

# **GHOST TRIBES**

## **VOLUME 1**

The Ghost of Africa

By Venancio Gomani Jr.



"The stars over Africa hold the secrets of a love that defied the heavens." –  
Venancio Gomaní Jr.,



# Entry



Survival! The word pulses through my veins as I sprint, darting between gnarled trees in the dark woods. Seven of us entered this cursed forest—seven hybrids, sent to capture it! But now one of us lies dead, taken by the very demon that stalks me. What kind of creature preys on beings as lethal as we are? No ordinary enemy could face even one of us, let alone seven. Yet here we are—hunted like trapped animals by the very creature we set out to hunt.

The twilight casts a gray hue over the forest, drained of color by impending danger. Gentle winds whisper through the leaves, a soft lament for our situation. The chill seeps into my bones, and fear raises goosebumps on my skin.

My brothers and I set out on a mission—to hunt and defeat the demon haunting these ancient woods. We're the top warriors of our order, marching into this domain where the skulls of past victims serve as grim markers atop wooden spikes. But as we crossed the threshold of bones and human remains, the air shifted—from neutral to malevolent. It struck from behind, breaking through our eldest brother's ribcage and tearing his heart from his chest. All we saw was a shadowy figure, hooded and bound by tattered sleeves and chains. And those hooded eyes blazed crimson—a sign of our impending doom.

Six of us survived, witnessing our brother's brutal death. In that moment, we scattered, each fleeing to escape this cursed place. We knew instantly that the odds were against us. Fortunately for us, now, the demon's skill doesn't matter all too much. Separated, it can only attack one of us at a time. And it chose me as its target, leaving my five brothers to flee. No matter. For their survival, I'll willingly become the demon's bait, leading the fiend away so they can report back to King Tasheni, our chief.

I tighten my grip on the spear as I sprint through the forest. Ahead lies the forbidden boundary, adorned with razor wire and the skulls of countless beasts impaled on wooden stakes—a grim warning we foolishly ignored.

More than two years have passed since the demon emerged and claimed this forest as its domain. Before that, a modest clan thrived here—a society led by Chief Tasheni and his sister, whom he married. They were proud descendants of the chief who sent us alongside an army of ten thousand hybrid soldiers. But when the demon's forces attacked, hundreds were displaced, and thousands died. Men, women, and children fell victim to this cataclysmic purge.

Legends tell of the demon—a commander leading armies of cannibal tribeless and mighty lions. They swarmed the clan, while the demon alone overwhelmed our hybrid army. The skulls of those who once trod this cursed ground now form a macabre fence, encircling the demon's territory. Tens of thousands—maybe hundreds of thousands—of human skulls mark its newfound home, a place I must now urgently flee.

My six brothers and I were the premier warriors of this vast continent. Chiefs and kingdoms sought our aid against terrors their own men couldn't face. We were summoned—seven unmatched hybrids. No single adversary, man or beast, could stand against us. Yet here I am, fleeing for my life, pursued by a demon under the shroud of night. If I die today, I pray my remaining brothers find escape from this cursed place.

Earlier, I warned my brothers: breathe in the fumes of fear-twisted leaves before we venture here. These leaves are rare, brought by Swahili traders from distant lands. They call it the herb of the gods—hemp. Before each hunt, we'd envelop ourselves in its smoke, shedding pain, fear, and even our humanity. It gave us strength, fearlessness, and the unwavering focus we needed for our dangerous tasks.

But this time, our eldest brother forbade the ritual, choosing to partake in secret. When we discovered his clandestine act, we planned to confront him after the hunt. Now, it seems I'll face this dispute alone—in the depths of hell.

Pursuit echoes through the shadows, the demon leaping from tree to tree. I sprint across open ground, stealing glances backward. Ahead looms the skull-studded barrier, and maybe—I might just reach it! My hand stretches toward a distant, seemingly plain wooden stake. But from afar, one sharpened pike impales six freshly decapitated human heads, blood dripping from their jagged necks. These aren't mere skulls; they're severed heads, haunting reminders.

I slow down, eyes widening in shock as I reach the boundary of this demon's domain. The heads impaled on sharpened poles...

"My brothers..." I whisper to myself in disbelief. Their fate etched in the gruesome tableau before me.

Each head severed, each skull a grim testament to their demise. The demon orchestrated this macabre display, anticipating my arrival. But how?

Suddenly, a massive darkness descends, crashing to the ground among the wall of skulls. This was no accident. I was led here. I glance back, and there it is: the shadow of a fully grown male lion, the demon's sinister companion. Trapped between the demon to my front and the lion behind me, I grip my assegai, poised for battle. It dispatched my brothers with ease, but that doesn't mean I won't fight.

"You slaughtered my brothers," I warn, the dust settling around the figure now standing before me. In the twilight, I discern a hooded form, rusted chains glinting in the moonlight, and gory crimson eyes gleaming from behind the lion skull—a bone-masked specter. A cold breath trails through the mouth openings, and I brace myself for the confrontation.

I am out of options, so I draw upon the lost arts, channeling the power of the orisha god, Ta Kora. The orisha's fury envelops me as I release a resounding battle cry, charging toward the demon with my assegai poised high.

But as I reach the creature, my swing meets empty air. Instead, my lower arm falls, severed, the assegai still clutched in its grip. The demon's weapon—a bizarrely shaped blade—acted with swift precision, slicing off my limb before I could react. Blood spills, and I collapse to my knees, wailing in agony, my remaining hand desperately clutching the remnants of my severed arm.

"What are you?!" I bellow, tears mixing with pain and anguish.

The demon seizes my neck, lifting my head to face it. Through the boned mask, its crimson-red eyes bore into my very soul.

