Kris Fricke
kris.r.fricke@gmail.com
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Chapter II - 9ja

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Day 1 - Arrival

February 13th, 2012 – It had been a clear sunny morning in Los Angeles; fifteen hours later it's a dim and snowy winter morning in Amsterdam. Out the terminal windows, big snowflakes drift down like falling feathers, and an inch of snow covers the tops of the boarding bridges like white frosting. Arriving at the gate for my flight to Nigeria, I find that nearly all the passengers are clearly Nigerian -- mostly men in business suits with multi-colored brimless hats, but also some serious looking women, or families in matching patterned clothes. I feel suddenly self-conscious, very obviously unlike everyone else. There are a handful of young white guys in suits sitting loungingly together in the front row, laughing loudly about whatever they're talking about. Oil industry folks I suspect, from the look of them and what I know of the Nigerian economy. The way they associate only with each other and laugh like they are kings of the world, I find myself hoping I will never be like them, and sit by myself in the back of the seating area.

It's a six-hour layover, fortunately I've brought a book – Dark Star Safari, in which author Paul Theroux chronicles his trip by trains and other low cost ground transport across the length of Africa from Cairo to Capetown. *One can… do that??* Africa had always seemed an intimidating place to me but a solitary American can safely just wing it across the whole continent?? I am amazed and intrigued, though I can barely imagine being brave enough to do something like that myself.

While reading I'm trying to ignore a concern growing in the back of my mind. I had previously been mainly preoccupied with just getting to Africa, but now that I am almost there, already surrounded by Nigerians, the thought nags at me -- who am I to come here and teach anyone anything? I've been a professional beekeeper just most of five years. Will I be able to contribute enough knowledge to justify the USAID Farmer-to-Farmer program funding which is sending me to Nigeria? Will I even justify the Nigerian farmers taking time out of their busy farming to attend my training, or will everyone loathe me for wasting their time?

A six-hour flight takes me south across the Mediterranean Sea and endless expanse of the Sahara desert to the squarish Texas-sized country of Nigeria tucked in under the Western bulge of Africa. The desert sands extend into the north of Nigeria, and to the south would be tropical jungles, but what does Nigeria itself look like? I look forward to finding out.

By the time we smoothly roll to a stop on the runway in Abuja in the middle of Nigeria, heavy darkness hangs beyond the sepiatone lights of the tarmac, so I can't yet sate my curiosity -- Nigeria is a set with the curtains still drawn. Stepping out of the plane onto the jetway bridge, the steamy tropical heat immediately hits me. Ninety Fahrenheit at 9pm. *Was I really watching snow six hours earlier?*

We passengers descend the escalator into the passport hall. We pass a framed photograph of Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathon, smiling cheerily under a fedora; and the green-white-green Nigerian flag; and then a big Nigerian coat of arms on the wall: two

white horses supporting a black shield with a white Y shape on it, representing the great rivers Niger and Benue which combine in Nigeria, and also, perhaps, the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria, the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Next, there is a big sign, again patriotically in green-and-white, with the picture of a decidedly scrofulous looking character, and the words "BEWARE OF INTERNET FRAUDSTERS" emblazoned across the top. It contains some fraud avoidance advice and the logo of the "Economic & Financial Crimes Commission" and finally the rather unsettling motto "EFCC will get you … anywhere … any time!"

Welcome to Nigeria!

In the warm humid darkness just outside the terminal, there's a rich scent of plant life in the air, as if one has stuck one's nose into a hedge. From the moment I grab my bag from the luggage conveyor, porters begin wheedling me to employ them to carry it, but aside from it being easy enough for me to carry myself, I have no local currency (nairas) to pay them with, so the importuning makes me feel set upon and increasingly anxious as I desperately look for my contact. As usual, just outside the baggage claim there's a crowd of people with signs for specific passengers, or hawking taxi and hotel services. I scan the crowd trying not to encouragingly make eye contact with any of the service hawkers. Ah, there's a man with a sign with my name on it. The man holding it is stocky, with a hairless head, and might have looked tough if he'd stop grinning for a moment. He extends a hand with a gold-looking watch hanging loosely from the wrist.

"Hi, I'm Blessing, I'm the driver," he says cheerfully in a thick Nigerian accent. I grasp his hand like a lifeline -- henceforth I should be in the Organization's capable hands. If I had known 48 hours later he'd be under arrest for a potential murder charge, I probably would have been a lot more uneasy. The porters melt away as we walk a short distance across the parking lot to the white Landcruiser. I try to stare into the empty darkness around the airport, *are there giraffes out there? Elephants? Zebras?*

Soon we're out of the airport and zipping along a broad divided highway. It seems about three lanes wide per side though there are no lane markers, and though it appears to be a freeway, there are occasional speed bumps. The Abuja airport, it turns out, is about half an hour out of town. Peering out into the darkness in hopes of seeing zebras or maybe some quaint huts, I see only the occasional blocky modern building, and a crashed car left on the side of the road … and a mile or two later another one … and another...

"The tow trucks won't come out at night" Blessing explains, after noticing my head swiveling to watch each wreck go by, "because it's not safe at night. So crashed cars remain till morning." *Does the same goes for ambulances?*

A pair of headlights approaches on our side of the median. *Surely I'm not seeing this right*. Blessing steers us to the far left of the laneless roadway as a car zips past on the right side, clearly going the wrong direction on our side of the median.

Instead of commenting on this Blessing says.

"There is another American beekeeping volunteer here"

"Oh yeah?"

"Yes, his name is Doug. He just came from Ethiopia, he is a very interesting man"

"Oh, I hope I will meet him."

"He is at the hotel where you are staying, you will surely meet him tomorrow."

Another oncoming car hurtles past.

"Umm," I say, raising a finger questioningly.

"They wouldn't do that during the day, they would be arrested," Blessing chuckles, "but there's no police at night. Probably they want to get somewhere on this side of the highway and rather than drive to the next break in the median they take an earlier one and drive down this side," he explains in his heavily accented English.

"Oh."

Presently we are driving in the city of Abuja, and from what I can tell, it looks indistinguishable from an American town -- parking lots, multi-story buildings and illuminated billboards, though none of the traffic signals seem to be operational. All my life African cities have always been portrayed in one of two ways on TV: miserable overcrowded shanty towns in the news and movies, or, in National Geographic type shows, full of quaint huts. Had I just traveled halfway around the world for a thoroughly mundane experience?

Arriving at the hotel, uniformed guards with AK-47 machine guns casually slung over their shoulders use a mirror on a pole to look under the car for bombs and look in our trunk before lifting the boomgate and allowing us to proceed to the hotel entrance.

"I'll be back at 9am to take you to the office" he says as I get out and thank him.

"The police don't go out at night, you probably shouldn't either." he adds as a warning before smiling and bidding me goodnight.

Having only ever stayed in budget hotels before, I marvel at the broad glamorous hotel lobby. The porter takes me up the grand stairs, there's a uniformed guard on the 2nd floor landing and another at the 3rd. He's a young man with a friendly face, in a solid avocado green uniform, and he nods to me as I pass.

The porter shows me to a room that is huge and luxurious compared to the Motel 6es I am accustomed to. A white mosquito net hangs like a veil around the bed. The porter sets the AC to blasting and turns on the TV before leaving me. I hurry to turn down the AC before freezing to death, and then spend a few minutes trying to figure out how to turn off the TV. Exhausted from the 27-hour journey, I climb under the mosquito veil and am soon asleep.

They say that mefloquine, which I was taking to prevent malaria, can cause vivid dreams, so let us in dreamland journey through quininated delirium to the proud Hausa kingdom of Zazzau in 1804. Zazzau Town is a collection of mud-brick buildings surrounded by a defensive wall in the hot savanna just south of the Sahara. We watch camel caravans come in from across the great deserts. 200 years earlier the legendary warrior queen Amina had led Zazzau to greatness, but now its leaders stand on the wall and eye the dusty horizons in fear, for another power has risen up in the expanses of the sahel -- the nomadic herders, wanderers and raiders, the Fulani, are now the ones to be united under a powerful leader, and they have formed the Sokoto Caliphate, conquering everything in their path and selling their captives into slavery. Indeed, Sokoto has at this time the second largest number of slaves in the world, second only to that new empire across the seas to which captives are taken on wooden boats never to be seen again. It is whispered that the oyinbos*, the "peeled skin people" actually eat the slaves they buy -- how else could you explain why they take away an endless stream with never a one to ever be heard from again?*

And so, when King Muhammed Makau sees the dust of the armies of the Fulani Jihad he gathers up his people and they flee south to safety. We see a montage of this process repeating over and over again for 24 years, as the Sokoto Caliphate expands and the weary refugees of Zazzau again and again move further south. Finally it is 1828 and the current king,

Abu Ja ("Abu the Red") finds himself gazing up at a massive rock, steep and grey like a sitting elephant, rising nearly a thousand feet above the surrounding forests. The local Gbagyi people have themselves fled from the Zazzau Hausa, scrambling up secret paths to unassailable refuge atop the rock.

