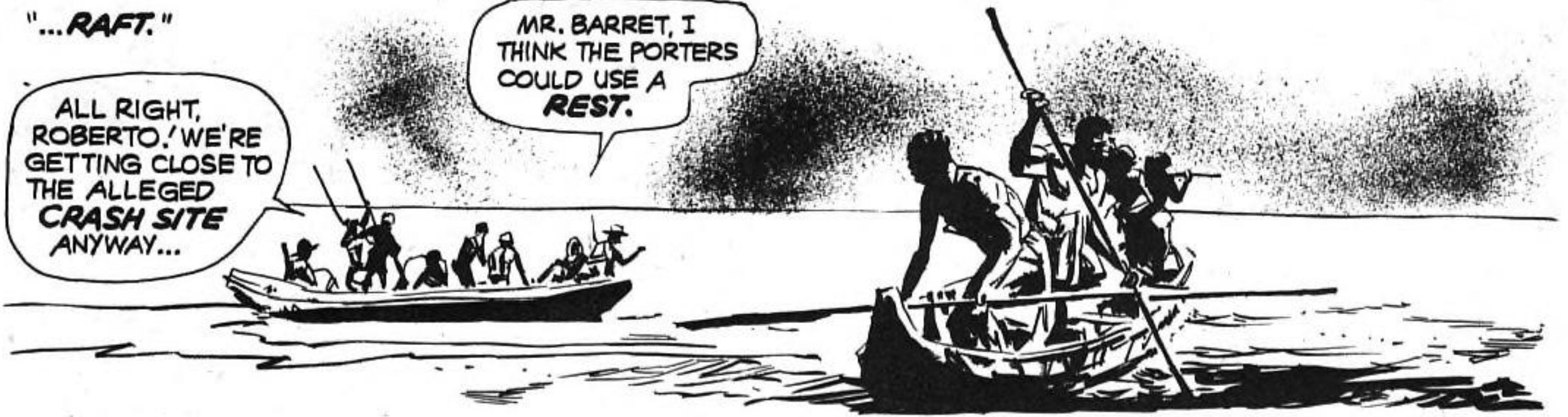
THE ZAMBEZI! ALL RIGHT, FROM HERE ON WE'LL HAVE TO PROCEED BY...



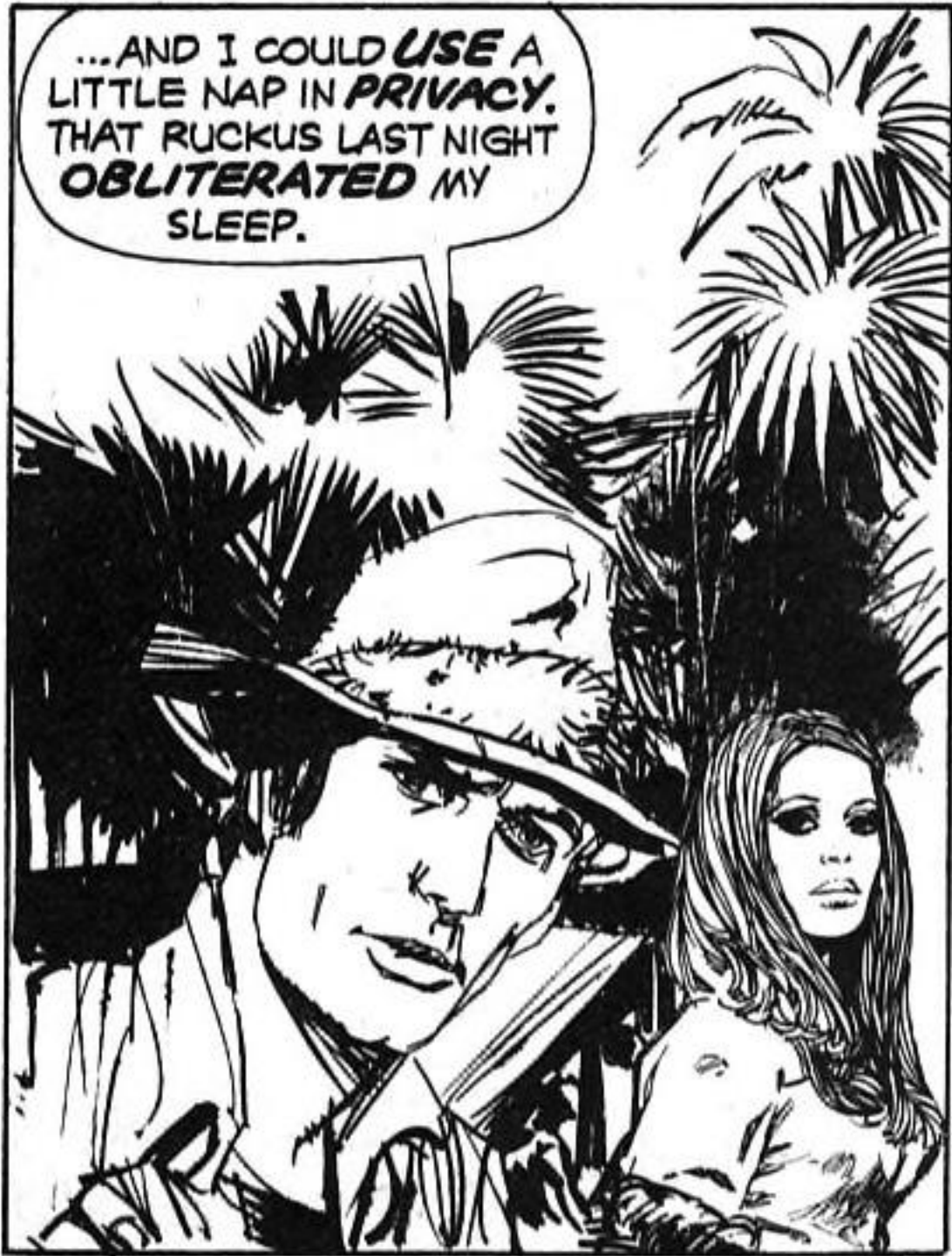
"...RAFT."

