

THE B TEAM

by Mike Resnick

It had not been a good year for the Mau Mau.

The British had brought in their army, and what had seemed like a battle against a handful of white colonists had become something infinitely bigger. Thousands of insurgents were held captive in camps that lined Langata Road. Thousands more had been shipped to the Northern Frontier District and incarcerated there

in the burning heat of the desert. The bulk of those who remained were spread throughout the Aberdare Mountain range, where the British made three daily bombing runs in their planes, killing Kikuyu freedom fighters, Kikuyu loyalists, elephants, rhinos, and buffalos with equal facility.

It was time, declared Deedan Kimathi, the Supreme Commander of the Mau Mau, to take the gloves off.

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Peter Njoro, the officer in command of one of the western slopes, made his way down the twisting path, alert to his surroundings. Twice this morning he'd been charged by fear-crazed rhinos. Another time a bongo had stepped on a land mine not twenty yards from him. He could hear gunfire to the north, and he knew

that the colonials had recently brought his blood enemies, the Maasai and the Samburu, to the Aberdares to help hunt his army down in the thick forest.

He shook his head. He should be back with his men, fighting the enemy, rather than proceeding on this fool's mission. But Kimathi had issued the order, and it had fallen on his broad shoulders to carry it out.

He stepped over a fallen tree, waded across a narrow stream, jumped with surprise as a colobus monkey screeched overhead, and peered ahead. He must be getting close to his goal, he knew, but visibility was extremely limited, especially in the lower sections of the mountain, where the British didn't drop any bombs for fear of hitting their own commando units.

Finally he broke into a clearing, and saw a row of caves ahead of him. Three old women sat around a fire, and a naked little boy, no more than four years old, was scratching designs in the dirt with a stick. The women looked at him as he approached them, but made no move to leave.

"I am looking for Matenjwa," said Peter. "I was told I could find him here."

One of the women nodded and pointed to the farthest cave.

"Asante sana," said Peter, walking over to the cave and standing in the entryway. He waited until his eyes adjusted to the darkness, then took two more steps forward and stopped before the old man who sat cross-legged on a blanket, mindless of the snakes that slithered across the moist floor of the cave.

"You are Matenjwa?"

The old man nodded. "I am Matenjwa."

"I am Peter Njoro," said Peter. "I come with an order from Deedan Kimathi himself."

"I told Deedan Kimathi's other messengers that my magic is not strong enough to kill all the soldiers," said Matenjwa. "I tell you the same thing, Peter Njoro."

"I am not the first?" asked Peter.

"No," responded Matenjwa. "The first messenger was a man named Kanoti. His tongue was cut out."

"How could he possibly have told you what Deedan Kimathi wanted?"

"His tongue was cut out after he told General Kimathi that my magic could not defeat the British soldiers," replied Matenjwa.

"Still, he was more fortunate than Sibanja, the second messenger. I believe Kimathi killed him and ate his heart." He smiled at Peter. "You are the third. I do not envy you, Peter Njoro; I have the very distinct impression that your General does not like to be given unhappy news."

Peter swallowed hard. "He ate Sibanja's heart, you say?"

"So I have been told."

"Maybe it was just a rumor," said Peter hopefully.

Matenjwa shrugged. "Maybe."

"I believe it, though," said Peter.

"So do I," agreed Matenjwa.

"I can't just go back up the mountain and tell him that you can't defeat the British."

"But it is the truth."

"What purpose would be served by it?" said Peter. "He'd just kill me and send someone else."

"Very likely," said Matenjwa. "He does seem to be a creature of habit."

"But I can't desert, either. Sooner or later one of his men would find me and kill me."

Matenjwa nodded thoughtfully. "That is true. General Kimathi has even less use for deserters than for the bearers of bad tidings."

"Then what am I to do?" demanded Peter.

Matenjwa shrugged. "I have no idea."

Peter turned on the old man. "You're a witch doctor! Why can't you destroy the British?"

