

# **THE TRANSKEI RUN**

and the Times of High Strangeness

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# 1

Check it. Saturday morning. Hung-over as fuck. The beer fear squirms through my belly with alien tendrils and I know with absolute certainty that I have done something unforgivable.

Something apocalyptic.

Again.

I run a diagnostic. My head is pounding. There are cuts on my knuckles. The bed next to me is, thankfully, empty. Apparently Jeremy “Spikes” Vorster (yours truly) was too far gone last night to think about bringing a woman home. A brief, horrifying flashback reminds me why, simultaneously filling me with gratitude and shaking me to my core: overweight women with bad skin, their skimpy tops losing the battle to contain bulging breasts.

Gag reflex. Breathe.

This is not the sort of town you want to end up in late on a Friday night when the beer has been replaced with brandy, when the good boys and girls are in bed and the night-scum are running rampant in the streets. This is not the sort of town where you want to draw attention by being sober if you *are* caught being out late on a Friday evening. They can smell sobriety on you. To them it smells like meat.

This is not the sort of town you want to live in. It's not the sort of town where you want to raise your kids or send them to school. Trust me.

This is not the sort of town where you want to spend your retirement. This is the sort of place where people drink

and smoke themselves to death from an early age. Like, from their mid-teens.

This is the sort of town that breeds narrow-minded hicks. And if you aren't a narrow-minded hick, you're a frustrated reprobate. Like my friend Zachary Post and me.

This is East London, South Africa, aka Buffalo City, aka Slummies. Not to be confused with East London, England.

In the vengeful morning light outside my bedroom window, I see my scooter parked at a somewhat arrogant angle. It sits crossways in the driveway as if to say, "I'm a Vuka, a full 110cc's of shut your face! What are you going to do about it?"

It seems unscathed. I don't know how I managed to ride it home last night. One day my luck will catch up with me. I do know this.

Another flashback: urinals filled with vile red puke, broken glass everywhere. I shudder and seek solace under my musty pillow.

Submerged in dread and self-loathing, I hear a bakkie pulling into the driveway, gearbox rattling, exhaust chunking. A muffled Nirvana tune is being cranked out from an ancient CD player.

Zach.

I moan into my pillow, consider feigning death until he leaves. But this would be underestimating the man's persistence. I pop my head out of the window to make sure he stops short of knocking over the Vuka, pull on a pair of jeans that reek of second-hand cigarette smoke and last night's sweat and spillage.

"Spikes!" Zach calls from outside my window.

“Give me a second,” I grumble, pushing through a thick haze to get to the front door. The floor seems unsteady beneath my feet, the walls not quite as straight as they should be. I make a mental note to have that fixed, then realise I am still drunk. This is disconcerting. I will have to stop this nonsense soon or I’ll become one of the undead that inhabit these parts. Working... Drinking... Dying.

“Fucken epic night, my good man!” says Zach as I open the door. He goes for a high five. I squint at him through one eye against the vicious daylight. “Don’t leave a buddy hanging, man!”

Some stupid American loyalty code has made it unforgivable to “leave a bro hanging”, so I don’t.

“I did terrible things last night, Zach.” He follows me through to my tiny, crummy kitchen where I fumble with appliances, cupboards, crockery in an automatic quest for caffeine.

“No way! You did awesome things last night, Spikes!” His eyes lock mine, full of pseudo-sincerity. “You are my new personal hero!”

If Zach approves of my actions, I can rest assured I acted like a real bastard to everybody within ice-block throwing distance.

Zach knows how to make himself at home just about anywhere, it’s one of his special talents; he goes straight to the fridge. He takes a jar of mayonnaise, unscrews the cap, takes a sniff, decides against it and pulls out the peanut butter instead. The kettle stops boiling. The smell of instant coffee seizes my attention, and when I look up again, Zach has peanut butter covering three of his fingers and is jamming the whole mess into his mouth.

Gag. Inhale, slowly.

“The way you hit that scumbag – no hesitation – you were like Chuck Fucken Norris, man! I’m surprised the pool cue didn’t break on his face!” he says, jamming the peanut butter into his backpack, on top of a loaf of bread liberated from my bread box.

He looks up, catching my horrified expression. “You don’t remember, do you?”

My insides are groaning and my scalp is beginning to prickle with dread.

“What did I do?” I ask.

He laughs. “You’ll find out soon enough...when the cops rock up to serve you with a GBH.”

“That’s not funny. Where are you taking my bread? I’m going to need that.”

“You’ll have to come with me if you ever want to see your bread again!”

“No way, bru, I’m in no condition to be going anywhere.”

“But I must regale you with our tales of adventure and intrigue!”

“Regale me here, in the comfort of my home. I need to recover from being the world’s biggest doos last night.”

“There’ll be plenty of time for recovery in the car. Grab a shirt and let’s go, we’re already late and we still need beer and petrol.”

“Where are we going?” I ask, feeling myself giving in to Zach’s powers of persuasion.

“Coffee Bay, my friend.”

“Transkei? Are you bloody mad? Six hours in a car with a hangover? Sounds like a shit idea, bru.”

“Sounds like a great idea!” He grins, slaps me on the shoulder, grabs me a T-shirt from my laundry pile and leads me like a man being led to certain death by cruel and unusual means. If I’m honest with you, I’m feeling nervous about what he’s said about the cops rocking up to serve me with an assault charge. This is a very real possibility. It might just be a good idea to get out of town for the weekend.

One thing you need to know about Zachary Post is that he can lead an old lady to the edge of a cliff, persuade her to jump and have her thank him the whole way down. Her last thought would be something like: Goodness, what a charming young man. I wish my grandson, William, was a bit more like that. Lovely boy, that Zachary Post, absolutely delight –

Splat!

And then, beaming with satisfaction, Zach would look over the edge and crack open a beer.

He’s just that kind of guy.

## CHAPTER 2 →

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Taljaard is a South African writer whose stories are peppered with mischief, anarchy and violence. He lives in Cape Town and works in online media. His hobbies include soaking his sense organs in the psychedelic weirdness of the internet.

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