"The Ghost of Africa!" it roars, a plume of ghostly breath escaping its mouth. And then, a sharp mass breaks through my chest.

Iron claws, merciless and unyielding.

I understand now. The heads impaled on stakes mark the gruesome fence of the demon's territory. But the bodies—the demon feeds those to its lion.

Death creeps upon me, its icy fingers tightening. The demon withdraws its hand from my abdomen, and I crumple to the ground, agonizing pain radiating through every fiber of my being. Immobilized, I lie on my back, panting defiantly, gazing up at the full moon, awaiting my inevitable demise.

They say that life's mysteries unravel in death—a haunting beauty. I've lived as both warrior and thief. Mapenzi of the Tonga, that was my name—the last of the seven Tonga hybrids.

Behind me, something stirs—the lion's paws treading earth. The beast obscures my view of the moon, looming over me. I draw a final, deep breath, bracing for the inevitable. The Lion roars, its teeth sinking into my throat, crushing my windpipe. I close my eyes, embracing death. My legacy stands—I did not die weak!



# **BOOK 1.**

The Awakening

# CHAPTER 1:

## The Intrusionist



In the heart of this vast African continent, where ancient legends intertwine with the whispering winds, I find solace among the eucalyptus leaves. Their delightful fragrance dances upon the air, a tantalizing invitation to explore their secrets. These leaves, as enchanting to behold as they are to taste, are a rarity here—a precious gift bestowed by the land itself.

The towering eucalyptus trees, their trunks reaching skyward like ancient sentinels, create a cathedral of green. Their branches extend far above, brushing against the heavens. It is in this arboreal sanctuary that I seek refuge, perched high on a sturdy

limb. The world below fades away, replaced by the rustling leaves and the gentle sway of the boughs.

This plantation, nestled along the boundaries of Lozi territory within the mighty Barotse Land, guards its secrets fiercely. A battalion of vigilant guards patrols its perimeter, their eyes sharp, senses attuned to any disturbance. Burglars and mischief-makers beware—the consequences of trespassing here are dire. The very air crackles with the tension of their watchfulness.

And so, she—the enigmatic guardian of this secluded haven—chose isolation. Within these leafy confines, no one enters uninvited, and no one departs without announcement. Her presence is both a mystery and a warning, a whispered tale passed from one generation of guards to the next.

As I lie supine upon the gnarled branches, the moon above waxes crescent, casting its silvery glow upon the earth. The breeze, a gentle lover, caresses my skin, carrying with it the stories of ages past. The clouds weave a delicate veil, concealing and revealing the moon in a celestial dance. Here, amid the eucalyptus leaves, I am both witness and participant—a silent observer of the night's secrets.

In the heart of this secluded plantation, where the eucalyptus leaves weave their ancient spells, I find myself ensnared by a serenity that borders on obsession. The air hangs heavy with secrets, and the very breeze seems to murmur forgotten incantations. It is a façade, this tranquility—a delicate veil that conceals the tumult beneath.

I perch high in the eucalyptus tree, my back pressed against the gnarled bark. The moon, a crescent sentinel, casts its silvery gaze upon the world below. But it is not death that beckons me; it is something far more captivating—an eternal captivity within this arboreal sanctuary. Likando and I, on the day this plantation first drew breath, wove this world together. It became our refuge, our clandestine haven.

Yet now, as the days stretch into nights, I watch her—my dearest friend—train relentlessly. Her determination is a force of nature, unyielding and fierce. She moves with purpose, her focus unbreakable. The kingdom awaits her, its hopes pinned upon her shoulders. The impending ceremony looms, and she cannot falter. To fail would be to betray not only herself but the very fabric of our creation.

Her knees tremble, and her shoulders ache from the ceaseless exertion. Likando's resolve remains unshaken. She slips away from the palace, evading the guards, drawn back to our hidden world. Here, she hones her skills, sharpens her mind. I do not blame her; I would do the same were I in her position.

As the moon arcs across the sky, I know this night will echo the last. Likando, her body swollen and weary, will return to the palace. And I, her silent accomplice, will help her conceal the evidence of her nocturnal escapades. Our secret world—the whispering eucalyptus—holds both salvation and peril. It is a place of magic and sacrifice, where destiny weaves its intricate threads.

In the heart of Barotse Land, where the Lozi kingdom weaves its tapestry of secrets, stands a princess named Likando—the sole legitimate child of the monarch. Her lineage, however, is shrouded in mystery, a riddle whispered only in hushed tones.

Three illegitimate brothers and three illegitimate sisters share her blood, yet none can unravel the enigma of her birth.

Chief Simasiku Lumeta guards this secret fiercely. To question Likando's heritage is to court danger. Those who dare inquire find themselves cast into solitary confinement, their curiosity punished by the unforgiving passage of days—or even months. Even Likando herself remains ignorant of her true lineage. Is she tribeless, a mixed breed, a tribesman, a half-blood, a hybrid, or perhaps something more elusive—a thoroughbred of forgotten origins?

Legends tell of the last hybrid in the kingdom—the Lozi king himself. Simasiku Lumeta, a man of both worlds, straddles the realms of mortal and mystical. Could Likando be his legacy? The possibility lingers, tantalizing yet improbable.

The breed of thoroughbreds faced extinction long ago, vanquished in a war etched into memory as the Night of the Living Moon.

From childhood, we were regaled with tales of that fateful night—a cyclical horror that descends upon the land once every five generations. It defies the natural order, unfolding in broad daylight. As the sun turns black, darkness blankets the world. From the depths of hell, enigmas rise—possessing the living and the dead alike. Their malevolence knows no bounds, wreaking havoc upon humanity.