"There are limits even to what a mundumugu can do," answered Matenjwa. "To summon the proper spirits, I would have to sacrifice more cattle and goats than there are on the entire mountain."

"Well, can't you do something?" persisted Peter. "Bring down a terrible disease on them, or something like that?"

"Certainly I could," answered Matenjwa. "But I would have to appeal to Sagbata, the god of smallpox."

"Then why haven't you done it?"

"The British are all vaccinated. The only people who would contract the disease would be ourselves."

"Think!" said Peter desperately. "If you can't kill them, what can you do?"

"I'm very good at circumcision rituals," said Matenjwa atlast. "But of course there's no magic involved, and you would have to bring them to me one by one. Once they saw my instruments, a few of them might come over to your side."

"You're not being much help," muttered Peter.

"I told you I wouldn't be."

"Look!" snapped Peter. "I'm not going back up the mountain until we've exhausted every possibility."

"They are all exhausted."

"That's easy for you to say. You don't have to tell that to General Kimathi."

"Some of us are warriors and some of us are mundumugus," said Matenjwa with a shrug.

"You don't get off that easily, old man," said Peter, pulling out his panga and holding it to Matenjwa's throat. "The rules of the game have just changed. Both of our lives depend on your getting rid of the British, do you understand?"

"I cannot summon the warrior gods without sacrificing at least two thousand cattle," said Matenjwa, pulling back his head slightly as the edge of the blade pressed into his neck.

"Well, summon somebody who can make them go away, or we're both dead men," said Peter.

Matenjwa uttered a deep sigh. "I will do what I can."

"Good."

"Fetch me that pouch," he said, indicating a leather pouch that was lying on the floor at the far end of the cave. Peter retrieved it and brought it to the old witch doctor. Matenjwa pulled two dead gecko lizards out of it and placed them on the floor in front of him. Then he reached into the pouch again, removed a small handful of bones, and, muttering a series of chants, cast them three times on the floor. Then he sat motionless for a moment, his eyes tightly shut.

"That's it?" demanded Peter.

"No," said Matenjwa, reaching out and grabbing one of the cave's resident snakes. "Now I must treat each lizardskin with one drop of the blood from a living reptile. Your panga, please?"

Peter handed over his panga.

"You understand," said Matenjwa, "that the snake's blood is a substitute for the blood of two healthy oxen."

"How much difference does it make?" asked Peter.

Matenjwa shrugged. "I don't know. I've never tried it before." He paused and looked up at Peter.

"You're sure you want to continue?"

Peter nodded, and the old man gently pierced the skin of the writhing reptile, then gently squeezed out a single drop of blood over each dead lizard.

"It didn't work," said Peter after a moment.

"I am sorry," said Matenjwa. "I guess it really does require the blood of two healthy--"

He was interrupted by a sudden puff of smoke and a sudden rush of air, and suddenly there was a tall, portly, bearded white man standing before them. He wore a blue pinstriped suit with a white carnation in its lapel. Atop his head was a bowler hat, hanging on one wrist was an umbrella, and tucked beneath his arm was a thin, well-worn leather briefcase.

"Good day, gentlemen," he said in exquisite English. "I'm so glad you've invited me here. Have you ever wanted to leave your dark, damp domicile" -- he gestured around him at the cave with an expression of distaste -- "and see the World? If you act promptly, a first-class passage to Bermuda aboard one of Britain's finest luxury liners can be yours at an unbelievable discount in price.

Think of it, gentlemen! Five-star French cooking, three -- count them: three -- nightclubs, a casino, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, and a telephone in every stateroom!"

He paused and stared at them expectantly. "Who is this man?" asked Peter, frowning.

Matenjwa shrugged. "I have no idea."

The man stared at them a moment longer, then snapped his fingers. Instantly his clothing vanished, to be replaced by a ragged loincloth. He still retained his bowler, umbrella, and briefcase.

