

CHAPTER 1

Cape Town, South Africa

“Screw the APP,”

Blade Patel grunted out of breath to Chris du Plessis, as they took off their backpacks. They had hiked up Lion’s Head in just over an hour and a half. It was much slower than their normal time, but it was past midnight and the rocks were a bit slippery this time. Furthermore, visibility was marred at places by the overhanging clouds and a thin sliver of moonlight. Below them the city was a blanket of black. Studded here and there with building and vehicle lights, that glowed like evil eyes as they snaked along the Atlantic seaboard.

“What do you mean screw the African People’s Party? Shh...you nuts or something? Somebody could hear us,” du Plessis cautioned, looking around to see if anyone else had reached the summit. Blonde, with features more typical of a farmer than the weapons designer he is, the walk up had been tough on his heavy body. “Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea to come up here this time of the night.” He groaned, rubbing his aching muscles.

“You worry too much mister cautious. It’s after twelve at night on the mountain. Chill out bru.” Patel passed his buddy a beer. He was tall, lean, fair of complexion, and often mistaken for a Persian or Turk. “Since the Limpopo Conference this country has gone all the way downhill my friend. Those bastards in government are stealing us blind. You know how much tax they take off from my salary? It’s daylight robbery *bru*.” Patel let rip, slightly irritated at du Plessis’ attitude. He brought him up there to get him onside, but all he did was complain.

If the bugger doesn’t cooperate, well then...Dlamini instructed me to take care of business if need be. ‘We need those blueprints,’ the big Zulu said.

“Ja, then they misappropriate the taxes we pay to live it up in five star hotels with their families. Did you hear of that minister who even splashed out on a luxury holiday for her boyfriend in Switzerland? To top it off he was on her payroll as a consultant. The National Party were traitors, they sold us out. No my friend, you’re still lucky. At least you’re not white.” du Plessis threw in his observation of the state of politics in the country.

That's it get angry. “Not black either. No, there's no place for us in this country my friend. I heard there was talk in Kwazulu Natal of kicking out all the Indians, you know, like they did in Uganda.”

“Tough call buddy, tough call, but I don't think that will ever happen here. They can't be that stupid. There are so many Indians in government. We had Valli Moosa, Frene Ginwala and Kader Asmal under the old man. Now we still have Gordhan, Maharaj, Patel...the list goes on and on. Hell, we even have a Shaikh in foreign intelligence. There's no way they'll do an Idi Amin on you guys.”

“Politics *bru*, politics, it's all messed up.” Patel shook his head and popped his own beer. He took a long sip and wiped away some froth from his mouth. Let me ask you this. How long have you worked at Smutscorp now, twelve years?”

“Eleven.”

“How much money have you saved this year?”

“...Uh...let me see...”

“I know, I know, nothing right?”

“What's your point?”

“The point is we have nothing to show for all our hard work. I was six years in production and now four years as a manager. Even if the operations director should die tomorrow, they still won't promote me. The system is set up so that a black guy must be appointed, even if he's less qualified. Same shit we had under your white government.”

“What do you mean my *white* government? Why do you talk like that? Must it always come down to colour? Is it my fault that I was born white?” du Plessis was all red-faced, even in the low moonlight.

Little groups of hikers had gathered on the summit as du Plessis threw his tantrum. Some of them looked at the big man but quickly turned away. Two dreadlocked Rastafarians made the peace sign, lit up their *zols*, and offered one to du Plessis to pacify the crazy white dude. He refused with a scowl, but within seconds the pungent aroma of the marijuana soon had everyone feeling a bit high.

“Listen, I'm sorry *bru*, that's not what I meant. It's just that I get so upset with the system.” Blade offered his version of the peace pipe by passing him a fat Cuban cigar.

“Might as well smoke if everyone else is, you have any ideas?” du Plessis resigned himself to the status quo.

“Thought you’d never ask. As a matter of fact I do.” Careful now, careful, Patel told himself. *Here comes the delicate part.*

“You’re the best missile designer we have right? Do you know how much you could earn overseas if you worked for the Americans, the British or even in the Middle East? Top dollar, I tell you.”

“I don’t know about that hey. That sounds a bit heavy boet. My boss, Dirk Van Zyl, is a legend from the old Armscor days. I’ve learnt my trade from him. They say he came up with the concept of the Red Falcon using a serviette at a coffee shop.”

Blade smirked, “He was just at the right place at the right time because he’s white. From what I heard they had a lot of help from the French in return for the contract on the Koeberg nuclear plant. Take it from me, Van Zyl is on his way out. You’re still there. You can still make some money.”

“What is it with you and whites, Blade? You need help you know.”