The demons emerge, clawing their way through mortal vessels. They reanimate rotting corpses, infusing life into long-dead bones. Beasts frozen in time stir, their eyes aflame with hunger. And at the heart of it all stands the king of demons—a malevolent force seeking to extend that cursed night into eternity.

Seven thoroughbred kings, each leading the mightiest tribes with their formidable armies, stood as the last bastion against the demon king's tyranny. With their dying breaths, they clashed with the forces of hell, their valor etching a desperate battle into the annals of time. Humanity hung in the balance, teetering on the precipice of oblivion. And then, against all odds, they prevailed—their sacrifice sealing the fate of the last thoroughbreds.

The extinction of these noble beings reverberated through the ages, leaving no trace of their once-proud lineage. No living thoroughbred remains, for if they did, our world would likely crumble beneath the weight of their power.

Above, the midnight sky dances with clouds, each independent and elusive. They twist and coil, shaping themselves into ephemeral forms—a celestial ballet witnessed only by the whispering eucalyptus leaves. A ghostly breeze stirs, rustling the foliage. Each leaf becomes an instrument in the orchestra of the night.

Within this arboreal sanctuary, Likando hones her focus. The wind caresses her face, tracing the contours of her nose and cheekbones. Her hair, like spun silk, dances in response—a tender touch, reminiscent of a mother's embrace cradling her newborn child. Likando, with her enigmatic lineage, is a living paradox—a beauty both ethereal and fierce.

Yet we are far removed from the Lozi capital, isolated beyond the boundaries of safety. Here, within the embargoed territory, we tread cautiously. To cross that

invisible line would court catastrophe. My purpose is clear—to watch over her, to protect her from the shadows that lurk beyond our sanctuary.

Lurkers abound—smugglers, thieves, and bandits—all seeking entry into the heart of Lozi civilization. But worst of all are the tribeless—the lost souls who wander, their motives veiled in mystery. As the moon waxes and wanes, I remain her silent guardian, bound by duty and the secrets of the whispering eucalyptus.

Two sunrises remain until Likando embarks on her fateful journey to meet the elder of spirits. A path laden with mystery and peril awaits her—a quest to discover her animal spirit, a distillation ritual that transcends mere flesh and bone. But even greater looms her maturity ceremony, a pivotal day that will etch her worth into the very fabric of the kingdom. Seven days hence, the weight of destiny will rest upon her shoulders.

From fifty yards away, I sense her turmoil—the rapid rise of blood pressure, the frantic rhythm of her heartbeat. Fear coils within her, yet she wears her mask well. Likando, the Lozi princess, conceals her trepidation beneath a veneer of determination.

Her weapons—short, venomous daggers—gleam in the moonlight. They are an extension of her will, honed through weeks of relentless practice. But what elusive prey has she chosen for tonight's training? Not a warthog or a fox; such mundane quarry would not warrant this intensity. No, Likando seeks a challenge—a beast that defies the ordinary.

The elder of spirits awaits her—a sage veiled in ancient wisdom. He alone comprehends the mechanics of the distillation ritual, a conduit between realms. They say he discerns a person's breed, unraveling their essence. The entire kingdom anticipates Likando's encounter with him—an unveiling that may alter the course of history.

Yet her resolve remains unyielding. She trains, her lithe form weaving through the eucalyptus grove. The wind carries her scent, but I remain hidden, my presence a mere whisper. She suspects another observer, but fatigue blurs her senses. I retreat further into the shadows, branches concealing my form. For both our safety, I remain unseen—a silent guardian in this clandestine world of secrets and spirits.

From my hidden perch, I snap a twig—a calculated disturbance meant to divert her attention. Likando, ever vigilant, reacts as expected. Her gaze scans the surroundings, seeking the source of the sound. But I am a phantom, a shadow in the eucalyptus canopy.

Next, I toss the twig to the crow perched nearby. The bird takes flight, startled by the unexpected missile. My aim is true; the crow flees, leaving behind a sense of solitude. Likando's relief is palpable. She believes herself alone, her suspicions quelled. Yet I remain, my silent vigil unbroken.

Her eyes lock onto the antelope calf—a creature innocent in its grazing. Likando crouches, her movements fluid, concealing herself behind a bush. Her small dagger gleams in the moonlight. But timing is everything. The calf senses danger, its ears twitching, eyes alert. It inspects its surroundings, antennae raised in perpetual vigilance.

Likando's dagger is poised, ready to strike. But she hesitates. The calf remains just beyond her reach—a tantalizing distance for a seasoned hunter, but an insurmountable gap for one weary and out of practice. Her resolve wavers, and the calf continues its wary perambulation.

And then she fires—a premature release. The dagger sails wide, missing its mark. I cringe, my silent encouragement futile. "Slow and steady," I murmur to the night. Likando's determination remains unyielding, but her timing falters.

The calf leaps, panic igniting its limbs. It scampers away, hooves pounding the earth. I anticipated this—the miss by a mere kiss's length. Likando's timing faltered, and the prey eluded her blade.

"What are you looking at, Kando?" I murmur, my gaze unwavering. She observes the fleeing calf, her eyes tracing its desperate escape. But something lingers—a discomposure, a dazed hesitation. The calf slows, teetering on the edge of indecision. And then it collapses, defeated, its breaths ragged.

Did she actually make the hit? Impossible! Her aim was off, her timing flawed. Yet she walks toward the fallen creature. My warning remains unheard—the dangers of venturing beyond Lozi territory. The very ground beneath her feet is forbidden without proper arrangements and royal supervision.