"I beg your pardon," he said in Swahili. "I seem to have been misinformed. I thought I was to be dealing with a party of British gentlemen."

"Who are you?" demanded Peter.

"Don't you know?" asked the portly man, looking more than a little ridiculous in his new outfit. "I mean, after all, you are the ones who summoned me."

"He summoned you," said Peter, indicating Matenjwa. "I'm just an onlooker."

"Oh. Well, I'm Hermes, son of Zeus."

"And I sent for you?" asked Matenjwa.

"I was told that you have a party of Britons who wish to visit distant lands. Is that correct?"

"In a way," said Peter.

"Well," said Hermes expansively, "if anyone can expedite their journey, it's me. I'm the god of travel."

"You are?"

Hermes nodded. "I'm also the god of eloquence, as you have doubtless noted, and of trade."

"Of trade?" asked Peter.

"Absolutely. I'll swap you my umbrella for your panga."

"I think not," said Peter.

Hermes shrugged. "Well, then, how about two Mickey Mantles for a Willie Mays?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"A _Batman #9_ for a _Captain Marvel #6_? A Lincoln Memorial commemorative for a set of Equidorian Roosevelts? Or a complete set of Jane Austen, bound in leather, for -- get this now! -- an illustrated _Fanny Hill_!"

"Perhaps we had better stick with travel," suggested Matenjwa.

"Certainly," said Hermes, opening up his briefcase, which was filled with travel brochures. "Where did you wish to go -- Ocho Rios, Fiji, Samarkand? They say that Duluth, Minnesota is exceptionally nice this time of the year."

"We do not wish to go anywhere," said Matenjwa.

Hermes frowned. "There must be some misunderstanding. I was distinctly told that I was to help arrange passage for a large number of Britons."

"You are."

"Ah!" said Hermes with a huge smile. "Now I understand! You are simply their Nubian manservants." He snapped his fingers, and suddenly his loincloth was replaced by his original pinstriped suit, although this time the carnation was red.

"Now, gentlemen," he continued, "if you would just point the way to your employers?"

"Well, they're not exactly our employers," said Peter.

"Oh?"

"They're our enemies."

"Then what in the world did you want a travel agent for?" asked Hermes. "You need a god of warfare."

"But you said you could make them all go away."

"I said I could expedite their journeys," said Hermes.

"There's a difference." He held up his briefcase. "I have here all the latest timetables, group rates, brochures, even passport forms. But I can't _make_ them leave. I can just help them book passage." He paused. "Are you sure you wouldn't like to visit Buenos Aires? Not only can I secure rooms with an ocean view, but you will miss the war entirely."

"No," said Peter. "We must drive the British from our mountain."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" replied Hermes enthusiastically. "I have access to Oldsmobiles, Cadillacs, Chryslers, Volkswagens...I even have a few Studebakers left. Though from the terrain, I'd say that you'll need 4-wheel-drive. I can give you a rate on, shall we say, 30 Land Rovers?"

"You don't understand..." began Matenjwa.

"He understands perfectly," interrupted Peter. He turned to Hermes. "Of course, you'll have to negotiate a price directly with the prospective passengers."

"Certainly," said Hermes. "Just point me in the right direction. Negotiating is one of my strong points." He paused.

"Besides, there's nothing in my cash conversion tables on cows and goats. I really would much prefer British pounds."

Peter escorted Hermes to the edge of the cave. "Just follow that winding path down the mountain," he said, "and I guarantee you'll come to the British."

"Damned white of you," said Hermes. "And now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me, I'll be bidding you a fond _adieu_ and be going about my business."

He tucked the briefcase under his arm, and, humming happily to himself, the god of travel started wandering down the mountain.

#

Colonel William Smythe-Roberts sat behind his desk, drumming his fingers on the plain wooden surface.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Well, sir," said Sergeant Michael Wilcox uneasily, shifting his weight from one foot to another, "it...ah...it appears that... well, it seems..."