“I know I know. We perfected racism long before the white man with our caste system. Never mind that, tell me what you think.”

“You’re saying I must immigrate to the Middle East? Go work for the Arabs? Now I know you’re insane. Haven’t you heard what happened to that Dr Karimus or something in the United Arab Emirates? The guy is seventy-odd and they jailed the oke for some obscure medical malpractice reason that they couldn’t even prove in court.”

“The bastard was probably guilty, but no, that’s not what I’m saying.” Patel munched on a chocolate bar and threw the wrapper down into the blackness.

“Say what you mean and mean what you say boet.” Du Plessis said, shaking his head at Patel’s actions.

“Confucious huh,” he laughed before quickly getting serious again. “Listen, I’m talking about going into business for yourself. What if I told you all you had to do was save something onto a disc or flash and you could earn millions.”

“Oh I see.” Du Plessis nodded, but not liking the direction of the conversation. He looked at Blade Patel with new insight, suddenly noticing the hardness around the eyes. Patel was thin, but

muscular. Du Plessis saw the ropy muscles of Patel flex as he strapped his knees with a bandage for extra support. He felt a small stab of fear in his chest. "I'm listening..., go on."

"I know this guy, Sam Reddy in Durban. He's connected with some heavy hitters. Big time boys. His main squeeze is some Zulu guy with juicy government tenders. Apparently this Zulu has some business contacts with the Russians. Former Mkhonto links with the old communists I'm sure. My bru in Durban tunes he's also in with the Angolans, the Somalis, and the Iranians, you name it..."

"Am I hearing you right? You want me to sell Smutscorp missile designs to foreign governments or groups or whatever. Are you bloody insane? That's flippin' treason man. They could lock us up for life. Maybe even hang us. I want no part in any of this. I'm sorry that's not the way I conduct business. I've worked far too hard to get where I am today."

I'm sorry you feel that way Mr du Plessis, he inhaled sharply, trying to reign in his anger at being spurned. "Hey slow down bru, they don't hang people in South Africa anymore."

"Very comforting, thanks." His colleague retorted.

Du Plessis chewed on some dried fruit and washed it down with a swig of beer. "You know I'm supposed to report this kind of thing don't you?"

"You not, right, are you? Listen man I'm only playing with you *bru*. Just forget about it okay. Another beer? You want some dry *wors*." Shit, this guy could be serious trouble, Patel told himself as they packed in all their stuff again into their backpacks. He thought about it for a few seconds and made up his mind about Chris du Plessis' future. *He knows too much. 'No loose ends,' Dlamini said.*

All the way downhill from here, bru.

"Can I ask you something? Why do they call you Blade?" du Plessis asked with a nervous chuckle.

"Cos I'm sharp man. You know, Indians and money." Patel laughed and tapped his temple with his forefinger.

Minutes later they started the trek back down.

"Let's take the chain route, I'm tired bru. I wanna get down quickly." Patel huffed, pretending to be out of breath.

Du Plessis didn't look too happy with the suggestion, but didn't complain for fear of being labelled again. "Maybe I shouldn't have had the beers," he muttered, not really wanting Blade to see his fear.

He held tight onto his backpack and used one hand to support himself as they descended via the mountain step-way. They were at the chains within ten minutes and waited for a group of foreigners to go down first. There were no hikers behind them. Patel's agility and strength saw him slip down to the next ledge below without much effort. He looked up at du Plessis who stood holding onto a chain, swaying as he looked for a firm foothold. It was dark, slippery, and there was beer consumed... At that moment Patel knew he'd found the 'how'.

They didn't call him Blade for nothing.

"Come on Chris, you can do it. Hold on, I'll catch your leg." He yelled, loud enough for the hikers below to hear him. Eyewitness accounts would describe how he supported his friend.

"Come on you can do it." He urged du Plessis on again.

Someone below called out their encouragement to their fellow hiker when they heard Blade's call. Du Plessis stepped down and hung onto the one chain, steadied himself and prepared for the next chain.

"Great, you're doing well. Come on Werner." Patel yelled again.

Du Plessis took the next few steps down and held out his hand to Patel who grabbed at his wrist. "Okay, let go of the chain now." He hissed up at him.

From where Patel stood, the pathway sloped to the left and down. To anyone below him he was unsighted, even though still within hearing distance. As du Plessis let go of the chain, Blade Patel tugged at his other arm, pulling him down as he side stepped against the mountain face.

Du Plessis had no chance as he plunged down and cried out, "Blade help...."

"Chris, Chrissss...." Blade yelled as he heard the satisfactory but sickening thud and crunch of crushed bones two hundred metres below.

That's why they call me Blade, bru!