I watch from my distant vantage point. The calf gasps, its struggle for life palpable. The poison courses through its veins, a cruel dance of mortality. Its left eye glistens—an orb of pleading. It doesn't want to die; that much is clear.

Kando approaches stealthily, her resolve unyielding. "How careless," I whisper to the night. "Outside the safety of our borders, danger lurks." I remain hidden, my duty to protect her paramount. But my mind races—has she ventured recklessly before, beyond my watchful gaze?

The veil of shadows conceals my presence, and I wait. Timing is everything.

Likando's gaze narrows, her instincts on high alert. Something troubles her—an unseen ripple in the fabric of our clandestine world. She inches closer to the fallen calf, her dagger poised at its neck—or so it seems.

But my unease grows. I must reveal myself, warn her away from the danger that looms. Not yet, though. Patience is my ally. I remain hidden, a silent observer within the eucalyptus shadows. My mission: to protect her from death, even if it means allowing her to court trouble.

Silently, I follow her movements, tree to tree, until she crosses the forbidden border. "What are you doing, Kando?" I whisper, my voice lost in the night. "Leaving Lozi territory without proper arrangement—it's illegal."

The calf lies on its side, gasping for air. The poison courses through its veins, and I watch from my distant vantage point. But then, the unthinkable—a dagger hurtles toward Likando. It pierces her neck, and she slaps the wound, blood seeping through her fingers. The blade is small, its venom potent. A direct hit won't kill her, but the poison will.

My heart races. The veil of shadows shrouds my presence, and I wait.

Likando's right hand clings to her bleeding neck, while her left wields a dagger—a lethal intent etched in its blade. She is mute, the weapon buried deep within her throat. But where did it come from? Who fired it? The trap was set, perhaps long before our arrival. My mind races, connecting the dots. Likando's clandestine training sessions beyond Lozi territory—had they drawn the attention of unfriendly eyes?

The attack was no accident. The calf, an easy target, grazed just beyond the borders. I should have seen it sooner—the premeditation, the calculated strike. But now, who fired the fatal shot?

Likando scans her surroundings, her vulnerability palpable. I remain hidden, my identity a secret. The woods echo with ominous sounds—crackling twigs, rustling leaves. And then it hits me—someone else is here. Not after me, for none know of my presence except the spirits of our orisha. The perpetrator seeks Likando.

She realizes it too—the dagger at the calf's lifeless neck wasn't her's while her own weapon discarded next to the panting beast. Panic flits across her eyes. I must act swiftly, reveal myself. "Kando, RUN!" I whisper, my voice stifled by judgment. Her pursuers are many, and I remain her silent guardian.

Kando's shriek, a guttural symphony of blood and fear, reverberates through the night. What horror has unfolded? The shadows stir, shrubs and bushes whispering secrets. She scans her surroundings, dagger clutched in her left hand, the right pressed firmly against her bleeding neck. A poisonous blade, too small to remove with trembling fingers, now threatens her life.

My instincts flare. I sense the fiends behind this ambush. Tribeless? Unlikely. Their motives lack reason for such elaborate schemes. But who, then? The neighboring clans? Their strength pales in comparison to Kando's potential lineage—half-blood or, perhaps, something more extraordinary as a hybrid. Yet they wouldn't risk proximity to Lozi territory, fearing annihilation by the great Lozi army.

My mission: protect Princess Likando. As her guard, my pride forbids failure—even more so because she is heir to the Lozi throne. And as her brother, I cannot bear the thought of her demise. But I, too, am at risk—the only other soul aware of her location. I remain hidden, yet prepared to sacrifice myself for her safety—again.

She runs, her pursuers concealed in the shadows. I follow, my resolve unwavering. Damn it, Kando! Your unauthorized escapades have drawn danger. Your father entrusted me with your life during this crucial time. But now, as the ambush unfolds, I realize the truth: everyone knows of your impending maturity ceremony. The timing was perfect for those who seek your downfall.

Likando sprints through the dense foliage, her breath ragged, and her pulse echoing in her ears. The towering trees blurred as she zigzags, desperate to put distance between herself and the Lozi territory and into IT's territory. Down the valley she races, the earth pounding beneath her feet, the wind carrying her away from danger.

I pursue, my own breaths labored. Panic surges within me. "Come on, Likando," I muttered, frustration tugging at my voice. "This is beyond reckless. It's perilous."

They whispered that IT was mere legend—a tale spun by parents to frighten their children before bedtime. But firsthand accounts, shared by inebriated merchants and wary travelers, painted a different picture. IT existed, lurking in the shadows, disliking trespassers who dared cross into its domain. An ambush by bandits was one thing; but an encounter with IT is another. For if IT revealed itself, hope would vanish like morning mist, leaving only despair in its wake.

"Turn around, Likando," I plead, my voice carried away by the wind. "Do you even comprehend where you're headed?"

Likando, her mind clouded, couldn't hear reason. She runs blindly, oblivious to her destination or the entities pursuing her. The poison coursing through her veins distorts her senses.

The ambushers—I knew them well. Not mere tribeless wanderers, but a ruthless gang of bandits. Their greed drives them to plunder copper and rare animal pelts. Yet, why did they target Likando? They couldn't be so naive as to expect a ransom for the safe return of the Lozi Princess. No, someone more powerful had orchestrated this perilous game, daring to challenge the very throne of the Lozi.

My worst fear has finally materialized! The poison, insidious and relentless, has infiltrated her mind, distorting her perceptions beyond recognition. Her relentless pursuers, once shadowy and elusive, now appear to have halted their chase. But there's a singular reason for their sudden cessation: Likando has unwittingly stumbled into the heart of its territory—a forbidden realm marked by an eerie barricade adorned with heads and skulls impaled on wooden stakes, numbering in the hundreds of thousands. The very embodiment of dread—the Ghost of Africa!