"Spit it out, man!" snapped Smythe-Roberts. "27 of our men have deserted in the past two days. I want to know why!"

"This is most awkward, sir," responded Wilcox. "You know that old witch doctor who lives up in the hills? Matenjwa, his name is?"

"Yes," answered Smythe-Roberts. "Are you trying to tell me that _he_ is responsible for this?"

"Well, indirectly, sir."

"You're trying to tell me indirectly?"

"No. I mean that he's indirectly responsible, sir."

"Explain."

"Well, sir, it appears that...well, that he's conjured up a god to help the Mau Mau."

Colonel Smythe-Roberts looked at his sergeant with compassion. "Poor chap," he said at last. "You've been out in the vertical rays of the sun too long. What did I tell you about always wearing your pith helmet?"

"I've _been_ wearing it," insisted Wilcox. "I tell you, sir, the old man has managed to summon a god."

"Of course he has," said Smythe-Roberts in a soothing tone.

"I swear to it, sir!"

"What does this god look like?"

"From what I hear, just like you and me, sir."

"Does he breathe smoke and belch fire? Rend the earth asunder? Call forth the heavenly host to aid his cause?"

"No, sir."

"What _does_ he do?" asked Smythe-Roberts.

"He...ah...he sells holidays, sir."

"You mean like Christmas and Bank Day?"

"No. He sells trips, sir. Excursions." Wilcox paused. "Some of them are really quite luxurious. There was one to New Zealand that--"

"That's _all_ he does?" interrupted Smythe-Roberts.

"Well, no. He also trades French postcards for guns."

"I beg your pardon?"

"French postcards, sir. You know. The kind that--"

"I am well aware of what a French postcard looks like, Sergeant."

"Well, then...uh...I guess that's it, sir."

"And based on this, you have concluded that he is a god?"

"Well, not entirely based on this, sir."

"What other evidence have you?"

"He told everyone he was, sir."

Patience, Smythe-Roberts told himself. _The poor blighter has cracked from the heat. Somebody had to be the first. Pity it had to be Wilcox, but there you have it. I suppose the best thing to do is to humor him until we can get him sedated and shipped back to Nairobi._ But _how_ did one humor a man in this condition?

Well, he believed that a god was walking amongst his fellows. That was obviously the starting point.

"Thank you for your report, Sergeant," said Smythe-Roberts.

"Are we going to do something about...well, you know?" asked Wilcox.

"Absolutely," said Smythe-Roberts. "_They've_ got a god. _We_ should have a god."

"Sir?"

"That's your assignment, Sergeant," said Smythe-Roberts.

Let's see. The medical officer ought to be back by sunset. "I'm putting you in charge of it. Secure a god for us by 1600 hours."

"But, sir..."

"No, don't thank me, son. You're just the man for the job."

"But--"

"Dismissed."

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"Corporal!" said Wilcox. "I need a witch doctor."

"A witch doctor, sir?"

"On the double."

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"Private!"

"Yes, Corporal?"

"Sergeant Wilcox has requested a witch doctor."

"Bully for him, sir." The private shook his head. "Vertical rays of the sun."

"Get him one."

"Where the hell does the corporal suggest I look, sir?"

"I don't know. We've got all these Maasai and Samburu fighting on our side. Ask one of them."

"You're kidding, right, sir?"

"Am I smiling, private? Now _move_! On the double!"

#

The tall, lean Maasai stood in the doorway to Wilcox's tent.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wilcox, getting to his feet. "Thank goodness you speak English! Please come in."

The Maasai entered the tent.

"You seem a little young to be a witch doctor," commented Wilcox.

"I'm not."

"Then why are you here?"

"We don't have any _laibons_ -- that's witch doctors to you -- in our unit, so they thought they'd send someone who could at least speak your language and find out why you wanted one."

"I need to conjure up a god," said Wilcox, feeling distinctly foolish.