In this fever dream, we find King Abu Ja to be the security guard I saw before going to bed, and, lo, I find myself his right-hand-man, his otunba*. He is wearing not the avocado green uniform but flowing robes and sitting atop his rosey-brown head like a pristine white cake, a turban wound tightly into a circle with flat sides and top. We peer up at the tiny figures just visible on top of the enormous rock. A stone comes hurtling down from above and clatters among the rocks, startling some speckled guinea fowl. Abu Ja in a dignified manner walks back a bit to stand under a nearby mango tree.*

"Your majesty, we can't climb the rock, they're completely unassailable up there" I tell him.

"A completely unassailable position?" he smiles "now that's what I think we've been looking for."

And so a peaceful conclusion is negotiated with the locals, and Abu Ja founds his city there, just west of Zuma Rock, and it came to be known as Abuja. His people settled with the Gbagyi people, and the Sokoto Caliphate expanded around them but did not conquer them.

It is now 1902, we know this the way you just know things in dreams, and a military force of a thousand men in British Khaki and pith helmets arrives in Abuja, led by white men with bristly mustaches proudly sitting atop their horses. Some Abujan warriors have rifles, but every member of this force has a modern gun, plus several huge weapons carried in carts; resistance clearly is suicide. Plus, this force, it is explained, is on its way to defeat the Sokoto Caliphate, so the leaders readily agree they recognized British sovereignty, whatever that means. Seems pretty inconsequential to humor them on this.

The British force marches north and at the Battle of Kano they unpack their big guns: field howitzers before which the walls of the Sokotan fort quickly crumble, and maxim machine guns that unleash a chattering death that fells the Sokotan cavalry as they charge. The sovereignty of the British "Northern Nigeria Protectorate" is now uncontested.

Now we jump forward, to the green-white-green of Nigeria replacing the Union Jack on a flagpole in Lagos in 1960, amid cheering crowds. In 1975 planners of the military government of Nigeria, in their uniform epaulets and aiguillettes, lean over a table-sized map of the country.

"Lagos is too far into the south-west corner of the country, if we want to avoid a second civil war we need to move it to somewhere in the middle." They all peer at the map.

"This area right about here looks good, there's not much there right now and we'll just relocate everyone who is" the general looks closely to read the label. "Abuja."

The surveyors and bulldozers come, and a new federal planned city is laid out in rural land east of Zuma Rock and the previously existing city, displacing local Gbagyi people living in the area. The current city of Abuja takes shape before our eyes, a planned city grid of broad straight boulevards around the smaller promontory of Aso Rock.

City-planning related dreams bore me to wakefulness in my cocoon of mosquito netting, otherworldly in the dim pre-dawn light.

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Day 2 - Abuja

February 14th, 2012 – The next morning, I'm in the hotel lobby reading the newspaper ("Director of Information Ministry Shot at Government House") when an elderly Caucasian man coming from the stairs greets me in a midwestern accent.

"Hi! Are you Kris?"

"Yes, Douglas Johnson, I presume?" I say, extending my hand. He is a lean fellow who looks to be in about his mid-sixties, with mischievous laughing eyes and white hair sticking out from under his fluorescent yellow baseball cap.

"Hey we have some time before Blessing is picking us up, want to check out the local market with me?" he proposes. I look anxiously out the gates of the hotel, where an armed guard is in the process of using a mirror to check underneath a car for bombs. *Out there?* I remember all the stories of violence, *the police don't go out at night because they're not safe*. I look at his ensemble, a subdued Hawaiian shirt, cargo shorts, and sandals with socks. My self-identity definitely does not include being less brave than someone who wears socks with sandals.

"Okay yeah, let's go," steeling myself, I put down the newspaper.

The streets are broad, with only light traffic. Locals walk past us on the tree-lined sidewalks in a purposeful manner without a second look. Some wear business suits, some wear patterned traditional outfits with colorful brimless hats. As we walk down a block of three-story buildings full of shops and little restaurants, Doug cheerfully tells me about his recent adventures in Ethiopia. He had ridden camels through sand storms in the Afar badlands to visit salt flats, sulfur springs and remote volcanoes. I feel envious and inspired, *I* want to do things like this, but how does one *do* that?

"Is that… safe?" I ask, addressing my first concern.

"Oh, yeah," he cheerfully answers, "a tourist was killed last month and they wanted to make sure it didn't happen again, so the army was out with kalashnikovs."

I digest this logic for a moment.

"How do you even arrange that?" I ask.

"Oh, I don't know, it just kind of fell into place."

We arrive at a smallish grocery store, and go inside. I had been expecting something more exotic, big baskets of colorful spices and piles of strange fruits, because, again, that's all that's ever shown on TV as an "African market," and what I had seen in a previous trip to Egypt at the famous Khan El Khalili bazaar; instead I find a fairly typical grocery store of orderly straight aisles stocked with packaged foods. We make our way to the aisle of glass jars of jam, jelly and honey.

"Ah here's the honey... let's see... product of Texas!" Doug rolls his eyes.

We drive to the Organization's headquarters across a city not that different from a pleasant American town, albeit one with no functioning traffic signals. I admire the abundance of trees and uncrowded feel of the city as we weave through intersections under traffic signals hanging idly inoperable. While most commercial buildings in American cities follow a basic and unimaginative boxy design, save for the occasional postmodernist library or corporate headquarters building, I note that nearly every building in Abuja seems to have been custom designed as if a plain box shape is simply unacceptable. Simple rotundas, stepped entrances and distinct building wings break up building shapes in an elegant

manner. I finally see some semblance of a hut -- a restaurant with a stylized large conical thatched roof, more a fancy design conceit than building expediency. From many places in the city one can see a huge rock rising 1200 feet out of the center of the city.

"That's Aso Rock" Blessing points to it. "You see that building on top, that's the president's house." While Doug and I are oohing-and-awing at it he continues "there's actually an even bigger rock just outside of town, called Zuma Rock, it's also on the 100 naira note."

Arriving at the Organization's compound, Blessing noses up to the solid iron gate and gives the horn a quick toot. A boy of about fifteen pops his head up in the window of a little kiosk-sized guardhouse built into the wall beside the gate, and then disappears, only to reappear a moment later pushing open the gate and then closing it behind us. There's a dirt parking area with a few land-cruisers and a two-story building with a few sets of stairs leading to different entrances, evidently other organizations or companies.

The Organization's Nigeria field office is just a small cluster of three or four offices and a conference room. Though its international headquarters is in Little Rock, Arkansas, all their field staff are locals of the countries in which they operate. In addition to the driver Blessing, we meet the accountant, a skinny young man; the secretary, a quiet young woman; John, a "Program Associate" who accompanies volunteers out into the field, a charismatic young man in his late twenties like me; and Michael the country director. Mike is a kindly middle-aged fellow, who worked for the World Bank before working for the Organization. While we're talking to him, he gets a notification on his phone and suddenly looks very troubled. He tells us very gravely,

"A bomb just went off in Kaduna, which is just north of here. My family is in Kaduna." After a moment he gets another notification and the tension mostly leaves his face -- he informs us "my family is okay," but he still seems a bit shaken.

We're told the plan is that John and Blessing will accompany Doug to his project, but as to me, Mike will accompany me on a short in-country flight to the city of Ibadan in the south-west corner of Nigeria, and leave me there in the hands of a local partner organization.

26 Hours later in Ibadan, I would see Mike looking a lot more troubled after getting off his phone -- "There's been an incident with Doug's team"

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Ibadan

February 14th, 2012 – "There's a dead man there in the road!" the driver exclaims in surprise.

"What, where?" Michael the Country Director peers into the crowd behind us, as do I. We're driving from the airport into Ibadan city, and it's already very different from Abuja. The road is lined with decrepit-looking cinderblock buildings, pedestrians throng the edges of the road and the dirt beside it, and frequently weave between the steady flow of cars to cross the road. I don't see the body but Michael does, turning back tsking in disappointment, "Why do these people just leave it there?"

The flight from Abuja had only been forty minutes on a small plane. Seeing the outskirts of Abuja for the first time by daylight, during the drive and as we took off, I found the land outside the city to be a savanna of intermittent trees punctuated by almost Dr

Suessian abrupt hills rising suddenly out of the flat land, no doubt more giant rock escarpments of which Aso and Zuma rock are particularly big examples. Between the hills, the flat lands are thoroughly peppered with little houses and small fields.

The short flight compared favorably to domestic flights in the US -- they served us complimentary hot sandwiches and beverages, which is more than even multi-hour flights in the United States usually do. It seemed a perfectly safe flight at the time, though the fact that one of three such aircraft operated by that small airline crashed a month later into the "Mountain of Fire" church with the loss of all aboard leaves me feeling I've come closer than I ever wanted to to a plane crash.

Presently, over a rise, the city spreads before us, an endless sea of rust-red roofs draped over uneven terrain. The vehicular traffic gets thick and viscous, as do the crowds of pedestrians flowing around and amongst the cars. I marvel at the common practice of carrying goods atop heads, even balancing objects on top of other objects. In return, many people aren't afraid to stare upon noticing me in the car, pointing and declaring "oyinbo!" to their friends, which makes me feel a bit self-conscious.