DAMN IT!

## CHAPTER 2:



## The Ghost of Africa



The forbidden heart of Africa looms before me—an enigma veiled in whispers and shadows. No mortal eye has ever beheld it with clarity; only fragments of folklore and legend hint at its existence. Tales, spun by distant wayfarers and inebriated merchants, weave a chilling narrative of a demon that defies reason.

Within this treacherous domain, no survivor has emerged to recount its horrors—save one man. His life spared, he bears the burden of a singular purpose: to pass on the dire warning. "Never trespass," he implores, his voice trembling with the weight of truth. For this demon, this Ghost of Africa, brooks no intrusion.

They say this survivor witnessed the demon's malevolence firsthand. Armies of cannibalistic tribes, mere shells of humanity, danced to the demon's macabre tune. Possessed by spirits from the abyss, they became instruments of annihilation. In a cataclysmic clash, the demon obliterated an entire tribe—an army of ten

thousand—its wrath unyielding. The Tisha tribe vanished, leaving behind only the skulls of its fallen, now impaled as a grisly barrier marking the demon's territory.

THIS IS BAD!

"Who are you?!" Likando screams, her hand clamped around her bleeding neck. Her dagger gleams, defiance etched into its blade.

I, hidden in the shadows, pray she restrains her panic. Her cries could summon the demon—a force beyond reckoning. For the **\*\*Ghost of Africa\*\*** is no ordinary adversary. It thrives on fear, feasting upon mortal terror.

"Run, Kando," I murmur, my steps deliberate as I navigate the gruesome barricade of skulls and bones. "Facing our pursuers is perilous, but confronting the demon? That's a whole different abyss..."

The air thickens with a primal roar, shattering the fragile equilibrium of our desperate flight. My thoughts scatter like startled birds, and I curse under my breath. "DAMN IT, what NOW?" The evening, already fraught with peril, takes a darker turn.

Likando, my sister, faces a new adversary—one that defies mere mortal reckoning. Not a calf, nor a bandit gang. She pivots, her eyes widening as she confronts the embodiment of terror: a thoroughbred lion. Its crimson-stained maw clamps down on a bandit's neck, lifeless eyes staring into oblivion. Two more corpses lie sprawled in a pool of blood, their fate sealed by the beast's wrath.

The lion approaches, unhurried, its gait both casual and lethal. It discards the bandit's body, no interest in the meal. Only the kill matters now. Twigs snap, signaling the bandits' retreat—a wise choice, but one I lack the privilege to make. If the tales of the Ghost of Africa hold true, they won't escape this cursed territory. Not unless the demon permits it—an unlikely prospect, given its history.

I tread deeper into this forbidden realm, fully aware that my life hangs in precarious balance. For Likando, my sister, I'd willingly pay any price—even my own existence. Her perceptions falter, poisoned veins clouding her judgment. Alone, she stands no chance against the lion's wrath.

I whisper to myself, urging her safety. "Run, Kando. It's safer to face the bandits than this predator." But my plea is futile. The lion inches closer, and I know that if I don't intervene, Likando will fall prey to its merciless jaws. Perhaps, just perhaps, I can save her before the Ghost of Africa emerges from the shadows.

And then, as if the very fabric of reality unravels, a short assegai hurtles through the clearing. It embeds itself headfirst into a nearby branch, narrowly missing my collarbone. Blood trickles down my chest, a testament to the demon's malevolence. Its aim transcends mortal skill—sharper than the armored rhino's thorned horns, more lethal than heavenly lightning. The assegai isn't meant to kill me; it's a warning, a proclamation that the demon knows my presence, my vulnerability.

What twisted game does it play? Summoning a lion to feast upon us as it slinks away, leaving Likando to face her doom? Even for a malevolent entity, this is excessive cruelty.

If the Ghost of Africa sought my demise, it could have severed my head with that assegai. No, it wants something else. So, I remain hidden, watching from my confines. But if necessity demands, I'll confront the demon itself. For Likando, I'll lay my life as distraction, hoping she escapes the lion's jaws and the demon's wrath.

The moon hangs low, casting elongated shadows across the clearing. Here, in the heart of this forsaken realm, it is Kando versus the lion—the Ghost of Africa and I mere spectators. The poison courses through her veins, leaving her dazed, her stance precarious.

She coughs, spewing blood and water. Composure eludes her; the venom gnaws at her senses. Words falter; her throat, punctured by the tiny dagger, spills crimson rivers into her lungs.

Only one dagger remains clenched in her hand; the others remain buckled within her hair-wrapped clothing.

The thoroughbred lion crouches, sinew coiled, and leaps. Likando reacts instinctively, rolling beneath the lion's stride. But before she completes a full rotation, the beast pivots, its heavy claw slashing across her right arm. She crumples to the ground, her throat and arm both wounded. Her father, should we survive this night, will demand retribution. But what does that matter now? Neither she nor I may witness the dawn; we teeter on the precipice of becoming prey to both the lion and its demon master.

Yet, something doesn't align. The lion dispatched three bandits with ease, yet it struggles against a wounded, disoriented 18-year-old girl. Why? Does the Ghost or the lion intend to kill her? Seemingly not, for they spared her earlier. The demon toys with her, prolonging her suffering. Perhaps it seeks our torment, our desperate struggle for survival.

If this is the game the Ghost of Africa wishes to play, then I shall helplessly comply—doing nothing more than hiding here, watching this battle unfold.

Likando lies supine, her arm and throat oozing blood. Disoriented, she struggles to maintain consciousness. Her vision warps, distorting the world she once knew. The lion, relentless, pins her beneath its weight—shoulders and legs immobilized.

