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On the freedom trail

venture recreates events surrounding the bogus tourist operation that aided ANC gun-smuggling into South Africa. **Sacha Molitorisz** reports.

Tom Zubrycki's latest

 As experienced documentary-makers, director Tom Zubrycki and producer Sally Browning had budgeted for everything. Except the beer.

It was last year and Zubrycki, a Sydney-based film-maker, was in South Africa. Having just finished *The Diplomat*, he was on the trail of one of the world's most ingenious smuggling schemes, an anti-apartheid operation dating from the early 1980s. This is when the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC) set up a fake safari company and customised a Bedford truck for sneaking rifles, grenades and assorted firearms into South Africa. Their goal was an armed insurrection, and all the backpackers who hopped aboard thus became unwitting accomplices.

As well as interviewing key players in the scheme, Zubrycki wanted to film reconstructions of pertinent scenes. So South African co-producer David Max Brown tracked down the rusting carcass of the Bedford, convinced some of the original smugglers to reprise their roles for the camera, and put up notices in three Johannesburg backpackers' lodges offering a three-day return drive to the Zimbabwe border. He also offered free beer, which proved unexpectedly expensive. After all, while *The Secret Safari* had a relatively generous budget, some of the backpackers were Australian. "We completely miscalculated how much beer these young travellers would drink," Zubrycki says. "What we supplied lasted a day."

The stylised reconstructions in this documentary are interesting in part because they mark a major departure from Zubrycki's previous work, which includes *Homelands* (1993), *Billal* (1996) and, most famously, *The Diplomat* (2000).

"It was completely different," Zubrycki says. "It was about bringing history to life compared

with trusting one's intuition in being able to second-guess the future."

But just as he was impressed by Jose Ramos Horta in *The Diplomat*, Zubrycki was impressed by the smugglers. "They're very brave those people. And in most instances they'd never before told their story to anybody else. Martha, who stored several tons of weapons in her flat and then couriered them to designated 'drop' points, hadn't even told her parents. So she had to ring them the night before we interviewed her to tell them. All these people lived double lives. James, one of the Cape Town-based operatives, ran about 30 missions, and he was convinced he would shortly be dead or in jail."

When it screened in South Africa in April, *The Secret Safari* caused a big stir. "People were stunned that it was principally a white-led operation - it wasn't common knowledge that there were whites in the ANC. But only whites could have carried out such border crossings; blacks would have been suspected straight away."

"Also, people were interested to learn that the scheme was still running at a time when Mandela had said to people that the armed struggle was off. That reflects a split within the ANC leadership."

One of the delights of *The Secret Safari* is watching the reactions of some of the original Australian, English and South African backpackers when they are told that they had been part of a gun running operation. "I made sure I got their spontaneous reactions while the camera was rolling. And we had the whole spectrum, including the two Afrikaners who were maybe a little displeased, but secretly quite thrilled. You could feel this was a dinner table conversation-piece for years to come."

The Secret Safari screens on SBS on Saturday at 7.30pm.



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movies **doug anderson**

tv previews

SeaChange
ABC, 7.30 pm

No, it's not a repeat, it's an "encore screening" of the third series of Deb Cox and Andrew Knight's rare beast, an ABC ratings and critical success story. With *Always Greener* having taken up the mantle with a barely disguised "encore screening" of the basic principles of *SeaChange* (not to mention its timeslot on a Sunday night), it's interesting to slip back a year and see how it was done.

Comedy is never far from the surface in this episode, even as that catch-all nasty of the '90s, greedy developers, look like taking away Max's home, the hardly lapidated boatshed.

While blustering Bob Jelly (John Howard, so far from his *Always Greener* touchy-feely character that you wonder if he has considered changing his name to Kim Beazley for the new program) denies involvement, a more important series of subplots is continuing. Not the least of these is when the hell will Max and Laura give in and just go at it like rabbits on a course of oysters?

For all the good and sometimes even great moments, for some viewers this third series had the sense of a friendship if not being stretched then certainly needing to be redefined.

Having worked through many of the permutations of this small town and its regular characters, it became understandable by the end that someone might pull the plug, preferring to go out on top than dribbling away in series four or five.

Nonetheless, you can settle in for the duration with little fear.