"Goll!" Doug exclaims over the phone that evening, "Blessing's driving! I'm scared for my life!" I too had noticed driving seems to be a wild adventure here, though Blessing hadn't seemed to me to be particularly worse than anyone else.

I toss and turn in my bed like bacon sizzling on a grill. Without the exhaustion of a 27 hour journey which had made sleeping easy the night before, tonight the eight hour time difference has my body thinking 10pm is 2pm. The mosquito netting around the bed is gently illuminated with the dim golden glow of the somnolent city -- I always leave the blackout blinds open, preferring falling asleep in the dim glow of city light to waking up in tomb-like darkness. Finally I drift to sleep, and let us once again suppose I had strangely accurate meflequinated dreams:

It's 1840, you just know things like that in dreams. We trudge in a ragged band, on foot and by horse, across the ravaged kingdom of Oyo, an undulating savanna of small hills. We on foot carry spears and animal hide shields, the horsemen's lances dance above them and their heavy cutlass-like swords jangle at their sides, We pass the burnt remains of many villages, and it reminds us of the nightmare of seeing our capital of Old Oyo town burned by the Fulani Jihad of the Sokoto Caliphate.

We pass a body lying face down by the trail, and our leader, an "eso" or noble warrior, who happens to look like director Michael, tsks sadly at it, but we don't have time to stop. The high king of the Yoruba people, the Alaafin, has directed the esos of the realm to gather with their followers by "the edge of the forest," Eba Odan, which is beginning to be shortened to "Ibadan," as the name of the town there. As we trudge southward, we constantly look nervously behind and around us for an approaching Fulani raiding party. To our relief the foliage gets more abundant the further south we go, providing cover we could flee into to escape the charging hooves of horsemen, but equally as the thickets look nearly impassable I wonder if it would actually impede our escape.

Presently, over a rise, we see ahead of us, draped over the top of a ridge, the thatched roofs of Ibadan town. We anxiously hurry down into the shallow valley beside it, which is cleared of forest around the town and filled with the even rows of yam fields. Farmers look up nervously from tilling their fields with hand tools, but on seeing we don't jangle the metal arm rings of the Fulani's jamma foot soldiers they greet us in relief. We cross the stream that runs through the meadow and make our way to the narrow gate in

the first of three concentric palisade walls around the settlement. A party of warriors with European guns sit on guard outside the gate. If we were to continue further south a few days we'd come to the network of lagoons known as Lagos, where the great boats of the savage Oyinbo kingdoms call in to trade.

We breathe a sigh of relief as we enter the protective walls. We're just in time, the lord of Ibadan, the Bashorun, has called a meeting in the central square. We make our way to the gathering…

…and I wake up, far too early due to jetlag. The dull silvery light of earliest morning streams through the window.

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Day 3 - Opening Ceremonies

February 15th, 2012 – The shaman exhales a fireball into the air, which curls away into swirls of dark smoke amid appreciative oohs and ahs. More than a hundred of us are crowded into the local government headquarters for the project opening ceremonies. We sit in a horseshoe shape as, in the middle of the room, a local shaman is performing a traditional dance amidst the beating of a drum, and breathing fire. He holds a metal wand with a flame on the end, his lips are thickly coated with some black substance, his eyes roll around -- he brings the flaming wand to his lips, seems to inhale it, and expels another ball of fire. Presently he grabs a small boy, who seems to be there for this purpose but still seems a bit taken by surprise, and the shaman pantomimes cutting off his head with an axe. I wonder if at some distant time in the past this perhaps may not have been a pantomime. The performance finishes to applause, and as the shaman goes around the room people shove money into his hands. The person beside me elbows me and I quickly pull out some local naira notes as well, lest the shaman choose to put a curse upon me.

Following the shaman's performance, proceedings are opened with first a Christian prayer and then an Muslim one. Nigeria is officially about evenly divided between these two religions. Next there are speeches. The local government chairman, a charismatic fellow, seems to be the star of the show. Fortunately, I'm just another person in the crowd, it would have been very intimidating to be thrust into the spotlight amid the overwhelming culture shock I was experiencing. After the ceremonies break up I meet the people I will be working with: Yinka is an attractive woman in her mid-thirties and runs the local non-profit development organization, known by the giant acronym PASRUDESS, which will be administering the project; and three young men in their early twenties who are volunteers with PASRUDESS: slightly geeky Hattrick in a polo shirt buttoned up too high ("not Patrick, but Hat-Trick, like in cricket"); Whale (Wah-lay) [I'm kind of thinking of intentionally misspelling his name phonetically as I don't know about you but I can't help but read "Whale" like the english word], in smart business casual attire, his collar rakishly unbuttoned and sporting hip sunglasses; and Dayo with the easy unassuming self-composure of a jazz musician.

After the ceremony we gather for photos on the front steps of the hall in various combinations of the people involved. The local government building is bleak, bare unpainted concrete looking out on a dirt-packed yard, in the middle of which a faded yellow construction grader sits like the carapace of a giant dead insect, with four enormous and very flat tires, weeds growing around it. A poignant monument to stalled development.

As everyone is dispersing, I look for Mike and see him just getting off the phone, looking very disturbed. He approaches me and says

"There has been an incident with Doug's team."

Earlier that morning 200 miles east in Kogi State – Doug nervously gripped the edge of the chair as Blessing wove the car through traffic and around the pedestrians. Suddenly there was a woman right in front of the car. The breaks screeched, followed by a sickening thump thump as she bounced off the hood and tumbled to lay on the road in front of them.

"Stay here!" John admonished Doug as he and Blessing leapt out of the car. Already a crowd was forming. The woman was conscious and not bleeding but she felt badly hurt. They took her to the hospital.

"Blessing has been arrested." Mike explains to me solemnly, "we must take care of the woman's medical care because if she dies he will be charged with murder."

In my dreams that night we are gathered in the central square. The foremost noble warriors, bound by a warrior's code, veritable knights of the yoruba, the esos, form a circle in the middle, surrounded by hundreds of their followers.

The long wood-and-thatch houses of the chieftains surround the square, chief among them that of the Bashorun, and above them, palm trees wave at the sky. Bashorun Oluyole steps into the circle to address the gathered warriors. In my dream he is the local government chairman, with his politician's charisma and air of authority, but now wearing a magnificent velvet robe. "The high king, the Alaafin, as you know has charged us with defending what remains of the Oyo Kingdom and defeating the Fulani invaders," "Eso Elepo, I would like to appoint you as the Ibalogun, commander of our forces" he says turning to one of the foremost warriors. The assembled crowd cheers their approval, but when the noise dies down Elepo is shaking his head.

"My own name is enough for me, I wish no title beyond eso, like my father before me."

They try to convince him but he persistently says he does not want the title. In reality he is already successful and respected but is apprehensive of becoming entangled in court politics and reluctant to burden himself with more responsibilities. And so the Bashorun instead bestows the title of Ibalogun on another warrior, eso Oderinlo.

"And now my friends," the Bashorun turns to the crowd with a smile, casually picking up an axe, "let us go down to the kola grove and make a sacrifice to appease Sango!"

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Day 4 - Training

February 16th, 2012 – Sweat drips down my back. It is hot but it's not the heat, it's that I think I have a mutiny on my hands and we've only just begun. I look around at the thirty attendees sitting in folding chairs facing me with looks of incomprehension. About three quarters of them are men, in mostly patterned traditional clothing, though there's some jeans and t-shirts. The men often have smoothly shaved scalps, some wear brimless hats, and some wear baseball caps. The women all wear the Muslim headscarf that leaves their face entirely exposed, and one of them is breastfeeding a baby. They grumble among themselves, is this project immediately going to crash and burn? I want to curl up and die.

"Let's start with the most basic and build from there to the more complex," I had told the beekeepers, under the corrugated metal awning by the side of the local government headquarters. Thirty pairs of eyes were fixed expectantly on me, sitting at a table beside Dayo. "So there's three types of bees in a hive" I explained, "we'll talk about them each in more detail later." so far they're all watching me blankly.

"The first type is the queen, there will be one queen, she lays the eggs." *Is my audience looking unsettled?* "Second, there's workers, they're female and make up ninety-nine percent of the colony, and they do all the work." My audience was definitely shifting and murmuring restlessly, and I was only two sentences in! "And finally, there are the drones, they don't do any work and their purpose is just to mate with queens…" I trailed off as it looked like I had a mutiny on my hands. One of the trainees raises his hand and says something to Dayo in pidgin, and there's a clamor of agreement.

"They can't understand you." he tells me. Hmm okay. I try speaking very slowly with careful enunciation. The audience is still mutinous. I'd been told going out to the actual bee sites was "not in the budget," so this is the project, me lecturing about bees for eleven days straight, and it looks like it's turning out to be an immediate disaster. I see two weeks of marinating in shame ahead of me. I want to die.

"What if you translate for me?" I ask Dayo.

