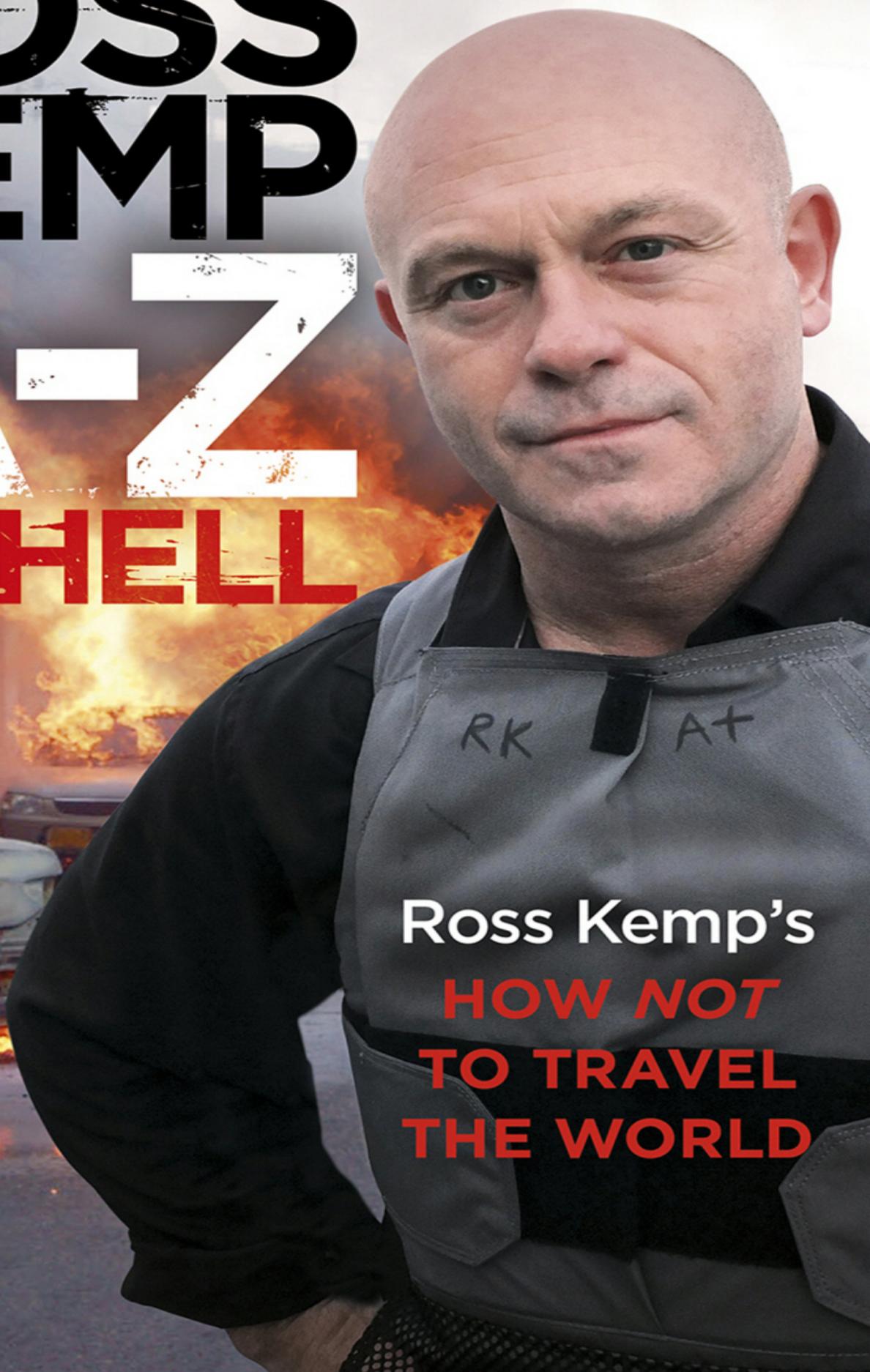


THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**ROSS
KEMP**

**A-Z
OF HELL**



Ross Kemp's
**HOW NOT
TO TRAVEL
THE WORLD**

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About the Book

Ross Kemp's fascinating guide of the worst places in the world.