CHOGM Opening Ceremony
ABC, 4.30 pm

Of course, we don't have a preview of this, but we can speculate. There is nothing quite like an opening ceremony to warm the cockles of your heart, is there?

And could there be anything more likely to raise the temperature of your little pumper than the words "direct from Brisbane"?

After all, that Goodwill Games opening took the 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games and Matilda the giant winking kangaroo to unimaginable heights of, well, OK, mediocrity.

CHOGM doesn't offer us the promise of matching loud Indonesian shirts or foreign ministers in bad karaoke (is that a tautology?) but with an election looming I'm sure our Glorious Leader, the Great Helmsman Howard, will find something that will make us proud to be a minor nation in an organisation of minor nations.

Bernard Zuel

show of the week

**As It Happened:
The Secret Safari**
SBS, 7.30 pm

Is there such a thing as a righteous war? As several commentators pointed out in the first week after the World Trade Centre attack, one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist. For example, depending on where you are on the political or religious spectrum, the mujahideen were the brave anti-communist fighters (or archaic and lethal zealots) while the Russians were communist invaders (or saving us from religious fanaticism).

Many in the West saw the apartheid regime in South Africa as a system that needed to be toppled by the ANC. This was a righteous war. As James Garraway, of the ANC's armed wing, puts it in this documentary by the regularly impressive Tom *Exile in Sarajevo* Zubrycki, "You would need to be very unprincipled not to have taken some stand against the State of South Africa in the '80s when it was particularly vicious, treacherous and altogether murderous."

But the ANC wasn't going to win this war by throwing words. Like guerilla/rebel/terrorists organisations

everywhere, they needed weapons and the ANC operated many gun-running operations into South Africa in the '70s and '80s. Most were infiltrated or busted by the government, one of the successes involved an African safari company set up and operated by the ANC that for seven years used "civilians", most of them Australian and New Zealand backpackers, as the cover for transporting more than a tonne of weapons and ammunition on every trip.

The *Secret Safari* is that story, a story that has all the elements of a paperback thriller with as many tricky moral conundrums for a viewer as a second-year philosophy lecture. Even a decade after the trips ended, there is a palpable tension watching this as you understand how close it came to being uncovered by the border guards and the undercover government agents.

It's a feeling enhanced by surprisingly successful re-enactments. Seeing those ANC operatives now (most of those involved in the visible part of the operation were white), looking like ordinary middle-class men and women who wouldn't throw out recyclable garbage let alone a grenade, makes for jolting but effective television.

However, when you hear ANC rep Mannie Brown explain that the big risk on each safari wasn't even the border guards, but the chance that an accident might cause an explosion of the ordnance, you can't help but ask yourself did that justify the means? Would the passengers have been acceptable "collateral damage"?

It's a question answered in part towards the end of the program when several of the hitherto unaware customers, who have been recounting fond memories of the trip, are told the truth. There is horror for one; joy for others at having participated in a "righteous" struggle. Fascinating.

Bernard Zuel

BY ALEX DEVAL SMITH
INDEPENDENT FOREIGN SERVICE

Hundreds of back packers who booked African adventure holidays through a London travel company in the late 1980's, unwittingly acted as a decoy for the most audacious arms smuggling operation serving anti-apartheid activists, it will be revealed on Sunday.

Along with their innocent cargo of camping gear and Lonely Planet guide books, hundreds of tourists who roughed from Kenya to South Africa as clients of Africa Hinterland carried AK-47's, hand guns, limpet mines, grenades and ammunition.

Africa Hinterland, which had an office in Greenwich High Road, South East London, was a front company set up by the military wing of African National Congress (ANC) and the arms it transported 40 tons over 7 years - were concealed in the seats of a specially adapted white Bedford lorry.

The sensational revelation will be made in a documentary called *The Secret Safari*. Africa Hinterland went out of business

along with apartheid not long after Nelson Mandela was released from jail in 1990. But the white Bedford, which was driven by British anti-apartheid activists, still exists and was put back on the road by the documentaries makers.

"I was 19 and had just passed my car driving licence when I was recruited as a driver" said Stuart Round, now an aerial photographer in Nunston. "When I landed in Nairobi at the start of this thing in 1986, I was very, very apprehensive," he said. Round was to become one of three British drivers who made a total of nearly 40 trips from Kenya to Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and finally South Africa.