"Sure"

I repeat the introduction to the three castes of bees, and Dayo code-switches it into Nigerian pidgin English, which I can mostly understand but almost every word is pronounced slightly differently. As best I can understand what he says it goes like this:

"There are three types of bees der, the first one are the queen, wipita capitapata for the bee colony. The second type they be the workers -- the workers, them be female and they tend to do all the work for the bee colony andeplasdatoo about ninety-nine percent of them. The third type is the drones, the drones dem the male and they not they do any work. The only work with them they do is just to sleep with the queen andteshakedey fertilized."

This seems to work well actually. The audience looks engaged and interested. And so we proceed, with me talking in English and Dayo translating my English to their English. I pause every few sentences to let Dayo translate, and often trainees raise their hands to ask pertinent questions, which I can sometimes understand directly, or sometimes Dayo translates for me. The trainees also write questions on notes and pass them up, which I read while Dayo is giving his translation and use them to guide the discussion.

By and by, I have made it to lunch time! *Half a day done, 10.5 to go!* Half the group goes to a mosque around the corner to pray, the other half are Christian it seems. A local staple, *amala*, which is a doughy ball of yam and flour, served in a very spicy soup with a bit of meat, is passed out. Everyone else eats it the traditional way, pulling off a piece of the *amala* with their fingers, dipping it in the saucey soup, and popping it in their mouth -- and I try this but don't quite like the pasty way it feels to get my fingers so covered in it, so when someone brings me a spoon I eagerly use it. Amala will be our lunch every day, with variations between beef, chicken, and goat for the meat.

After lunch, the lecture continues. I can easily talk about the basic behavior of the respective castes of bees, and how it practically relates to beekeeping, and how these behaviors relate to important hive-level activity such as reproduction of new colonies. I think it's important to know what the bees would naturally do and how a beekeeping activity works with the bees to accomplish something for mutual benefit. There's a natural

flow of topics dovetailing into one another through the lifecycle of bees that touches on all aspects of beekeeping. Though some of the trainees know a fair bit, they seem to appreciate this comprehensive discussion. *I can fill at least two days like this!* I think to myself with the fragile relief of a fate merely postponed.

The Fulani armies of the Sokoto Caliphate close in on Ibadan, in our dream we see their mounted warriors and accompanying infantry, distinct from the Yoruba people by being more inclined towards the headdresses of the northern deserts. We see them pillage the outlying villages of Ilobu and Edo, and as they march on to Ibadan they are funneled into longer columns on ever narrower paths by the thickening forest. Suddenly from the thickets around them there is the roar of guns, followed by the screaming onrush of Yoruba warriors through the gunsmoke and shrubs, led by eso Elepo, hurling their spears and swinging their heavy swords. The Fulani horses rear up and the warriors brandish their lances but there's no room to maneuver. Elepo and the warriors around him, fighting on foot, slash and parry with their swords, or stab up at horsemen with their spears. The Fulanis are broken from the start, and soon the Ibadanian warriors are pursuing the fleeing survivors.

Eso Elepo arrives at the village of Edo to his fellow warriors lighting torches to raze the village to the ground.

"What are you doing? These are our people!" he admonishes them.

"Ibalogun Oderinlo told us to," a warrior informs him.

"Well, you're not going to" Olepo curtly informs him. The warriors look ashamed for a moment, but Elepo is soon leading them all in pursuit of the enemy again.

They advance further to the village of Ilobu and again Elepo holds back the wild warriors from destroying it. That evening the people of Ilobu come to the army's encampment and heap gifts in front of Elepos tent in gratitude. .

As the victorious warriors troop back through Ibadan to the central square, the gathered crowds cheer for no one more than eso Elepo. When they are gathered before the Bashorun the Ibalogun complains that Elepo is taking credit beyond his station for their victories, and demands he prostrate himself before him.

"I prostrate myself before no one but the Bashorun!" Olepo objects. The Ibalogun scowls darkly at him but Olepo is too powerful to punish.

§

Day 5 - The Chairman's Throne

February 17th, 2012 [Friday] 7:55am – I'm sitting in the hotel lobby waiting for the driver. It's just a short drive to the training, which is supposed to start at eight but I'd have liked to be there at least ten to fifteen minutes early. I've heard about "Africa time," in fact, the first day one of the organizers had admonished the group "we won't be running on 'Africa Time,' be here on time!" What kind of example would I be setting, arriving late myself? I fidget neurotically. 8:00 rolls by, and 8:05 .... I pick up a paper to try to distract myself.

"Boko Haram Jailbreak in Kogi" reads a headline. Wait, that's where Doug is. I anxiously read on. It seems the previous evening around 7pm about 20 Boko Haram gunmen stormed the jail in Kogi, spraying the buildings with gunfire and killing one guard. They released seven Boko Haram members whom they went away with, but also released

112 other inmates into the surrounding community, leaving only one. I sit there and wonder about the one inmate that wasn't sprung, did the Boko Haram dislike him, was he in a solitary cell they couldn't quickly find a key for? Or perhaps he was near the end of a sentence and didn't fancy complicating it with an escape? Moreover, I picture Doug with escaped criminals running around and possibly trigger-happy authorities trying to chase them down. I picture… wait … Blessing is in jail there! I picture Blessing, sitting cross-armed in the back of a jail cell, having nothing to do with the jailbreak around him.

I hear a car on the gravel. It's the driver, and Hattrick hops out to greet me, seeming unhurried. I greet him with a smile, and try to suppress my frustrations -- if he isn't worried about it then it's presumably not a problem.

I greet the driver, a middle-aged man with three parallel scars on each cheek. He doesn't speak English but smiles warmly and greets me back in Yoruba. As I get in the Landcruiser I note a long thin wood wand laying on the dashboard.

"What is that?" I ask, indicating the wand. The driver himself doesn't speak English but Hattrick exchanges some words with him in Yoruba and answers

"It's a horsewhip"

"Oh, is this a traditional sign of drivers?" I ask, delighted that a profession that once drove buggies might hold on to this archaic tool out of professional pride. Hattrick translates my question to him and he laughs and responds with a grin.

"No it's because military officers carry it"

"Is he a military officer?" I ask

"No but he hopes people will assume he is when they see it and treat him with more respect."

As we make the short drive through the streets teeming with pedestrians, I note that about every fifth person has a simple pattern of scarification on their cheeks.

"What's the cheek scarification mean?" I ask Hattrick

"Oh, it's a tribal thing. In older times it was the higher class that had them. But during the British administration, people who worked with the British didn't have it done, and so now it's principally illiterate indigenes who do it," he says. It seems to me a bit "savage" and exotic but then again, I immediately recall black and white photos of my great grand-uncle Ludwig and his mates at military academy in old Prussia with similar scars on their cheeks. In their case "fencing scars" were the fashion.

The trainees are just gathering in our meeting place when we arrive. We continue with the question-and-answer lecture, and a functional rhythm has developed. Initial awkwardness has melted away. I've been worried that maybe they will just be bored with my basic overview of beekeeping, they seem to know the basics, but they seem interested. Questions keep coming up in notes about the numerous irregular situations that can come up that aren't covered in basic beekeeping manuals, and I find I can usually comprehensively answer them, though as a rule I am never afraid to say "I don't know, actually." When this happens, I make a note to ask someone more knowledgeable.

I'd expressed a fascination with the giant African land snails which are raised for food and so someone brings a platter with several live ones and sets it on my table, the football-sized mollusks squirm and gambol about in ultra-slow-motion on my desk as the morning goes by.

During the lunch break I'm feeling an uncomfortable strain on my lower intestines and ask a support volunteer if there happens to be a bathroom around.

"Yes, certainly, just a minute!" they say and hurry off. A few minutes go by and I begin to squirm, wondering what happened with them. They finally return and beckon me to follow them. We proceed across the courtyard past the decrepit construction grader to what I gather is the local government chairman's office. His office is a large room in the middle of which are several overstuffed leather couches upon which overstuffed men in suits are lounging importantly, wearing designer sunglasses and generally looking like an extravagant entourage. At the far end, facing the rest of the room and the door I've just entered from, his big impressive desk is flanked by flags, and there is a door behind it. I'm told to sit again while the volunteer disappears somewhere for another few minutes to return jangling a pair of keys with which they unlock the door behind the chairman's desk and indicate I am to go in there and to the right. And sure enough, there is a bathroom there with a toilet. I do my business, chuckling a bit to myself that of course the chairman's office has the only "western toilet." Then I go to flush the toilet and... nothing happens. My bemusement turns to horror, how utterly mortifying to leave my leavings there in the chairman's toilet!

I lift the lid of the toilet tank and see that the float arm has become unhooked from the flush lever, so I hook it up and try again --success and relief! It is only later that I discover the usual method of flushing a flush toilet in Nigeria would have been to fill the bucket by the sink and pour it into the toilet bowl causing it to flush. I had actually unnecessarily fixed the chairman's toilet!

As we're winding up the day's training, around 3pm, Hattrick tells me they've decided to organize field visits after all. This is a great relief, because beekeeping is something you really need to teach hands-on. A project consisting of only 11 days of lecture had seemed a nightmare to me, a tedium that would never achieve as much as a few field visits..