"Well, I suppose it can be done," replied the Maasai.

"Good. What's your name?"

"Olepesai."

"All right, Olepesai -- how do we go about it?"

"About what?"

"Conjuring a god."

"I never said I could do it," replied Olepesai. "I just said that it could be done."

"Haven't you ever watched any ceremonies?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Good. We'll just have to do it without a laibon."

"It's been a long time," said Olepesai. "I probably couldn't remember all the words, or the right chants, or..."

"We have no time to worry about that," said Wilcox. "My colonel demands a god by 1600 hours. That's four this afternoon."

He checked his wristwatch. "We've only got about ninety minutes. What will you need?"

"A laibon."

"Besides that."

"Well," said Olepesai, rubbing his chin, "the last time I saw such a ceremony, I think there was a fire, and the laibon sang the Chant of the Gods, and then he sacrificed three mice and a lizard."

"And that's it?"

"If I remember correctly," said Olepesai.

"This will be easier than I thought," said Wilcox. He stuck his head out of the tent. "Corporal, get me three mice and a lizard, and bring them back in a small box or a cage."

"What if it doesn't work?" asked the Maasai when Wilcox turned to face him.

"Then we've done our best, and I can report to the colonel with a clear conscience." He walked outside. "Let's start gathering some kindling."

They had the wood in about five minutes, but were forced to wait another thirty before the corporal returned with the animals.

"Here you are, sir," said the corporal.

"Thank you," replied Wilcox. "You may leave us now."

"You're sure you don't want me to stick around, sir?"

"No. Olepesai and I are quite capable of taking over from this point."

"As you wish, sir," said the corporal, walking off.

"Well," said Wilcox when he and the Maasai were alone, "are you ready to begin?"

"I suppose so."

"Good. I'll light the fire." He took out a match and tried to light the kindling, but the wind blew it out. Two more matches received the same fate.

"Perhaps that is an omen for you to desist," suggested Olepesai.

"Nonsense," said Wilcox. "It's just a windy day."

He pulled out a brochure for the _fjords_ of Norway that Hermes had given him, lit it with a match, slid it under the kindling, and waited. A moment later the fire took hold.

"You really want to go through with this?" asked Olepesai doubtfully.

"Orders are orders."

Olepesai shrugged and began reciting the Chant of the Gods while Wilcox stood a few feet away and wondered if perhaps he _had_ been just a bit too long in the vertical rays. Finally the Maasai finished and quickly dispatched the mice and the lizard.

Wilcox wasn't quite certain what he expected, but it definitely wasn't a disembodied voice:

_ "It looked extremely rocky

For the Mudville nine that day,

The score stood two to four,

With but one inning left to play." _

"Was that you?" asked Wilcox.

"No," said Olepesai, stepping back from the fire.

"Well, it certainly wasn't _me_."

"It was _me_," said the voice, and now it was joined by a tall blonde man wearing furs and a metal helmet.

"Who are you?" asked Wilcox.

"Bragi, of course."

"Bragi?"

"The Norse god of poetry, come to sooth your savage souls:

_ A bunch of the boys were whooping it up

In the Malamute saloon;

The kid that handles the music box

Was hitting a jag-time tune..." _

Wilcox stared long and hard at the blond god. "But why _you_?" he asked at last.

"Well, your friend here definitely asked for a god of poetry. Since there are no Maasai poets -- no offense, friend -- we needed a little direction as to just which god of poetry you wanted. There are quite a few of us, you know."

"The brochure," said Wilcox dully.

"Right the first time," said Bragi. He throw a massive arm around Wilcox's shoulder. "I can tell we're going to be great friends."

"We are?"

"You'll have your women clean and baste a few cattle for dinner, and after we've had dessert, I'll recite." He paused. "I've been boning up on all the new stuff:

For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can hear the

Dead March play,

The regiment's in 'ollow square -- they're hangin'

him today;

They've taken of his buttons off an' cut his stripes away.