It's over. All hope extinguished. I prepare to strike, but then, a voice reverberates from the shadows. "ENOUGH, Khumbo!" The command echoes across the clearing, originating from the opposite end where I cower, concealed in darkness.

Chains drag, a dissonant symphony against the forest's backdrop. Twigs part, creating a path for the Ghost of Africa. Even nature bows to its supremacy. But what

is it? Beast, spirit, or something beyond comprehension? If human, what breed? If beast, how does it walk on two legs? If spirit, whose vessel grants it such strength?

When a spirit possesses a mortal, its power mirrors the host's limits. Hence, the varying strengths of cannibal tribeless—their bodies mere conduits for otherworldly forces.

The arena hushes. Woodland creatures fix their gaze. Suspense constricts my chest. I am but a witness, bound by fate, as the Ghost steps forth.

All of nature falls silent, its symphony hushed, leaving only one sound—the inexorable approach of the Ghost of Africa. The very winds bow, their whispers stifled as each footfall reverberates through the earth. Birds, once free, now prostrate themselves, wings trembling in fear. Even those nearby dare not flutter away from this ungodly menace that pervades the air.

Drumbeats—or perhaps heartbeats—pulse in the stillness. The air thickens, heat radiating until, finally, we see it! A final unveiling, a hoax draped in darkness.

The wind surges, gusts and torrents tearing through the clearing. Birds scatter uncontrollably, their terror palpable. Trees whistle, their branches agitated. Woodland creatures flee, galloping from this hellish tableau.

And there stands the Ghost, poised at the veil where light meets the shadows it once hid within. Not fully revealed, yet its presence commands awe. Bare feet, shackled ankles—a testament to its escape from the abyss. A chain descends, seemingly from around its neck. Its long black cape flutters, flames licking from within the darkness, tattered extensions burning black into the surrounding light.

But it's the eyes that sear into my soul—a twisted masterpiece of nightmare. Crimson red, tinged with eerie malevolence, they glow from the depths of darkness.

How long since I've felt such fear? How long since I've witnessed this grotesque perfection? Fear, faultless and conscious, consumes reality itself. At the very sight of the Ghost, existence unravels into oblivion.

How long since I swallowed pride and recoiled, poised to flee? How long since I tightened my grip on the sheathed assegai, ready to bolt? This twisted, maniacal force—its sheer WILL—presses upon me like the crushing depths of the ocean. I sense its malevolence, unseen yet vivid, rending the very atmosphere. Even the distant heavens tremble, thunder splitting the air. Spirits cower, awaiting their fate.

"We stand no chance of survival," I whisper, my subconscious swallowing a globule of spit. My eyebrows raise, pupils dilate, and hair stands on end. The demon, from that great distance, hears me. Its grin—a macabre dance across cold, crimson eyes—hungers for my blood. I can't control my breath; my desire to flee gnaws at my soul.

"We stand no chance!" I voice aloud, more desperate now.

And then, the demon graces us with a second act. It steps forth, revealing the rest of its form. Dear me. Even the lion bows before it.

Draped in a tattered, hooded black overcoat—sleeves torn away—it wears shackles of greyish-green iron. Bound to its wrists, they extend downward, enveloping its hands up to the elbows. Five small black chains encircle each wrist. Another chain winds around its neck, while two stretch from its shoulders. And behind the hood, a white Ghost mask, carved from gorilla bones, obscures its face.

The Ghost's protective covering, rising to its knees, appears to be thick black cotton, interwoven with iron wire from ankle to hem. Likando trembles, her breath ragged—like a woman in labor or a dying man with an assegai through his heart. I know that feeling too well.

She glimpses the demon's vertically flipped figure, her back pressed to the ground. The lion, having relinquished her, now bows in reverence beside its prey—Likando.

But she remains paralyzed. The grass quivers around her, as if desperate to uproot itself. The ground shakes with her fear. As the Ghost approaches, she drops the dagger, shielding her face with both hands. Curled into a fetal position, knees pressed to her belly, she weeps in loud, periodic gusts. Blood and water drip from her skin, staining her clothing and moistening her wounds.

Even the lion, from a closer vantage, shivers slightly. Its fear is palpable, evident in its reluctance to meet the demon's gaze.

I dare not meet its eyes. The Ghost—its presence a maddening force—buries its gaze deep within my soul. I fixate on its feet, mouth agape, pushing silent gusts of wind from the shadows. The weight of its being presses me down until I'm on my knees, then all fours, breaths ragged. I can't move; water and moisture stream from my face, pooling at my chin and the tip of my nose, watering the grass below.

My eyes water involuntarily when I glance at it. Footsteps echo. If not for Kando, I'd shield my eyes too. But I can't tear my attention from her. How can anyone survive against this demon? Its mere presence crushes hope, extinguishes life.

"We stand no chance of survival!" I whisper, my voice more desperate now.

Kando ceases her heavy breathing. What's happening? Has she mastered courage before me? I scrutinize her. The Ghost kneels at her face, one claw on her forehead, another at her wounded neck. Panic seizes me—she's stopped breathing altogether!

I thrust myself upright, unsheathe my assegai, and charge toward the demon, battle cry echoing. Fear propels me, reckless but urgent. The timing is now!

But before I reach the Ghost, I find myself face down, a heavy weight on my back. My assegai lies just beyond arm's reach. Damn it—it's the lion!

"WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH HER?!" I cry to the demon.

The lion roars, teeth clenched, hoping the Ghost will permit it to devour me.

All hope crumbles.

