

# THE SANCTUARY

## A Story of Bloodshed and Survival in the Congo

### OVERVIEW

*The Sanctuary* will be an approximately 85,000-word work of narrative nonfiction encompassing these three primary, and interwoven, threads of exposition and reportage:

#### I. History, Science, & Culture

A) Information about the Ituri Forest; its people (indigenous hunter-gatherer Mbuti pygmies, for example); and its wildlife (particularly, the okapi—the national symbol animal of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and among the oldest mammal species left on earth).

B) Tales of exploration and adventure in the Ituri. Follow two renowned nineteenth-century figures, Henry Morton Stanley and Harry Johnston, who played pivotal roles in the search for the so-called “African unicorn” (i.e., the okapi, which in 1900 became one of the last large land mammals to be discovered by Western science)—and the subsequent race to obtain specimens, dead *and* alive, for examination.

C) The unusual origin story of Epulu, a small, heart-of-the-Ituri village with roots that trace back to the quarter-century “reign” of eccentric, Harvard-educated field anthropologist Patrick Putnam. In the 1930s Putnam fled his prominent East Coast family in order to, in essence, establish his own tiny kingdom in colonial Africa—living with a succession of wives (both American and African), and serving as an intermediary between locals and visitors, in a camp he modeled after the dude ranches of the American West . . . before finally going mad and attempting to destroy all that he had created for himself.

D) The successes and failures of conservation endeavors in the Ituri since the early 1900s to the present, including the 1987 formation of the Okapi Conservation Project (a nonprofit that strives “to protect the okapi in the wild while preserving the biological and cultural dynamics of the Ituri”) and the 1992 creation of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. More than five thousand square miles in size, the reserve covers approximately one-fifth of the Ituri in the northeastern DRC. And in addition to being home to nearly ten thousand Mbuti, this tropical sanctuary, and UNESCO World Heritage Site, supplies crucial habitat for numerous imperiled wildlife species. (The okapi, for one, which in 2013 was officially classified as Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources . . . the IUCN designation for a species deemed to be at “high risk of extinction in the wild.”) There are forty thousand people living in and around the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, and the reserve has its headquarters in the village of Epulu—a command center from which conservationists and reserve personnel labor to mitigate the damage that human activities, both lawful and unlawful, inflict on the reserve’s ecosystem—and where, until fairly recently, they also cared for a number of captured and born-in-captivity “ambassador” okapi utilized to help generate support for the reserve (and to provide fresh genetic stock for this rare species to zoos throughout the world). Today the reserve contains an estimated five thousand okapi, as much as half of the entire population in Africa.

#### II. True-Crime

A) A portrait of the poacher and militant Paul Sadala (a/k/a “Morgan” and “Chuck Norris”), relating his enigmatic life and actions before, during, after his devastating attack on Epulu and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve headquarters in June 2012.

B) An analysis of the conservation and security threats to the Okapi Wildlife Reserve since June 2012, as well as of the measures being taken to combat them by an assortment of conservationists and reserve personnel. (Threats such as poaching, development, and mining; logging and slash-and-burn agriculture; an expanding human population—in addition to elements more unique to the DRC: the collateral damage of tribal divisions created generations ago by European colonists; the enduring inability, dating back to Congolese independence from Belgium in 1960, to establish a functioning government in the tumultuous northeast; the recurring presence of various militia groups and warlords.)

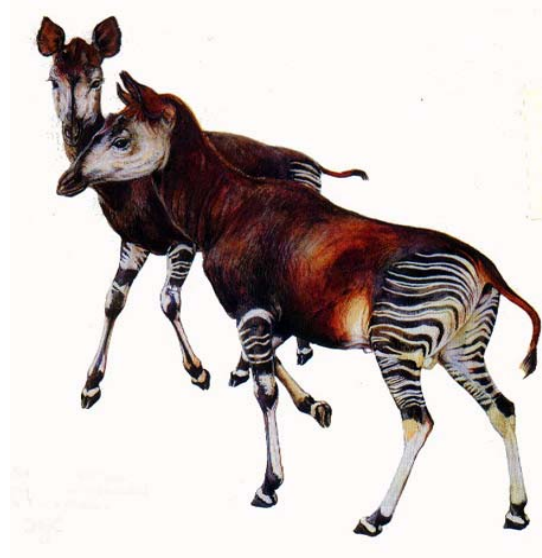
C) An investigation into the suspicious circumstances surrounding Morgan’s death after his surrender to the DRC army in 2014.

D) The current activities of a poacher named Manu—an Mbuti man who has recently emerged as the leader of Morgan’s former followers.

#### III. A Quest

In July 2016 I am accompanying Okapi Conservation Project founder and president John Lukas—the Conservation and Science Manager for the Jacksonville Zoo, and perhaps the world’s leading authority on okapi—on a lengthy visit to Epulu and the reserve (and I will be spending significant time with him in Florida as well). An opportunity to conduct interviews, inquiries, and research, and to observe firsthand the ongoing conservation, recovery, and security efforts that have followed the events of 2012. And there *The Sanctuary* will connect the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century by juxtaposing the historical search for an elusive creature in the green depths of the Ituri with a contemporary one—because Lukas, with the assistance of Mbuti trackers and hunters, is also spearheading plans to capture several okapi in the wild and restart the captive breeding program Morgan brought to a tragic close. I will chronicle, and participate in, parts of that exciting undertaking.

For an informative and affecting introduction to much of this subject matter, perhaps take ten minutes to view the short 2013 documentary “Okapi Conservation Project: On the Front Line of Conservation in DR Congo” (<http://ghfilms.com/films/okapi-conservation-project/>)—as well as the 2015 presentation made by Lukas about the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, and the current status of okapi conservation efforts, during the Wildlife Conservation Network’s annual Wildlife Conservation Expo ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRU4bL\\_AyGk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRU4bL_AyGk)).



#### FUTURE PLANS

Over the course of my FYAP year, I was able to complete a significant amount of the research necessary for this narrative nonfiction book project, as well as a detailed, 85-page book proposal that I will soon be presenting to potential publishers. In addition, I have arranged and organized a lengthy July 2016 trip to the village of Epulu and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve—my opportunity, as noted in the Overview, to conduct much of the interviewing, inquiry, and research around which large portions of *The Sanctuary* will center, and to observe firsthand the ongoing conservation, recovery, and security efforts that have followed the attack on Epulu and the reserve headquarters in June 2012.



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