An' they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'._

"That's all very well and good, but we've summoned you here to perform a task for us," said Wilcox.

"Tasks are for gods like Mercury and Atlas and the like," replied Bragi. "Me, I just do poetry."

"But we're at war, and the enemy has called down its own god."

"What is that to me?"

"We rather hoped to pit you against him."

Suddenly Bragi appeared interested. "How is he on iambic pentameter?"

"I don't know," answered Wilcox honestly.

"That's one of my great strengths," said Bragi with more than a trace of pride. "Though I can recite sonnets with the best of them. Does my opponent let his voice linger lovingly over rhyming couplets? Can he bring tears to your eyes? How is he on free verse?"

"What he's mostly good at is making soldiers desert," said Wilcox.

"What? You mean he can't even hold an audience?" bellowed Bragi with a confident laugh. "Lead me to him!"

"I don't think you understand me."

"Certainly I do. You've set up a contest between myself and this pretender."

"Well, yes and no," said Wilcox.

"Explain yourself."

"We'd like to set up a contest, but not the type you're referring to."

"Any type at all will do. I'll murder the bum. Into the Valley of Death rode the six hundred..."

"That's kind of what we had in mind."

"Tennyson?" asked Bragi. "One of my favorites."

"No -- murdering the bum."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Don't you understand?" said Wilcox. "We're at war, and the other side has a god helping them."

"No problem," said Bragi. "I'll fill your men with such spirit that they will be unbeatable."

"They will?"

"Virtually."

"What does virtually mean, in this context?"

"They'll feel pretty good about themselves for at least five minutes after I've finished reciting."

Wilcox shook his head. "I'm afraid that's not good enough."

"If pushed to my limits, I can encourage them to look death in the eye and stare it down," said Bragi. "John Brown's Body comes to mind."

"What good will staring it down do?" asked Wilcox. "In the end, they'll be just as dead, won't they?" "But they'll die happily," said Bragi. "A few of them may

even be mouthing the same brave words they hear from my immortal lips, inspired to the very end."

"This is not working out," said Wilcox. He turned to the Maasai, who had been a silent witness. "Olepesai, send him back."

"But I just got here!" protested Bragi.

"You heard me, Olepesai," said Wilcox. "Send him back and we'll summon another one."

"I protest!" said the Norse god.

"Protest all you want," said Wilcox. "We're wasting time."

"Wait!" said Bragi with such desperation that both men froze in their tracks.

"You can't send me back yet," said the god, tears coming to his eyes. "Nobody up there listens to me anymore. They've heard all my poetry. They snicker when I get up to declaim, and they always leave before I'm through. Loki is the worst of them, but even Odin leaves the room the moment I enter it. Give me a chance to destroy this other god. Then I will write a great new ode to myself, three hours in length and filled with the most remarkable felicity of expression, and my peers will finally listen in awe."

Wilcox had his doubts that anyone, human or deity, would ever willingly sit through a three-hour ode that

Bragi wrote about himself, but he was desperate enough to give the tearful god a chance.

"All right," he relented. "As long as you're here, we might as well make the best of it." He paused. "I suppose the first thing is to find the other god."

"I can see him right now," said Bragi.

Wilcox turned with a start. "Where is he?"

"In a cave halfway up the mountain."

"You have remarkable eyesight."

"Gods can always see others of their kind."

"You can?"

"Well, there aren't an awful lot of us to begin with," explained Bragi, "and we do have an affinity toward each other. With all due respect, I am already bored to tears by the two of you."

"Then let's start climbing the mountain," suggested Wilcox, who was feeling much the same way about Norse gods of poetry.

"There is an easier way," said Bragi.

#

"Twenty-seven?" shrieked Peter Njoro. "There are tens of thousands of British soldiers surrounding us, and you only managed to get twenty-seven of them to desert?"

"It's the wrong time of year," said Hermes defensively.