Want to know where to discover the perfect sunset in Fiji? How about a tropical paradise in St Lucia, or one of the world's beautiful natural wonders in the Alps?

Well this is NOT the book for you.

But if you want to know about meeting transvestite prostitutes in a South African prison, or being attacked for a can of tuna in the Congo, buying crack cocaine in Venezuela or being chased by dogs in a haunted house in Belize, then look no further. Ross Kemp has visited the worst places in the world, and here they are in all their horror - in a handy A to Z format.

This is not one hell of a travel guide. This is a travel guide to hell.

About the Author

Ross Kemp is an investigative journalist, receiving international recognition for his critically acclaimed and BAFTA award-winning documentary series on Afghanistan, Gangs and Africa, as well as his hit series *Extreme World*. Ross has spent time on the front line in Afghanistan with 1 Royal Anglian, 16 Air Assault and 45 Commando. He lives in London.

A-Z of Hell

Ross Kemp's

How Not to Travel the World



Introduction

MY DEDICATED TEAM and I have been making documentaries for nigh-on ten years now and during that time we've become incredibly close, fallen out, made up, laughed, cried and come face to face with some of the very worst aspects of humanity. One thing I know for sure, I wouldn't be here now five coffees down and four kitkats to the good if it wasn't for that team. I want to thank them all from the bottom of my heart, and everyone at Sky for giving us the freedom and support to make the films we want to make.

As I sit here writing with my editor Ben Dunn looking over my shoulder, I remember that I originally wanted to call this book the *A-Z of What Not to Do*. Because given the option of doing the right or the wrong thing, I have generally chosen the latter. And, amazingly, most of those bad decisions have happened off the screen. So this book hopefully captures those moments you don't see on TV.

However, as you can tell, I often don't get my own way (others may disagree), so my editor insisted we call it the *A-Z of Hell* for 'commercial reasons'. So if you have purchased this book, he was right and I was wrong; if you haven't then I was wrong again.

Whatever's on the front cover, this book is an honest, sometimes tragic and at times (hopefully) amusing account of what happens when a hyperactive fortysomething-year-old man gets given the opportunity to travel the world and make documentaries. And as far as I'm concerned, long may it continue.

Ross Kemp, Ben Dunn's office, Penguin Random House,
Pimlico 18.21 25 February 2014

A is for '*Avez-Vous Le Boeuf?*'

GRADE TWO CSE is the extent of my French, but even so I know what '*Avez-vous le boeuf?*' meant. It meant a pair of hungry, angry and possibly stoned Congolese guys were coming to get me.

Or at least it did on the night in question.

We were in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for a film in the second series of *Extreme World*. It was the first time I'd returned to a genuine war zone since Afghanistan, and it would prove to be an eye-opening, not to mention distressing experience, mainly because of the sexual violence associated with the war. Not only is the war in the Congo the bloodiest conflict since the end of the Second World War, with around 6 million dead since 1998, but almost 400,000 women are raped there every year. Horrifically, brutally raped. It is, according to the UN, the rape capital of the world.

It's ironic how many countries with 'Democratic' in their name - many of which I've been to - clearly aren't.

Because the eastern DRC is technically a war zone there are no commercial flights in and out, so we had to reach it by road from neighbouring Rwanda. That was fitting, because it's in Rwanda that the roots of the Congolese conflict lie - the immediate roots, anyway - when, in 1994, during an attempted genocide that shocked the world, the Hutu tribe tried to ethnically cleanse Rwanda of Tutsis.