The Ghost reaches behind its cape, retrieving a small sachet. Liquid—a laxative, perhaps—pours into Kando's mouth. Moments later, she hiccups, water and blood mingling, and her breathing steadies. Has the Ghost saved her from the poison? It probes her neck wound, flesh parting, and extracts the dart from her throat. How perplexing. Is this not the Ghost of Africa? The demon we were told only cared for its territory? Spawned from hell, cursed to wreak havoc upon the living?

"I don't understand. Why did you save her?" I ask, tears streaming—not from fear, but from the oppressive weight of its presence.

From a nearby bush, a baby gorilla emerges, scaling the Ghost's body until it rests atop its right shoulder.

The lion releases me as the Ghost turns away, revealing only its back. Deliberate, calculated. It knows I can't meet its gaze directly, so it offers the view of its cape.

Dragging Kando's seemingly lifeless body closer, the lion leaves her at my feet. Then it positions itself directly under the Ghost's left hand. The demon strokes the lion's mane before they move away. For a fleeting moment, I glimpse a necklace around the lion's neck. Six middle beads bear engraved letters, spelling the name 'K.H.U.M.B.O.' Two unmarked beads flank them—one before the K and one after the O.

The Ghost commands me, "Take care of her! This woman has trespassed into my territory thrice, and thrice I have saved her from those filthy mixed-breeds of bandits. A fourth encounter will cost you your life"

It turns to face me, calling out, "Mapalo Kema!" The warning hangs in the air as it fades into shadow. The lion's tail vanishes last, swallowed by the woods' darkness.

"The Ghost knows my name? How comforting," I jest to myself. "Kando, you are one strange young lady."





# CCHAPTER 3:

## Whispers of the Void



Adrift in a sea of starless skies, I am suspended. Around me, the gears of eternity turn, carrying with them the echoes of my life's most challenging moments. The scars I once bore are now painless; the fates I once glimpsed hold no regret.

In this realm, there is no time, no wind, no breath, no consequence—only an infinite expanse of emptiness.

Is this the end? Is this what it feels like to be no more?



The experience is otherworldly—a calm within the storm of existence, where vortices of truth, reality, and feeling spiral in a kaleidoscope too vast and vibrant to comprehend.

And yet, it is breathtaking.

I find myself ensnared by the currents of time, pulled back from the precipice of what was and into the now of our existence.

It is breathtaking.

But then, amidst the tranquility of this void, I am caught in a whirlwind. Voices pierce the silence, calling out to me—calling out my name.

I resist. I yearn to stay enveloped in this peaceful end of all things.

They call out again, "Likando!"

I resist. The allure of this place is strong, but the voices persist. The whirlwind of serenity intensifies, blazing with a light that I cannot evade, until at last, I awaken.

I am in my chamber within the palace walls. My throat is sore, my shoulder aches, and bandages encircle both. The evening shadows stretch across the room.

"What has transpired?" I murmur. "Was it merely a nightmare?"

A scoff breaks the silence. "A nightmare, you claim?" The voice comes from near the doorway. It is MK, my elder sibling. Once a prince of the Bemba tribe, now a man of mixed heritage. Perhaps he is my brother only because he faced the rites of passage before I did.

With a sudden realization, I leap from my bed. "The maturity ceremony!"

"Easy, Kando," MK soothes, his voice a balm to my racing heart. "You've done enough for today. No more worries."

But arguing with him is like trying to divert a river with your hands—futile. He always prevails, especially when it comes to what he calls 'my safety.' It's one battle he never allows me to win.

His shoulder is swathed in bandages, with a wound peeking out, still raw and recent. He leaves it exposed deliberately, not wishing to conceal his tattoo. A mark from childhood, he cherishes it as the sole remembrance of a brother lost but never forgotten. He vows that upon their reunion, he will show his brother the lion's head inked into his skin—the symbol of an animal spirit, crowned with a broken diadem that speaks of victory marred and promises hidden.

I can't decipher the full meaning of his tattoo.

Asking about the events that led to his injury is equally enigmatic. He remains tight-lipped, a vault of secrets.

Tomorrow, I face the elder for the distillation ritual. The thought fills me with dread—not for the ritual itself, but for the revelation of my animal spirit and the breed that defines me.

“Kando,” MK’s whisper cuts through the silence as he turns to depart. “Steer clear of trouble, will you?” With a nod, he exits, the door closing with a definitive thud behind him.

So, he knows. It wasn’t merely a dream.

Great. Just great.

# CCHAPTER 4:

## Echoes of Silence



In the quietude that envelops me, I find my deepest fear—yet it is the only sound that fills the void within me. Not pain, not discomfort, not joy, nor concern—just an overwhelming silence.

Here I am, lying awake, my eyes wide open, haunted by the same recurring nightmare. Seventeen days have passed, each night a replay of the terror—the terror of confronting my true lineage. It begins in isolation, amidst the towering Eucalyptus, under the midday sky, alone... until MK emerges in the distance. His gestures shift from welcoming to alarming; a smile turns to anguish, tears become

blood, and joy morphs into dread. He signals frantically, urging me to flee, then he himself retreats.

Amidst the trees, I stand resolute as the Ghost's hand rests lightly on my shoulder. I face him, his red eyes gleaming from behind the gorilla skull mask.

"Welcome," he says, likely smiling beneath his disguise. Strangely, I feel no fear.

His embrace is warm and comforting. But then, the scenery shifts—the trees transform into shadowy specters, the air is tinged with crimson, and the ground becomes a macabre carpet of human skulls. Among this ghastly array, I recognize MK's skull, adorned with the distinctive Yaka-Suku crown, a gift from the Pende, hailing from the heart of Africa. And there, amidst the sea of bones, one skull stands out—my father's, crowned just as he was in life. The rest belong to my people, a chilling testament to a legacy I'm yet to understand.