"There's no snow base at Aspen yet, and it's raining in Miami."

He frowned. "And Cunard has got the Queen Mary in drydock for re-outfitting."

"Twenty-seven," muttered Peter.

"There's a bright side, though," said Hermes.

"Oh?"

The god nodded. "Yes. Starting next week, Pan Am is giving a thirty percent discount on its around-the-world airfare."

Peter turned to Matenjwa. "Two thousand cattle, you say?"

The old mundumugu nodded.

"I'm doing the best I can," whined Hermes.

"And your best is none too good!" said a booming voice from the back of the cave.

Peter drew his pistol and trained it on the blonde, fur-clad man who suddenly appeared.

"Who are you?" demanded Hermes.

"I am the one who is going to bring you to your knees," replied Bragi confidently. "Listen, and weep:

_There are strange things done in the midnight sun,

By the men who toil for gold,

The Arctic trails have their secret tales,

That would make your blood run cold;

The northern lights have seen queer sights

But the queerest they ever did see

Was the night on the marge of Lake Lebarge

I cremated Sam McGee._

There! What do you think of that?"

There was a stunned silence, which Hermes finally broke.

"Actually, I rather liked it," he said.

"You did?" asked Bragi excitedly.

"Definitely," said Hermes. "I hate all this new-fangled stuff. I don't know how people can call it poetry when it doesn't even rhyme."

"My feelings precisely!" agreed Bragi.

"By the way, that's a fine-looking helmet you're wearing," said Hermes. "I don't suppose you'd like to trade it for my bowler?"

"I don't think so," replied Bragi after some consideration. "I'll throw in my umbrella. You never know when it might rain up here in the mountains."

"Done!" cried Bragi, removing his helmet and handing it to Hermes in exchange for the other god's hat and umbrella. "You know," he continued, "you're not such a bad guy."

"Neither are you," said Hermes. "I could listen to real poetry all night."

"Not in my cave, you can't," said Matenjwa disgustedly.

"We can go back behind the British lines," suggested Bragi, obviously eager to recite for a receptive audience.

"Nonsense," said Hermes. "We have the whole world to choose from."

"We do?" asked Bragi.

Hermes opened his briefcase. "Just this afternoon I saw...now where is it?...ah, here we are!" He held up a small brochure. "Why stay on this cold, damp mountain at all when we can take a five-week cruise to Tahiti and then transfer to a luxury lodge on Bora Bora? You'll have round-the-clock room service, a private bath, an electric overhead fan, and four miles of absolutely uncluttered

white sand beaches."

"It sounds wonderful," said Bragi. "Tell me more about the boat."

"Well, we'll want first-class passage, of course," said Hermes, taking Bragi by the arm and leading him out of the cave and down the twisting path that paralleled the stream. "There's a pool, a dance floor, two nightclubs, a library, shuffleboard..."

"Nightclubs? Possibly they might like to hear me recite."

"No reason why not," answered Hermes. "Every morning there's a breakfast buffet from eight o'clock until..."

Then they were out of earshot.

"_Those_ were _gods_?" asked Peter bitterly.

"Perhaps we expect too much of them," offered Matenjwa. "Or perhaps not."

"I don't understand."

"If our war god met _their_ war god in battle, they would probably have fought to a draw, just as these two did," said the old man. "At least this way, the mountain is still standing, which is a good thing, for we shall wish to live on it after our war is over."

#

Deedan Kimathi was killed three months later, bringing the State of Emergency to an unofficial end.

Peter Njoro, after a brief period as a game ranger, converted to Christianity and spent the rest of his life as a minister in Nairobi.

Michael Wilcox returned to England, converted to animism, dropped out of college, and opened a poster shop in Soho.

As for Hermes and Bragi, they opened the very first travel agency in Papeete. With the profits from this venture, they formed the H & B Theater Company, where Bragi still declaims nightly before a devoted audience of Polynesians who never learned to appreciate the virtues of free verse.

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