

Daniel Schuman and his wife Laura are among a truckload of international travelers on an overland safari through backcountry Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi in 1993.

Camping in the bush in lion territory, digging out of muddy streambeds, making friends in remote villages, scouting game on the open *veld*, stalking an elephant in a *mopani* thicket on foot, confronting near-tragedy while crossing a crocodile-infested river... they receive an immersive education in animal and human behaviors in keeping with the tour company's behind-the-back motto: Mamba Safaris—"Many Anxious Moments in Bleedin' Africa."

If I were ever to try to turn this trip into a novel, Daniel later reflected, I'd have to make up some more detailed back-stories to flesh out my fellow travelers....

What I could also do, I mused, was have them killed off one by one. Alistair dragged from his tent in the night by the prowling lion at Nsefu... Greta "taken" by a crocodile at the river ford... Reg jumped by a leopard on the fringe of bush camp... Nigel overrun and trampled by the bull elephant... Gerhard, haplessly without a knife, swallowed by a python... Melody bitten in the butt by a black mamba during a loo stop....

I could eliminate them in inverse order to the degree to which we'd connected, and spare them according to their youth and physical attractiveness.... I'd have suspense, mounting tension, incident. Who among us would be next to fall victim to Africa's perils? Who among us would be left, who'd be at the wheel, by the time we pulled into the Kamuzu International Airport parking lot?



David Ollier Weber has no plans to visit Antarctica, although he has voyaged to the other six continents and been as close as Punta Arenas. He writes and farms in Northern California's Mother Lode.

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