"We had no idea about running a travel company," said Jenny Harris,



Hippy tourists masked overland gun traffic into South Africa

The sensational revelation will be made in Secret Safari on e.tv at 5pm on Sunday

another Briton who was Africa Hinterland's failed manager when it launched in 1986. "We had to set up an office, design a brochure and find customers. We found that the best ones were young, New Zealanders and Australians, and even some young South Africans, who were in London during a year out."

Jo Lewis, a former driver who now runs a vegan restaurant in London, said: "The passengers were our cover. We had to get them to Mombasa beach, to see a lion here and a hippo there. I am sure we were the best company operating overland safaris because we were so worried about failing."

Stuart Shaw from Manchester, who was a passenger in 1989, was convinced: "We always seemed to be drinking beer

the only thing that changed from country to country was the make of the beer."

The film's producer, David Max Brown, whose father, Mannie Brown, established Africa Hinterland in London in 1986, said the current leadership of the ANC had been apprehensive about his making the documentary.

"Possibly the ANC's still embarrassed about using unwitting tourists as a cover, or about the current location of the weapons, many of which remain unaccounted for," he said. But if the film is to be believed, the tourists who took the truck safari to Cape Town in the late 1980's are largely pleased to have unwittingly played a role in ending apartheid rules.

"I think it was probably one of the best things I ever did," said one of the Australian tourists, Mishu Coleman, interviewed in the film. "I would have helped out if I had known," said another, Lucille Fraunstein.

Ironically, a number of Africa Hinterland's clients got off the truck in Zimbabwe and flew back to Britain because they did not feel it was morally right to holiday in SA at the time.

The key to the operation, said Mannie Brown, who ran Africa Hinterland with the late Joe Skvo, was complete

secrecy. A truck was bought from Bedford and specially adapted by Rodney Wilkinson, an anti-apartheid activist who had fled to Britain after blowing up Koeberg - a nuclear reactor which was about to be commissioned in the Western Cape.

"Wilkinson was full of ideas, stuck in London and bored. First he designed a yacht for smuggling arms. The idea was to offer boating holidays. Then he came up with the overland safaris idea. The brand new Bedford cost £80,000 and took 9 months to adapt," said David Max Brown.

The truck was re-built so that its pick up area featured two long rows of plastic covered seats, facing one another.