She materializes, always a silhouette against the horizon. Her face is veiled by the Pondo wig, her presence regal, devoid of any tribe. She stands before me, lifting my chin with a tender smile. Our eyes mirror each other—identical in their intensity, our cheekbones subtly sculpted in the same way, a shared ferocity lurking within.

Her embrace is a sanctuary, her kiss a whisper at my ear. My heart beats a steady rhythm, my eyes sealed shut. In her arms, I find a sense of belonging, a feeling of home. I nestle against her, my arms encircling her slender form. Her lips linger at my ear, breathing a melody from our shared past, followed by a haunting confession:

"No one can fathom your depths...no one will. You are a reflection of me. Come, exist alongside me. You are a reflection of me...just...like...ME!"

This moment terrifies me—the impending violence, the bloodshed. My eyes snap open to a macabre scene: where once stood a woman, now lies the remnants of carnage. My hands are drenched, my mouth stained with the lifeblood of my kin.

Could I be tribeless?

And then, I am jolted awake. The shock of reality never fails to startle me...that I wake up!

Below, voices rise in heated debate, undoubtedly about me—about the incident in the woods two nights prior. Each time I venture out, MK bears the brunt of it. I've never properly expressed my gratitude; he's my elder brother, and gratitude is expected, yet it remains unspoken. But my debt to him is profound. The words below are indistinct, so I decide to indulge my curiosity—to eavesdrop. To be honest, I intend to eavesdrop quite a bit!

Today marks a turning point, the day I stand before the elder of spirits. Yet, there's no flutter of excitement within me. Why should there be? To have him declare my lineage? My interest in such revelations has long since faded. If destiny intended for me to know, it wouldn't have cast my mother out, leaving only her absence in its

wake. In my quieter moments, I've often wondered if I was the reason for her departure. Was I not strong enough, not the child she had hoped for, not...beautiful enough? These thoughts, though beyond my control, haunt the corners of my mind.

MK, in contrast, seems fortunate. He knows the finality of his mother's fate, allowing him to grieve as one should. I am left in limbo, uncertain if my mother walks this earth or has departed from it. How does one navigate such unknowns? Should I hold onto hope or surrender to sorrow? Oh, how I wish she knew the depth of my longing, the ache to see her face just once more.

Uncle Miaze, my father's elder brother, would often speak of her beauty—a beauty so profound that my grandfather deemed her worthy of a crown, a prize for the successor he would choose. This much I know: she was beautiful. But beyond that, Uncle Miaze remains silent, bound by my father's edict to reveal no more. And so, I've learned to stop asking, to stop seeking answers that will never come.

The clamor of discord grows as I draw nearer to the chamber, the hallway bathed in a soft glow. Through the doorway, shadows cast by two men dance upon the wall—one unmistakably MK. The other's voice, laced with authority, can only belong to Uncle Miaze.

"So, was your adversary so formidable that your blade faltered?" Uncle Miaze challenges.

"The foe was..." MK exhales heavily, resignation in his voice, "compromised." He gathers his belongings, wrapped in a cotton shroud, bound by strings—a poetic package containing his arsenal and provisions for a journey unbeknownst to me. His departure, unshared, feels like a slight.

As he attempts to pass, Miaze seizes him. "And you call it a victory, even as her throat was marred and her shoulder wounded?" he accuses.

MK whirls around, his demeanor fierce. "You dare mock my ability?" The accusation has clearly hit its mark.

"I question not only your results but your allegiance!" Uncle Miaze retorts with equal fervor.

"How dare you question my actions! Yesterday's events were an anomaly," MK asserts, his words carefully chosen to shield me.

"An anomaly, you say?" Uncle Miaze probes further.

"My duty is her survival!" MK's voice rises in defiance.

"Your duty is to GUARD!" Uncle Miaze's voice booms, demanding submission. "Have you forgotten? Your fealty is to the crown; you exist for the sovereign—you perish for the sovereign. And once Kando completes the ceremony, she will be the sovereign. Is that clear?"

"What's happening?" I ask, feigning ignorance as I step into the room. The tension between them is palpable, their argument halted by my presence.

"It's nothing, Kando," MK quickly interjects, his nod attempting to bridge the gap between reassurance and reality.

"Indeed," Miaze concurs, his nod a silent echo of MK's.

"Time to rest, young one. Dawn will come swiftly, and with it, your journey to the elder," MK says, moving towards the door with purpose.

"But where are you off to?" I probe, though I suspect he may not divulge the truth.

"To prepare for your meeting with the elder," he replies tersely. "Uncle will guide you to the elder, while I traverse the valley of the tribeless come midday."

"Miaze," Uncle corrects, a subtle reminder of his presence.

"Of course," MK concedes with a smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes.

Uncle places a comforting hand on my shoulder, a gesture meant to soothe, though it falls short. "You're in capable hands," he assures me. "Rest now. Tomorrow is a significant day." With a pat, he departs, leaving me to ponder in solitude.

I inhale deeply, the weight of the coming day settling in my chest as I exhale and retreat to my quarters.

Why must my family's narrative be so complex?



## The Oracle's Vision



The realm of ancestral spirits stretched before me—an ethereal expanse where time wove its intricate tapestry. I walked alongside Ikenga, the orisha of time, our footsteps echoing through the veils of existence. His presence was both comforting and unsettling, for he held dominion over past and future alike.

Ikenga had two faces: one eternally gazing forward, eyes wide open, and the other turned backward, eyes closed—a paradox of foresight and memory. As we moved, he guided me through the shifting currents of existence, revealing glimpses of destiny.