

Bloodhorn by Graham Spence

5 stars

When will people realise that rhino horns do not cure anything?

Josie Gordon, a freelance wildlife crime investigator, has received shocking news from Nzuri Reserve in KwaZulu Natal. An orphan rhino that she had raised had been shot and the horn taken. The attack had to be the work of the Wildlife Mafia. They had arrived with assault weapons in an unmarked helicopter; shot game warden, Gumede; killed the young rhino and had used a chainsaw to remove the horn.

There is no doubt in her mind that the person responsible is Staal Venter, the owner of Venter Safaris, Musina. He was already under investigation because of white lion canned hunts. (The animals used in canned hunts have been sedated, making it easy for the "hunter" to shoot it.) The only way into the reserve is by helicopter. Josie is determined to get into the ranch to discover how Staal Venter is exporting the rhino horns he's poaching. Unfortunately, even though she's well-hidden, one of the San trackers employed by the ranch quickly traces her and takes her to Staal Venter, his boss.

Chris Stone works as a fishing guide on a remote stretch of the Anvik River, Alaska. His partner, Debra, receives a phone call from her mother in South Africa to say that Josie, her sister, has disappeared. As the fishing season has finished, they can close the lodge and go to South Africa to help with the search.

We follow Chris as he joins Hardus Kruger, a private detective and ex-member of the South African police. He has been hired by Josie and Debra's parents to trace Josie. This search will take them into some dangerous and life-threatening situations. Their task is not just to rescue Josie but to also put a stop to this very well organised and dangerous wildlife mafia gang.

Graham Spence hooked me with the very first line of this book. It is a brilliantly descriptive narrative on what happens almost daily in South Africa when highly organised and completely ruthless poachers sweep in and kill rhinos for their "clients" in the Far East. Rhino horn now sells for more than gold! The fact that the horn is like our nails, just adds to the ridiculous claim that this so-called medicine can cure everything from cancer to lack of libido.

The storyline is like watching a movie. I found myself walking with these crazy, brave people as they set out on a quest which could see each of them killed by highly trained "soldiers" and their psycho boss.

There's a bizarre, very personal twist to the storyline. It happened just days after the book was published. Two of the orphaned rhinos on Thula Thula Lodge were murdered in a similar and very brutal fashion. The guards were overpowered and badly beaten by well-trained, ruthless thugs. The news of this wilful attack, not only on these young rhinos but also the staff, shocked all conservationists in South Africa.

For those of you who did not recognise Graham Spence's name, he was the co-author of all three of Laurence Anthony's books. Babylon's Ark is the account of Laurence's rescue of the caged animals in Iraq while the war was raging around him. The Elephant Whisperer covers the befriending of a herd of rogue elephants which he introduced into Thula Thula and The Lost Rhinos portrayed trying to trace and rescue rhinos in war-torn African countries. This might be a bit of trivial information, but if, like me, you've read these books (and then read them again), you will know just how Graham Spence's easy and vivid writing is. It's very obvious in this book as well.

I hope we're going to meet Chris Stone, Debra and Josie Gordon and hopefully even Hardus Kruger again. They are the kind of people I'd love to have with me as I'm sitting around a fire in a beautiful piece of the African veld, telling stories about close encounters with wild animals but also discussing the subject of trying to put an end to the terrible slaughter of ALL animals that consider Africa to be their place of safety.

Treebeard

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