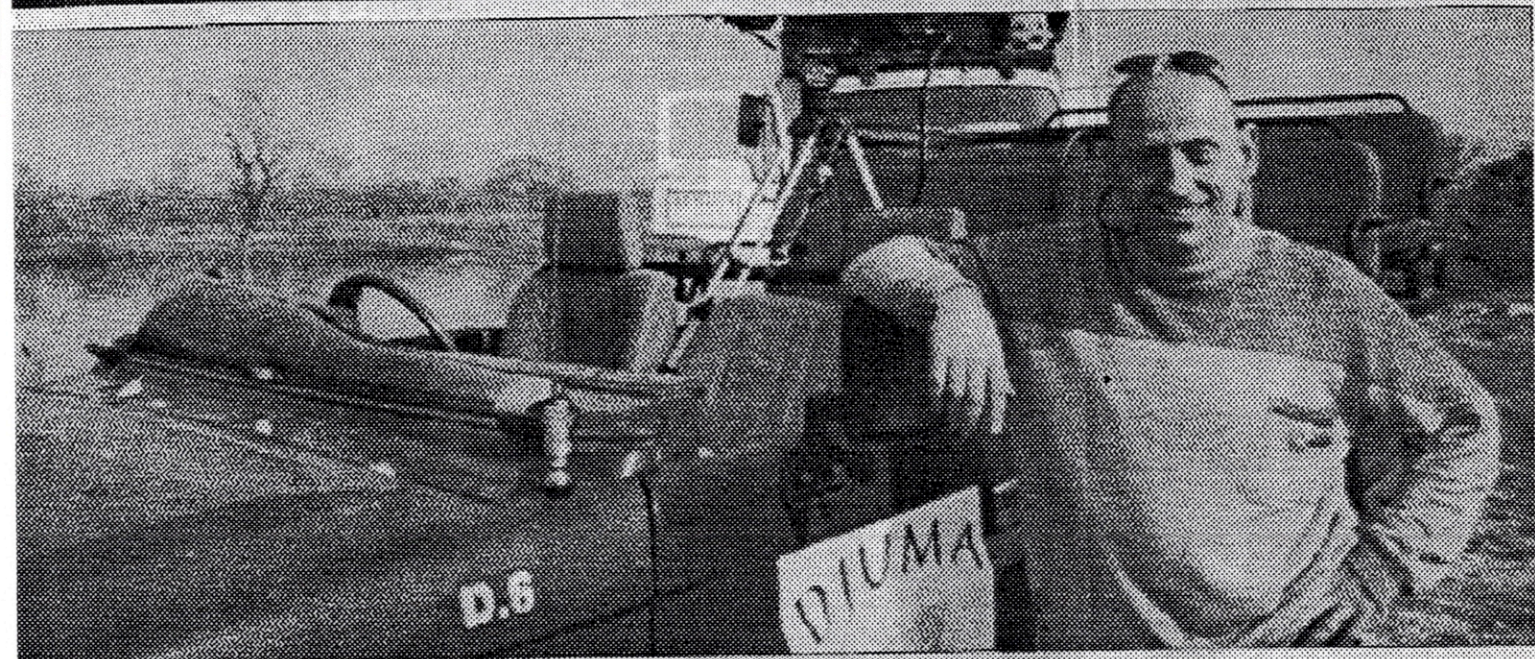
In four inch ruts under the padded seats, one ton of arms could be concealed after being carefully packed to minimise the danger of explosion and of detection by sniffer dogs at the border between Botswana and South Africa. Mannie Brown said: "We loaded the weapons in Lusaka (Zambia) where the passengers were told that they would have to overnight so that the truck could be serviced. When the vehicle was returned to them in the morning it looked no different and the trip could continue." But Round said the last leg of the trip was very nerve wracking. "I used to make sure we spent the night before arriving in SAK quite near the border so that I would be fresh and clear headed. I used to dread the sniffer dogs. I always used to walk away from the truck during the search."

After Mandela's release in February 1990, Africa Hinterland closed its Greenwich office and relocated to Johannesburg from which tours of Southern Africa - also intended for arms smuggling - were offered to South Africans.

The operation finally ceased in 1993, the year before the country's first democratic election.

Secret Safari on e.tv at 5pm on Sunday

The producer's story: A new respect for his father



Producer of *The Secret Safari*, David Brown, tells the story of his father and Joe Slovo's plans to bring arms into South Africa for the ANC

Photos courtesy of e.tv

They watched the wild animals and the glorious scenery from a safari truck, unaware that underneath the seats was a pile of guns. A documentary about how the ANC used a tourist vehicle to run guns into South Africa is due to be released on e.tv. Myrtle Ryan looks at the background to this amazing story of spies, unsuspecting tourists and high adventure

Gun runners on safari

I was one of the most audacious and successful military operations in the fight against apartheid in South Africa. It entailed using a legitimate safari company, complete with unsuspecting tourists, as cover for bringing in arms and ammunition for the African National Congress.

Next month e.tv will screen the documentary *The Secret Safari*. As a producer to this programme the *Tribune* contacted the producer, David Brown, and found a tale which would have the likes of John Le Carré reaching for their pens. David's story had all the elements of a thriller, with famous names thrown in for good measure. As a young man he had rubbed shoulders with apartheid-fighting giants like Joe Slovo and Chris Hani.

"My dad, Emanuel 'Mannie' Brown, was involved with the ANC in the '60s and as a result, the family moved to the UK," said David. "While we were living in London, Joe Slovo often visited our house. He and dad would play cards."

Young Brown didn't know that the games were often a front for much more serious business - plans to take guns into South Africa.

Many young men at times feel their father hasn't quite measured up. David was no different. "In 1988 I

worked for the ANC in Tanzania and felt my father had failed the revolution," he said.

"I saw him as a businessman who wasn't really involved in the struggle. Little did I know that he organised the entire British front for the gun-running operation."