Abuja had seemed a safe and non-threatening place but Ibadan, with a population of over a million, and teeming crowds on every street that don't hesitate to stare at me, is still very intimidating and so I don't go out on my own.

In the evening I decide to call Doug to see how things are going there.

"Goll!" he exclaims, "I was lecturing to my class, we were under an awning by the road, when suddenly there was an extremely loud bang by the road! I dove under the table thinking it was a bomb! It turns out there was a passing military convoy and a car tried to pass them so one of the military vehicles ran it off the road!"

"What is your plan now?" the Bashorun asks, sitting on his throne in the large audience chamber of his house off the square. Various advisors and visitors sit on low chairs along the wall, while the Ibalogun stands before him. Everyone save the Bashorun is barefoot, as a show of respect before their lord in his audience chamber.

"We will advance towards Osogbo across the Osun river" the Ibalogun proposes, "to push the Fulani entirely out of this area of Yorubaland. We can't compete with their horsemen on the open plains during daylight but we will only seek to meet them by night."

"Yes this is a good plan, will you take the entire army?" the Bashorun asks.

"No," says the Ibalogun with a sneer, "Eso Elepo can remain here with his thousand men."

"You can't win without Elepo!" blurts out one of Elepo's supporters. The Ibalogun glares at him, his fist tightening around the short horsewhip in his hand.

§

Day 6 - Field Trip

February 18th, 2012 [Saturday] – "Look at that development, you should take a picture of that" Hattrick urges me as we roll out of Ibadan past a tract of new cookie-cutter houses, each on a little square quarter acre lot with driveway and front lawn, just like America, very Norman Rockwell. I smile and take a picture just to be polite, digital film is cheap, so to speak. I know Hattrick is a bit concerned that I primarily photograph notable un-modern looking things and wants to highlight the more modern, but modern is boring to me.

We pass beyond the last suburban developments of Ibadan to find thick shrubbery on either side of the narrow paved road, with frequent cassava or yam fields -- rows of the straight leafy shoots of the above-ground part of the massive tubers. We drive, one Landcruiser followed by one small bus of trainees, through villages of dull grey cinderblock buildings where the government has exercised its right of imminent domain on everything within fifteen feet either side of the road and just bulldozed through the structures that were there so every building has half a room stretching out its broken walls towards the road. We stop for a moment, to ask directions of a passerby near a crossroads in a village, which seems to be how one navigates here. The air has the fragrant tang of woodsmoke. Hattrick gets out and buys something from a woman frying balls of dough in a cauldron of oil by the road. He hands one to me, it's sort of like a doughnut but a bit spicy, it's totally delicious. I'm told it's called a "popov," apparently derived from "popover," which may or may not be a similar food item in some part of the anglophone world as foreign and exotic to me as deepest Africa, such as maybe [googles] ... Boston.

Hearing a many people voices and the strains of rhythmic traditional music I look down a side street, and there a crowd is gathered and in the middle I can see some figures covered head to foot in feathers, with masks over their faces, dancing about. I've heard of West African masquerade dancers, it's somehow related to traditional religion and I'm excited to actually see it. I bring up my camera to take some pictures. Hattrick grabs me by the arm

"Come on, we've got to go!" his tone is urgent

"But I–"

"Come on lets go" he's already dragging me away. I don't insist because maybe it would have been rude to photograph them? Or maybe the others really are just all ready to get back on the road.

"What was that?"

"Just local superstitions don't worry about it"

We arrive at our destination -– an intersection of two dirt roads a short way off the paved road. The tree coverage isn't quite a forest here but is thick enough that visibility isn't far. In places there are more cassava plantations and the occasional person walking along, so it doesn't feel like we're in some distant uninhabited place. There's a mess of cracked eggs at the base of a nearby tree.

"What's this?" I ask Hattrick

"Oh, it is a fetish. The simple peasants put them at crossroads like this due to their superstitions."

We suit up by the vehicles before approaching the hives. Most of the beekeepers

have homemade bee suits that turn them into shapeless hooded figures, like a child dressed as a multi-colored ghost for Halloween. One man in elegant robes simply pulls his robes around him until he is completely covered. We then proceed the short walk to the hives. They are located in a shady area under some trees, though even here it is hot and humid. In a darker, wetter glen just beside the hives some very large carnivorous pitcher plants are growing.

The hives are all topbar hives -- trough-shaped wooden boxes raised up on metal legs to about waist height. If you're familiar with the box shaped hives ubiquitous in the US and developed world ("Langstroth hives), these are much more oblong. Some have sides slanting inward and some have straight sides.

We don't have a usual crucial piece of beekeeping equipment, a "smoker" consisting of a metal canister in which things smoulder and an attached bellows to puff the smoke out the tapered end. Instead, we ignite dried corn cobs and other flammable materials in an old coffee can, and once smoke is billowing out the top, one of the trainees dangles it under the first hive by its handle. The smoke billows vaguely against the hive. Someone flaps at it with a large leaf to drive it more towards the hive but I'm not sure much smoke actually is going in and having an effect.

We open the lid and I am startled to see among the bees scurrying across the topbars over a hundred small beetles like all-black ladybugs. Small Hive Beetles! *Aethina tumida*! In the dry desert environment of California it was rare to see even a few hive beetles and seeing just two or three in a hive was cause for alarm. But this is their native land. Fortunately, the bees here (*Apis mellifera adonsonii*) have co-evolved with the beetles and can handle them well, unlike the Europe-derived honeybees of America. If hive beetles overrun a hive their maggot-like larvae overwhelm the hive and everything gets covered in a gross slime that is their defecation, this is called a "slime out" and is disgusting. This hive, however, doesn't look like it's suffering from the hive beetles, and indeed all the hives we go on to look at have a lot of hive beetles with no ill effects.

One by one we lift the topbars and carefully examine the attached comb. These bees run off of each piece of comb as soon as we begin to remove it, so that by the time we've removed it from the hive and are holding it up there are few bees on it. Once we've finished going through a hive nearly all the bees are hanging in a clump underneath the hive box. The European honeybees I'm accustomed to by and large remain on the comb, ideally ignoring the beekeeper. Even with a stirred up colony of "Africanized" honeybees (AHB), while a lot will lift off to fly combat air patrols, the overwhelming majority at any given time will remain on the comb. While some of these colonies were a bit more aggressive than an ideal European hive, I find none are as bad as the average AHB colony.

I had approached the hive fully suited up, but, finding from the behavior of the bees that they aren't trying to sting me -- "angry" bees make a distinctively different pitch that becomes very recognizable with beekeeping experience, and the usual accompanying behavior of trying to sting one's gloves and clothes is usually a give-away-- I carefully exposed first a few inches of my wrist between my glove and sleeve (just in case I'd read the scene wrong and there were perhaps angry bees whose sound was masked by the non-angry bees), and then removed one glove and then both and as a demonstration placed my hand squarely amid the bees crawling across the tops of the topbars in the hive. Many of the trainees first made exclamations of amazement at what I had done, as they had never even attempted to take such a risk, but seeing that I didn't get stung, many then followed

my example. This isn't merely cowboy show-off antics, but rather I think it's one of the most important lessons that one should be comfortable with the bees and not entirely in fear of them. There's a trend in beekeeping training to teach new beekeepers to fully suit up every time but there's compelling reasons to go bare handed if you can -- for example it's much easier to manipulate the tools and parts of the hive, and being bare-handed will make you hyper-aware if you're upsetting the bees, but in this case I really wanted to demonstrate to the trainees that their bees weren't a fearsome danger to be very afraid of coming in contact with. The trainees with bare hands in the hive around me laughed and grinned and called out to their friends who were away looking at other hives to come see what they were doing.

In topbar hives, under the lid one sees the tops of the "topbars," lined up the length of the hive. Most of the hives are built pretty well but on some of them the topbars are wider or narrower than the requisite 32mm. This is possibly the most important measurement in beehives. One wants the bees to build exactly one comb hanging along the underside of each topbar and the bees have instinctual ideas about spacing -- too much or too little spacing will force them to either "double-comb" topbars or "cross-comb" across topbars thus leaving the beekeeper unable to remove topbars without breaking combs, smashing bees, and making a mess.

While most of the hives mostly have suitable topbars there were a fair number of improperly sized ones and the consequent cross-combing problem. Fortunately, I have a measuring tool quickly at hand to measure for correct dimensions -- I had picked up a metal bottle-cap off the ground -- from a fanta bottle but all metal bottle caps seem to be the same size: 32mm. Placing this on topbars immediately tells us if the topbar is the correct width (if you're doing this to topbars intended for European bees you'll need a different measuring device, as they will want 38mm wide bars).

In the third hive we open up, there is indeed cross-combing. The combs break off as we remove the topbar, and I'm left awkwardly holding a detached piece of comb.

"At home I'd attach this into a frame with a rubber band but uh, I'm not sure what to do here" I admit.