MR. BARRET, I
THINK THE PORTERS
COULD USE A
REST.

ALL RIGHT,
ROBERTO! WE'RE
GETTING CLOSE TO
THE ALLEGED
CRASH SITE
ANYWAY...



...AND I COULD **USE** A
LITTLE NAP IN **PRIVACY.**
THAT RUCKUS LAST NIGHT
OBLITERATED MY
SLEEP.



SO... IT **WASN'T**
A DREAM, YOU **DO**
EXIST.

BUT WHERE'D
YOU GET THAT **MIRROR?**
YOU CERTAINLY DIDN'T
MAKE IT **YOURSELF,**
HERE IN THE **JUNGLE...**



YOU WANT ME
TO **FOLLOW** YOU?
I TAKE IT YOU'RE
GOING TO **SHOW**
ME WHERE YOU GOT
THE MIRROR...?





WELL... I'LL ... BE...

THE PLANE CRASHED INTO THE RIVER.

AFTER SALVAGING IVAN SAXON'S RESEARCH FILES AND *PERSONAL DIARY*...

ISABELLE, THIS DIARY DISCLOSES THE FACT THAT YOUR FATHER'S "TRUSTED FRIEND"... *ALBRIGHT* HERE... WAS ENGAGED IN A *DRUG-RUNNING OPERATION*...

...AND THE VERY *LAST ENTRY*, WRITTEN IN A PANICKED *SCRAWL*, REVEALS THAT *ALBRIGHT SABOTAGED* THE PLANE ... *FORCED* IT TO CRASH ... SO YOUR FATHER WOULD NEVER GET THE CHANCE TO TURN HIM *IN*.



THAT'S A LIE!!



ROBERTO! BRING THAT *SCUBA GEAR* DOWN HERE! *FAST!*



...TWO *ADULT SKELETONS* BUT NO EVIDENCE OF THE *CHILD*.



ALBRIGHT, SHOVEDS THE WANDERER CHIEF BACK... INTO TO GROPING VINES OF A MAN-EATING PLANT...



POOR ALBRIGHT! ACCORDING TO YOUR FATHER'S RESEARCH FILES, THE RARE GIANT DRUG PLANT ALBRIGHT AND THE CHIEF WERE AFTER...

... WAS RIGHT HERE ALL ALONG! BUT IT TURNED OUT TO BE DEADLY TO MORE THAN JUST HOPELESS JUNKIES IN THE STATES.

ONE THING'S FOR CERTAIN! WE WOULDN'T HAVE UNCOVERED ANY OF THIS WITHOUT YOUR HALF-SISTER... WITHOUT LUANA.