David told how later in life he learned more about this from his father. "Slovo and my dad brainstormed several ideas for getting weapons into South Africa. The first was to use a yacht which would drop off weapons somewhere along the coast near Durban."

"This never came to anything, but a British volunteer was chosen to train as a parachutist in Cuba. He is now a captain in the South African Navy."

The next plan was to use a candle-making factory in Zimbabwe as a front; weapons would be concealed in the candlewax. "They even planned to park a large truck filled with candlewax in which explosives were concealed outside the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, and blow it up."

"However, Oliver Tambo felt such an operation would be too volatile - there was no guarantee that no human life would be lost."

Then fate intervened. Rodney Wilkinson - the man responsible for



Joe Slovo, left, and Emanuel "Mannie" Brown were the brains behind the operation. They evolved their strategies while playing cards



the Kreeberg power station bomb blast - approached Joe Slovo. This was not their first contact. Wilkinson had previously met Slovo and Chris Hani in South Africa when he offered them the plans of Kreeberg. At the time, they persuaded Wilkinson to place the bomb.

In London later, Wilkinson suggested using a truck to run guns into South Africa. But he was no dreamer; he had a realistic plan and had drawn up blueprints to show how a

Bedford truck could be modified to include secret compartments.

Slovo called in a former runner to run the show. David told how his father was the person who interviewed and chose potential drivers.

"Even the drivers were watched," said David. "A tourist driver would be among the passengers. He believed it was normal tourist, but he was there also to learn the ropes and check on the driver and other passengers to see if any of them was

more than just a holidaymaker. Even the driver was unaware of this 'watcher's' presence."

The ANC was aware that the South African government had infiltrated some safari operations. "The government suspected guns were being brought into the country in this manner, so drivers were given training in how to assess their passengers and single out possible spies."

"Apparently at least one driver did identify a government spy, but he knew how to mislead him and allay his suspicions."

David Brown said *The Secret Safari* was several years in the making. One of the first countries to realise the potential of this documentary was Finnish TV which offered to invest funds in the venture back in 1987.

"It was quite difficult to track down all the players," said David. "In such a secret operation nobody knew who the next link in the chain was, so it took several years to tie up the loose ends."

The film director is an Australian, and the documentary - which took five weeks to film and 12 to edit - is due to have its world premiere in Australia at the Perth Documentary Conference in March.

e.tv will be screening it one month earlier, on February 11 at 8pm.

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Travellers with an Africa Hinterland tour rest at a camp-fire in Lusaka, unaware that the truck transporting them overland across Africa was being loaded with arms to fight the apartheid regime.
INSET: Stuart Round, a British driver for the front company.

Bums on guns

Film reveals how ANC smuggled arms into the country via tourist safaris

By Rafiq Rohan
Political Editor

Soments within the African National Congress have for the first time since the armed struggle was waged by the ANC against the apartheid government divulged how arms were smuggled into the country at the time.

The sources said one of the most successful means was through an audacious operation which involved using unsuspecting tourists on overland journeys through a legally set up company

in the UK called Africa Hinterland.

While the ANC has tentatively lighted, it gave its approval to a local film-maker to make a documentary to be shown on e.tv on Sunday - of the operation.

One of the more fascinating aspects is that most of the people working for the ANC inside South Africa at the time were ordinary white South Africans and most of the arms exchanges took place in white suburbs.

One of these was James Garraway, now working at a Western Cape technician, whose role was to collect the

arms and buy them in safe places.

The Africa Hinterland plot was dreamt up by the late Joe Slovo and involved an elaborate plan in which the company was set up with sales and marketing staff.

Young tourists, mainly from New Zealand and Australia, were targeted in pairs to buy into the journeys.

They would pay their fees and become part of groups that travelled overland from Kenya to Cape Town.

Africa Hinterland was registered as a company by Slovo and ANC exile Munnie Brown, whose son David Max

Brown produced the documentary called *The Secret Sign*.

When the specially fitted truck arrived in Lusaka from Kenya, the tourists were made to participate in an overnight camp while the truck was taken away by Umkhonto weSizwe operatives who packed the concealed compartments with guns, bombs and ammunition.

The truck was then returned to the tourists the next day who made their way, blissfully unaware, into South Africa with their deadly commitment.