Hattick translates, and a trainee exclaimes "Ah!" while holding up a finger. He reaches out to a thin vine hanging from a tree that happens to be in arms-reach from where he is already standing. He pulls off a piece of it and further strips it apart like a piece of string cheese, producing a string-like portion that he uses to tie the comb onto the topbar. If held in place it should only take a few days for the bees to reattach the comb. This use of vines is the first of many lessons I would learn myself from the trainees.

Honey is easily harvested from these hives by slicing it off the topbars using a kitchen knife and letting it drop into a bucket. The honey is later squeezed from the comb. Though most of this group know basically how to operate these hives, I'm alarmed to see them about to harvest the uncapped honey every time they encounter a comb full of it. Nectar in flowers is 80-95% water, which is approximately opposite the proportions the bees want.

"What is the water content of honey?" a trainee asks me as I'm trying to explain this.

As I'm thinking "I don't know that obscure statistic" my mouth opens and rather to my surpise the answer of "14-17%" comes out.

Bees "ripen" nectar into honey by dehydrating it in the hive, while enzymes work some other magic as well. The reasons for this dehydration are twofold: (1) with a water

content higher than 17% it could ferment and it's not very useful for the bees to all get drunk; (2) the bees' interest in honey is as energy storage (consider that they don't put on fat -- the honey is their analogous energy reserve), and it's extremely space-inefficient to store it heavily diluted in water. As a beekeeper you don't want to harvest this "unripened" honey because it will be thin, overly liquidy, and worst of all likely to ferment (which, when unexpected, usually upsets the people you've sold it to, and can also cause containers to explode). It is fortunately easy to determine when the honey is "done" because the bees seal over the top of the cell when it is done, and thus "capped honey" is what beekeepers are looking to harvest.

Some of the less experienced trainees also are inclined to try to harvest "brood comb," which is the darker brown section of the comb in which bee larvae are developing under capped cells. Bee larvae are obviously composed of mainly proteins, and not honey, and harvesting them with the honey is to be strictly avoided. The addition of significant amounts of protein into honey can make it cloudy, and being as this same person is likely harvesting unripe honey so the water content is high enough to allow bacterial growth, the whole thing could rot with disgusting and/or dangerous results.

And this is partly why field visits are so critical on projects. I had already covered this stuff during "lecture," but I can see many of the trainees are itching to harvest what looks to them to be a full comb and only reluctantly under my admonishments do they put it back.

It is important to understand some socio-economic underpinnings for why they were inclined to do some things. Namely, I gather most of them live a bit far from where they have hives and none of them have a car. They are accustomed to infrequently visiting their hives and harvesting all they can when they're there. I know there are real challenges to them coming out too frequently and if they leave honey the bees might consume it before they get back (or human thieves take it -- a frequent complaint is that the nomadic Fulani herdsmen who still wander the area rob their hives) but it's my hope that by the end of the training and under the encouragement of some of the members who seem to have a strong aptitude for beekeeping, they'll all learn to strategically plan their visits to pair their socioeconomic realities with the best beekeeping practices.

After the initial few hives, I find my comments are often the same, and, moreover, because they have to be translated to the rest of the beekeepers, the one or two best trainees have more or less taken over the teaching. Realizing this, I begin to feel a bit redundant, like I'm losing control of the session, but then I reason that there is absolutely nothing wrong with this and content myself with only jumping in if there is something new or I sense the teaching might not be perfectly accurate, and far from looking at me like I'm redundant I'm sensing an increasing fond respectfulness from the trainees. They've begun to call me "*otunba*," a high traditional title.

Suddenly I hear a commotion. I look up to see trainees backing away from a hive and some are running towards it with sticks. It turns out on lifting the lid they discovered a lime green snake under the lid. A rhythmic whacking sound accompanies excited exclamations as they beat it to death.

"Is it venomous?" I ask

"They don't know" says Hattrick, and perhaps seeing the frown I was trying to hide elaborated that "it's better to be safe."

I'm rather concerned that this treatment of the snake isn't quite necessary, but their

safety in re potentially venomous snakes is not within my purview.

It was generally agreed that the field visit was very productive and henceforth every training day consisted of a morning session at the government building and an afternoon trip to a hive site

A warrior comes galloping up the trail from Osogbo. There are cuts on his muscular arms that look like they'll scar but he sits straight and proud in his saddle.

"What news??" people call to him as he enters the palisade gates, "were you victorious?" but he stares straight ahead inscrutably as he rides up the streets to the central square and Bashorun's house. There he dismounts and enters. A short time later the Bashorun emerges, looks around the crowd that has gathered, expressionlessly, and then breaks into a grin to announce

"They have won a great victory! The Fulani tide has been turned back!" and the crowd breaks into loud cheers.

A little later, however, when the Bashorun sees eso Elepo he takes him aside.

"The messenger reports that the war chiefs want you to leave, with the glory they have now won you cannot stand against them."

"You won't stand up for me? Remember when I alone stood up for you after the Ota War, when the Bashorun Lakanle and his war chiefs ordered that you would not be permitted to return?"

"Yes, yes, my friend, I remember. " Bashorun Oluyole says putting his hand on Elepo's shoulder, "listen, just temporarily go to Ipara until I can smooth things out here."

Elepo looks his friend in the eye and knows he'll never return but nods resignedly.

§

Day 7 - A Special Treat

February 19th, 2012 [Sunday] – "We've got a special treat for you!" Hattrick tells me excitedly in the car as we roll through the thronging traffic of the city. "We're going to make amala!"

"Oh cool, that sounds fun." I'm always down for an interesting cultural adventure.

"You've had beef amala, and goat amala, and chicken amala…" he's cheerfully counting off on his fingers

"Yes, that is true" I nod, wondering where he's going with this.

"So to make it extra special we're going to make FISH amala!" he exclaims.

"Fish amala?" I ask, trying not to sound terrified, "you, uh, can do that?"

"Of course!" he blithely answer.s. I look out the window apprehensively at the jumbled crowded city we're weaving through. I happen to loathe fish, though I hadn't mentioned it earlier since it didn't seem likely to come up much in this inland town. Sure I could tell him now but it's my inclination to persevere uncomplaining rather than make excuses.

We jolt across a pair of obviously disused railroad tracks, covered in weeds and trash.

"Are there trains here?" I ask Hattrick.

"There used to be but ten years ago they stopped functioning" he explains

"whenever they try to restart them, the truckers sabotage the tracks"

We pull into the walled and guarded parking enclosure attached to an apartment building and Hattrick leads me up to the apartment Yinka apparently shares with her sisters. It's cozy but not tiny. Hattrick, whom I'm beginning to gather is a nephew or cousin of Yinka's, dons an amusingly colorful flower pattern apron in the kitchen and proceeds to show me the ingredients. Pungent plump little mackerel are quickly diced. A plant, "jute mallow" I'm told, is also diced up and added to the sauce.

"And now we use the broom" Hattrick announces

"THE BROOM?" I ask in alarm.

He chuckles and brandishes a kitchen whisk made of the same bristles brooms are often made of. "We call this a broom."

"Ah, okay!" I laugh, a bit relieved.

Finally, yam flour is rolled up to make the amala dough balls.

As the time to sit and eat our creation grows nearer my stomach is tight and my mouth is dry. We sit around the little table in the dining room and I smile gamely and dig in. I'm trying not to let on that I loathe the meal but I fear it's becoming obvious that I'm making slow progress and drinking way more water than eating food. In a pinch I can eat a roasted salmon to be polite, and I hoped to pull off the same trick here, but mackerel is a very fishy fish, and the combination with the unfamiliar gelatinous texture of the amala is making my diaphragm involuntarily heave with every bite. After I come particularly close to losing my stomach contents, I finally resolve that discretion is the better part of valor and it would be more polite to claim to be full, however suspicious that may leave them, than to puke all over the table.

In the evening Hattrick, Whale and Hattrick's sister take me to a "Western restaurant" where we are able to order pizza. The meal ends with them having only picked at their pieces and not finished very much.

"I think you don't like pizza?" I joshingly jibe at Whale. He offers an embarrassed smile and says

"To tell you the truth I don't really like foreign food."

It makes me laugh to think of pizza as an exotic foreign food, but a hurt expression enters his eyes.

"Are you making jest of me?"

"No no no" I backpedal quickly trying to think how to smooth the offense, "I myself had never had amala before I came here. Can you imagine?"

He laughs and grants that that's pretty funny to him.

[dream sequence the British plot to foment a war between the Yoruba city-states? The problem is this is just speculation on my part with no direct evidence (my primary source Samuel Johnson appears to be a bit pro-british despite being Yoruban). the "16 Year War" begins.]

§

Day 10 - Waxing Eloquent

February 22nd, 2012 [Wednesday] – "Now back home I have a specially made wax-melter to melt wax and can order candle molds, but we'll have to improvise. I have this manual another development organization put together which describes how you can put beeswax in a sack and submerge it in boiling water to render the wax…." I explain the method described while my audience listens politely.

"Otunba, …." one of the trainees addresses me once I've finished. He is older, his goatee frayed in grey, deep creases etched in his cheeks where wrinkles form from smiling. He is speaking Yoruba of course so I have to await Dayo's translation

"He says otunba, we have a better way to do this, let us show you." I enthusiastically agree, and the group sets about getting the necessary equipment and setting up just outside our metal awning. Some cauldron-like pots are somehow immediately produced and a campfire of logs is soon burning. A cauldron full of water is set on some cinderblocks to be just above the fire and presently the water inside is at a boil. Chunks of wax are then tossed in, and it's all stirred with a stick as the wax slowly melts. Presently the whole thing is soupy with what looks like bean casings floating on the surface. One doesn't think of bees as making cocoons, but they do -- they're just never seen because they're embedded within the wax comb but they are separated out during the wax rendering process to become what's called "slumgum."

Once everything in the cauldron that's going to melt is melted, the contents are carefully poured through a mesh of mosquito netting into another large pot, which separates the slumgum and other debris. From this second pot it's carefully poured into bowls. Wax being lighter than water we just pour carefully off the top and stop when it appears we've poured off all the wax. Because the wax will naturally separate from water there's no real harm in accidentally pouring water in with the wax. We've coated the inside of the bowls with soap so if the wax cools and hardens in the bowl we'll be able to remove it. Some we allow to do this to make wax cakes useful for longterm storage or trading. Some of the wax we put into another pot to make a lotion out of. This is a very simple matter of combining the beeswax with shea butter and the pulpy insides of aloe vera leaves. Another thing we want to do is make candles, but we need a suitable mold.

The participants and I scrounge around for anything we think might work as a candle mold. I had high hopes for a piece of PVC pipe but once the candle had hardened within it it couldn't be cracked open without breaking the candle, and the pre-cracked pipe leaked too much. Two long fluorescent light tubes were filled and then shattered to make candles, which was effective though obviously not repeatable and wasteful of resources (though I assume they were already broken), but the two giant candles thus formed are enthusiastically dubbed the "otunba candles" by the class.

And then we had a true candle-making breakthrough. The papaya plant it turns out consists of a woody trunk a bit taller than a person (the ones I recall seeing anyway, though I read they can get up to 15 feet) from which green hollow branches emerge. These branches are about the width of a finger and can be cut to a length of about two finger lengths as desired for candles. Because the melted wax will leak out the bottom we firmly plant the bottoms of our molds in the sandy soil, and fill them with wax, with a wick of string suspended down the middle. Being plentiful, once we found it worked, we could have as many of these molds in use at a time as we could desire. Once the candle had cooled, the papaya stalk is easily peeled off the finished candle.

All this was more or less a fun novelty as candles don't sell well in Africa, people do

have electric lights and better things to spend their money on than candles, but everyone enjoyed the project anyway.

September 3rd, 1886 – "They're coming, they're coming!" the children eagerly call out as they run up the dirt road. Presently the traveling party emerges around the bend of the hill – two white men on horses accompanied by fifty Yoruba men with guns and packs.
"It's time to fire off a salute!" one of the ilari –the king's eunuch household staff– instructs the household guard who are leaning on their guns. They happily lift them up and fire a ragged volley into the air.
Down the road the two white men dive off their horses and throw their entourage into a turmoil of shouting. Presently there is the gleaming of many pieces of metal and it becomes apparent the soldiers are fixing bayonets. The two white men remount and continue their advance but now with their troops surrounding them with bayonets menaced outward.

"Is this what they normally do?" an ilari asks the another.

"I.. don't know?"

The crowd nervously awaits the approach, and a sigh of relief quietly goes around when the British representative cheerily greets the crowd.

The next day all the royal party prepares to formally meet the British representatives. The king sits on his throne in the receiving portico of the royal palace, with his chief attendants arrayed around him in their regalia. The two British representatives approach in their red uniforms, buttons gleaming, white pith helmets on their heads. The lead representative is striding purposefully towards the king with his hand thrust out. Three big ilaris rushed out to block the white man's progress, waving their hands and exclaiming "oyinbo mase mase!!" – white man don't, don't.

Samuel Johnston, a yoruba man fluent in English who has been helping arrange diplomatic issues between the Yoruba and English runs anxiously up to the white man,

"Sir, sir what are you doing?"

"Why, I'm going to shake his hand dear chap what else would I do?"

"You can't shake the Alaafin's hand, he is the high king of the Yoruba people!"

"I am the representative of the Governor in Lagos, who is the representative of the Queen of England, I'm clearly superior to any African monarch"

Mr Johnston grits his teeth and tries to compose himself diplomatically, he could be killed himself if the English representative commits too grave a faux pas.

"Sir, sir, be that as it may, but it would be a gross breach of etiquette at this time. Please take this seat prepared for you"

The representative, in fact only an assistant secretary dispatched by the secretary of the British Lagos colony, looked around haughtily. He was eager to feel extremely important, but with his way blocked there'd be no un-awkward way to proceed with his original plan so he smiled and proceeded to the indicated chair as if it was his intention all along.[1]

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Day 12 - Closing Ceremonies

[1] As described by Samuel Johnston
https://archive.org/details/historyofyorubas00john/page/542/mode/2up

February 24th, 2012 [Friday] – I sit at the dais table in flowing robes, with the high officials who have come for the closing ceremony. My robes, gifted to me just this morning, are a thick blue cloth with intricate designs sown in with a shinier blue thread. On my head I wear a local traditional *fila* hat, whose flat top slouches diagonally to one side. I wonder why they would wear such a thick garment in such a hot climate – *the sacrifices one makes to look elegant* I suppose. During the opening ceremonies nearly two weeks earlier I was a nobody surrounded by strangers, barely acknowledged personally by the officials taking credit for organizing the training – now I look out at all the smiling familiar faces in the audience as the state minister of agriculture makes a speech, followed by the baal agbe (king's traditional chief of farmers), and local government chairman, and then one by one, the participants have their names called out and come up to receive a signed certificate and shake hands with those of us up at the dais.

I had been so anxious at the start that the project wouldn't go well, to see all the participants and organizing officials so happy and full of smiles now is a great relief to me.

Dr Bello, one of the primary organizers, asks me to come stand in the front of the room again and because I'm not quite sure why. I'm not prone to stage fright but I'm the center of attention of well over a hundred people and have no idea what's going on, so I do feel a bit anxious. About half a dozen dignified elderly men and women in flowing robes are also coming up and gathering around me.

Once the elders are gathered around me, Dr Bello explains that this is the local counsel of traditional elders and they are going to bestow the title of "chief" on me. A sprig of neem leaves is placed under the traditional hat on my head, and the elders begin chanting. In my memory there were swirls of smoke around me, I don't know if incense was being burned, it was from the otunba candles which had been lit, or my brain was just overloading.

"We are bestowing upon you the title of '*Soyindaro*'" Dr Bello announces with a grin, "it means 'maker of honey into wealth,'" a necklace of large orange clay beads is placed over my head and matching bracelet placed on my wrist. "And we are bestowing upon you the Yoruba name of '*Oyoyemi Omawale*,' which means 'our son has returned.'" Everyone applauds. I grin and shake Dr Bello's hand, and thank everyone who comes near me, it's all a bit overwhelming.

Walking back to the waiting landcruiser after the rounds of photos and handshakes have finally ended, Dr Bello tells me he has one more gift. He opens the trunk of his own car and brings out a large bag of yam flour which must weigh thirty pounds.

"So you can make amala at home!" I am immediately doubtful it will be practical to transport this large bag home, but do my best to gratefully thank him. The daily flight out of Ibadan is sold out, so I'm driven four hours south on the smooth and straight highway through the patchwork of croplands to Lagos to fly to Abuja from there.

"Do you have a gift for me?" the gray-haired airport employee says laughingly with a sly wink as I approach the outer doors to enter. I laugh as if he had just made an amusing joke, and try to sidestep him.

He stands to block my path and says just a little more forcibly "come on surely you have a present for me?"

I force a smile and insincerely apologize that I do not. In the back of my mind is an

idea that I could immediately unload the yam flour as a "gift" to this guy, but that idea takes a back seat to my overriding stubborn refusal to give in to bribery or extortion. *How am I going to break this impasse?* I look back at the parking lot for my driver, but we'd parked a few rows back and I can't see him. No one else is around at the moment. A bead of sweat rolls down my forehead as the man and I stare at each other. I am sure he has no right to demand a payment from me but he can certainly bar my entrance. I'm just thinking I'm going to have to rush across the parking lot to grab my driver before he leaves when the door man notices my orange beads.

"Are you a chief?"

"Yes"

"Where?"

I give him the details and he switches to respectful tones as he invites me to enter the terminal.

"What's in the bag?" a man standing swaggeringly in a military uniform in an airport corridor demands.

"Uh, my luggage?" I venture.

"I need to inspect it, open it up." This isn't even an official security checkpoint, but I'd made the mistake of looking uncertain about what direction to go and this guard saw his opportunity to lord it over an *oyinbo*.

"Right here?" I don't terribly want to unpack my luggage in the middle of a busy airport corridor.

"Yes" he snaps peremptorily, but, apparently noticing my necklace, follows it with "wait, are you a chief?"