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Tourism with a Twist

Unsuspecting backpackers were used to smuggle arms to anti-apartheid activists in South Africa

By PETER HAWTHORNE CAPE TOWN

FOR THE 500 OR SO BACKPACKERS WHO took a bargain-price safari from Kenya and central Africa to South Africa, it was the experience of a lifetime. Only now are they discovering it was even more than that. The travelers were unwitting participants in an African National Congress weapons-smuggling operation. From 1986 to 1993, Africa Hinterland Safaris, a company set up by the A.N.C. in London, carried not only innocent passengers but also a total of 40 tons of not-so-innocent arms and ammunition for the A.N.C.'s war against apartheid in South Africa. On each seven-week journey of up to 4,500 km in their swaying safari truck, for which they paid as little as \$150 a person, the holiday travelers were sitting on a ton of AK-47 assault rifles, ammunition, hand grenades, limpet mines and sometimes TNT. The inside story of the secret arms safaris is told in a new Australian-South African TV documentary. Its co-producer, David Max Brown, is the son of Mannie Brown, a veteran South African anti-apartheid exile who helped plan the smuggling project from London.

Africa Hinterland, which was set up as a genuine safari travel company, was a front for Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the A.N.C. The company produced a handsome sales brochure, ran slide shows on the scenic attractions of

overland in Africa and organized visas and vaccinations—all geared to appeal to young backpackers, mainly Australians, New Zealanders and some South Africans looking for something different out of London. A Bedford truck was bought with \$120,000 in A.N.C. cash, converted into an all-purpose safari wagon that would ferry up to 20 passengers and shipped to the Kenyan port of Mombasa to await the first tour group.

What the customers didn't know was that in the course of the conversion, the truck had been fitted with secret compartments under the seats. The hiding places were designed by Rodney Wilkinson, another A.N.C. activist-in-exile, who had been responsible for placing limpet mines at South Africa's Koeberg nuclear power station near Cape Town. The drivers were volunteer members of Britain's Anti-Apartheid Movement. When they took the truck in for "servicing" in Lusaka, Zambia, the arms and ammunition, carefully packaged to avoid detection by sniffer dogs at the South African border, were concealed in the compartments. In South Africa,

SAFARI: Hinterland was a front for the military wing of the A.N.C.; its oblivious clients sat on a ton of arms on their journeys across Africa



AFRICA

DECOY: Documentary makers tracked down the original weapons-carrying truck

A.N.C. agents collected the weapons and distributed them to underground MK cells throughout the country. It is not known how they were used, though up to 20,000 South Africans of all races were killed in political violence in the 1980s and early '90s.

In its nine years of operation Africa Hinterland Safaris made some 40 trips into South Africa, but the hidden arms operation was never uncovered. Mannie Brown didn't even tell his own family about it until six years ago. "When I got over the surprise, I recognized immediately the potential this story had for a powerful documentary film," says David Brown, who was also an A.N.C. member-in-exile and taught at the group's school in Tanzania before studying film and TV in Canada. In 1998 Brown and Australian co-producer Sally Browning traced the original Bedford truck, which was taken out of service in 1993. Rescuing it from a Pretoria junkyard, they put it back on the road to make their film. They also tracked down people involved in the London front company, as well as the drivers and South Africans who worked underground for the A.N.C. Londoner Jonny Harris, who managed Africa Hinterland Safaris, says she often thought about the morality of using the young travelers "sitting on a powder keg." But she also convinced herself that "in the end, the end justifies the means." Says Mannie Brown, now 74 and living in London: "The passengers had a good time and they got a bloody good deal, far cheaper than any of the others. Now I think perhaps we owe them an apology."

The documentary makers tracked down some of the original tourists and told them the real purpose of the overland safaris. Some were speechless with disbelief. Others were supportive. "If I'd known [what they were doing] and they were offering another trip, I probably would have gone on it and joined in, who knows?" said South African passenger Lucille Frauenstein. Observed Australian Misha Coleman: "It's probably one of the best things I did. If it was a contributing factor to apartheid being overturned, I'm very glad." Whatever the A.N.C.'s secret safari plan achieved, it will be remembered by many as a traveler's tale with an intriguing twist.