"Yes"

"Where?"

I explain, and he welcomes me to immediately continue my journey, pointing the direction I need to go.

The flight, like a bus, waits an hour until enough tickets are sold before taking off.

Amid swirls of smoke, the elders lower a beaded necklace around Ogundepo's neck. "We bestow upon you the title of Seriki" The young man grins, his new title makes him leader of the young warriors of the town. A bunch of leaves stick out from the abeta aja *hat sitting rakishly on his head, with its two pointy upright flaps like dog's ears.*

"It's not fair!" he complains later while walking with his friend Mosanya, it has always been that we could go to war after the new appointments are made so we warriors can prove ourselves. Now the English won't allow us to have wars, how am I ever to prove myself?"

Mosanya nods, unperturbed, as they walk along the Ibadan street. Mosanya, in his fila *hat that slouches to the side, always seems calm and composed. "Did you hear someone insulted Captain Bower, you know, the English 'resident,' the other day, and now he wants to arrest the Ibalogun?"*

"It wasn't even an insult, someone shook their fist at him and the silly man didn't know that is a salute among our people!" Ogundepo's exclaimed, and continued: "What passes for a war any more? Someone fired their gun at Oyo the other day and they called it a bombardment. "

"Meanwhile in Ijesa Ogedemgbe's war boys continue to raid Benin. Captain Bower

wrote warnings to Ogedemgbe twice but he takes the warnings as a great joke." Mosanya laughed.

And so they walked along ruing their lack of opportunity to win glory in war, until their friend Dada Ojo came running. "Did you hear?"

"Hear what?" asked Ogundepo, curious but aware Dada Ojo could sometimes be a bit overly serious.

"Captain Bower is organizing two battalions of men to go north and fight the Fulani Jihad in the north!"

Ogedemgbe slowly breaks into a broad grin.[2]

Soon Ogundepo, Mosanya and Dada Ojo find themselves far beyond the borders of the Yoruba kingdom, wearing British khaki and pith helmets, shouldering modern martini rifles. They gazed up in awe at the towering elephant-like rock above them, as the British commander negotiates with the local leader in his cake-like hat. The marvels to be seen!

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Days 13-14 - Back in Abuja

February 25th, 2012 [Saturday] – "Hi Thomas, how's it going?" I ask the hotel doorman as I return from having walked to some nearby shops..

"Very well sir how are you?" he beams as he opens the door. I greet the receptionist at the desk and then I see Doug coming down the stairs.

"Hey Doug!" we greet each other and sit down in some chairs in the lobby to catch up. Despite some major mishaps his project has gone well. The woman hit by the car had recovered and Blessing had been released.

After we've thoroughly caught up, Doug remarks "woo-wee that girl over there is pretty, have you met her yet?" indicating a very elegantly dressed gorgeous young lady sitting behind a table in the back corner of the lobby area, some kind of promotional posters are all around her. She had been there when we had first come through here two weeks ago as well.

"No, I haven't actually."

"Well, go talk to her!"

"I, uh… okay" I sigh. I don't make excuses to avoid a challenge. It turns out Princess Nwaji is an actual princess, her grandfather is a king somewhere near Port Harcourt in the Igbo region of Nigeria in the south. She is presently engaged in selling luxury real estate in Dubai. *Nigeria is a place where gorgeous princesses sell luxury real estate in Dubai in hotel lobbies* I think to myself in wonder. I've heard it said that some people in Nigeria fly to France for lunch.

Walking up the stairs to my room I find Anthony, the same guard who had been there when I arrived two weeks ago, standing in the stair landing, and we get to talking. He's clearly bored out of his mind, so I linger and talk to him for forty minutes. His job is to stand there in the stair landing all night, eight hours, and isn't allowed to sit down. As we talk it comes out that he lives near the famous Zuma Rock just outside of town, and he

[2] These are the actual items of local gossip in Ibadan 1896 according to https://archive.org/details/historyofyorubas00john/page/644/mode/2up

invites me to accompany him there in the morning. My schedule is open -- the organization scheduled three days in the capital for me to write the report that took me an hour-- so I take Anthony up on his offer.

"Meet me here at 7" he tells me.

In the morning I get dressed and step out of my room at 7:00 and there he is at the landing, exactly as I left him as if he's been frozen in time since then.

He would normally take a bus home but we call a taxi. A short drive out of the city and the massive rock looms before us, nearly a thousand feet tall with sheer barren grey sides and a flat top, like an enormous recumbent elephant. Near its base Anthony points out a large hotel that he tells me was never used after being constructed due to the persistent belief it is haunted by the spirits of Zuma rock.

We get out of the taxi near the base of the rock and walk up to touch it. Nearby some kids are tossing rocks at a mango tree to knock out mangos, and a family appears to be having a picnic nearby. They wave us over and offer us some fresh mangoes.

We walk a short distance to Anthony's village and he takes me to a man who makes palm wine because I had expressed an interest in it and hadn't heretofore been able to find any. The palm wine is tapped from the crown of a palm tree by driving a small pipe in and collecting the sap that flows out as a clear but slightly milky liquid. It tasted strong but not too bad. Since Anthony hadn't asked me for anything, I buy him a bottle of palm wine from the tapper. Then, feeling like that's kind of a lame gift, I have an idea.

"Hey, Anthony, do you want a twenty kilo bag of yam flour?"

"Sure?"

"Okay I have one. I'll give it to you tomorrow."

[move the part of the previous dream sequence where they're at Zuma rock to here?]

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Days 15 - Last Day

February 27th, 2012 - "And they made Kris a chief!" Doug is telling Dr Walter, an irrigation specialist who just arrived to start his own project.

"Oh they made me a chief too, in Ghana I think" he chuckles dismissively. Later, as we're both going to our rooms, which are on the same floor, we pass Anthony on the landing, like most guests, Dr Walter is on course to take negligible notice of him as he goes by.

"And this is Anthony," I say, indicating my friend. Dr Walter looks at me as if to say "yes, so?" as if I had just pointed out a mundane piece of furniture.

Later that day I watch the ground drop away outside the airplane window, and the surrounding savanna landscape and elephant-like batholiths shrink away below. It's a bittersweet departure – I feel pleased that after all my anxiety the project seemed to be a success, but will I ever be back here, or is this landscape disappearing from my life forever, to become a distant memory? Will I have more opportunities like this or after this will it be back to being a beekeeper attached to a bee removal company in my hometown for the rest of my life? And though everyone seemed pleased with the project, would it have a

long-term benefit or would the local beekeepers similarly grow to vaguely remember as an obscure anecdote the time an American beekeeper came and entertained them for two weeks?

§§

Nigeria Epilogue – Plaza of the Amsterdamned

Ah, back in Amsterdam, this time with an 18 hour layover with which to see some of the city. I step out into the frigid air of Schiphol Plaza just outside the airport. Everything is ultra modern, big buildings of steel girders and glass. Huge block letters stand at one side of the square spelling out "**I am**sterdam," with the "I am" in red and the rest in white. I go to buy a coffee – €2.80 – That's $3.76 in dollars!! For plain coffee! Clearly I'm not in Africa any more.

I go to a tourist information kiosk, buy a city guide, and ask how to get to my hotel. Just take the 192 bus, right, sounds easy. I walk down the street to the bus stop.

After half an hour and no sign of the bus I note that "192" is not listed on the pending arrivals for the next half hour either. I go back and inquire at a train information kiosk, they send me to the train ticket sales window, they tell me I should buy a 24 hour pass back at the first tourist information kiosk I'd first gone to. I go there and she tells me I should go to an automated ticket vending machine.

Even though the machine has an English mode, there's no explanation between "deluxe," "standard" "full fare" and other cryptic synonyms, and I don't know how any of the listed destinations relate to where I want to go. I do my best punching buttons and the machine wants me to put in $65 for the selected ticket. I want to scream. I walk away from the machine without buying anything.

I go back to the bus stop to see if 192 is coming yet – it is still not listed.

I sit on a bench with my head in my hands for a few minutes. Nearly two hours have passed since I arrived in Amsterdam and I haven't succeeded in leaving the immediate vicinity of the airport. *I'll never get out of this Schiphol!* The light is fading and temperature dropping. If this was Africa I'd have immediately hailed a taxi and it wouldn't have cost terribly much, but now I'm in the cold, impersonal, and overly complicated "West." After a few minutes of sitting with my head in my hands, spurred on by the increasingly uncomfortable cold, I google on my phone and it seems to indicate I should take a "sprinter" train.

I return to the train information kiosk where they again redirect me to the train ticket counter, where I get a ticket. I go down into the station. No train is labeled as "sprinter" nor is it listed on the departure displays. I watch a few trains go by hoping for clues but nothing becomes clearer. I return to the train information kiosk upstairs and the woman says "Train number two in two minutes!"

"Which track?" I inquire

"Train number two in two minutes! Hurry!"

Back down below I see a train with "2" 'emblazoned on the side and jump on hoping for the best.

It turns out all such trains, for, I assume, diabolical reasons, have "2" emblazoned on the side.

(NEXT: Inter-session 1)