The Tutsis rose up against the Hutus and forced two million of them - including some of the ringleaders of the original uprising - to flee the country. And where did they go? They took the same road we did when we made our way from Rwanda into the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It was quite a journey, going from one country where the fighting and barbarism has drawn to a close into another where it continues to rage to this day. In terms of the change from one to the other it was like leaving Switzerland and finding yourself in Hades, for as we drove around the outskirts of Lake Kivu, still in Rwanda, we saw no signs of conflict. No barbed wire, no rubble, no half-demolished homes. Not even the piles of plastic you seem to encounter everywhere else in Africa.

Then we entered the Congo. And what a difference: rubbish, barbed wire and rubble were everywhere. We'd seen very few guns in Rwanda but here in the Congo it seemed as though every other guy was carrying: the Congolese police, army, UN peacekeeping troops in their distinctive blue helmets. We're talking about the largest deployment of UN troops in the world in the Congo and there were a *lot* of guns being carried around.

By the time we reached the border crossing, we were already mourning the comparative beauty of Rwanda. We clambered down from our Land Cruisers at a white, old colonial French-style building and I wandered up to a couple of bored-looking cops in shades (see K is for Kit).

'*Bonjour,*' I said, smiling. '*Ça va?*'

The cops scowled and led us around the back of the building to an office, where they quizzed us about the reasons for our visit. We're journalists, we told them. We're trying to do a story on the Congo.

What story? What story?

Absolutely paranoid, these guys, like something from *The Deer Hunter*, wanting to know what story we were planning to cover. Not far away was a grill, thick bars in the ground with hands poking through and prisoners inside babbling away in pidgin English. I'd heard them when we passed: 'Help me, help me,' and I'd looked at them nervously, feeling a mix of sympathy and a keen sense of

not wanting to join them down there, fully aware we were being treated with extreme suspicion by the cops.

You could hardly blame them. The tribal problems in the Congo are made worse by the fact that it's so mineral rich. If you use a laptop, a mobile phone or a computer game then you're making use of coltan and cassiterite that may well have been mined in the Congo. Two-thirds of the world's coltan comes from the Congo, in fact.

You'd hope that sitting on top of huge reserves of minerals used by the vast majority of the Western world would be a good thing for the regular Congolese? And that some of the wealth generated by those mines might trickle down?

Well, as I was about to find out, it isn't. And it doesn't. So, like I say, you could hardly blame the border guards for treating a bunch of guys from the West with suspicion. Historically, it was blokes like us who came into their country, took what we wanted and left a God-awful mess in our wake.

During the first portion of our stay in the Congo we visited Panzi Hospital, run by the remarkable Dr Denis Mukwege. There I got to meet some of the victims of rape and sexual violence.

I knew the rapes in the Congo were brutal, but even so, nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to learn at the Panzi Hospital. Rape, I discovered, is being used as a weapon of war: soldiers force fathers to rape their own daughters and brothers to rape sisters. Dr Mukwege introduced me to women who had had their lower arms cut off from just above the elbow so they can never hold anything again, who had been repeatedly gang-raped, been penetrated with guns and knives, and had burning wood and molten plastic bottles pushed into them - that's how deep the hatred is.

And afterwards? The poor victims are ostracised. In many, if not most instances, they're carrying the babies of their tribe's most hated enemies, so they're rejected by their families, by other women. Everybody. In the eyes of Congolese society they've been defiled and they are, effectively, cast out.

That was very, very hard to understand. On top of the barbarity and inhumanity of the original act comes that next insult. The fact that women who have been victims of such terrible violence are then shunned by their own families defies belief.

Leaving the Panzi Hospital that day I did a piece to camera saying I wanted to look into the eyes of a man who was capable of doing this to another human being. And that, in the end, is what I did. (See R is for (the thankfully). Rare Glimpses of Evil.)

First we had to find them. Which meant a UN supply flight out of Goma to Walikale, a town some way from civilisation, where roads are in short supply but jungle is plentiful - jungle that hides thousands of Hutu militia men who wage a constant war against the UN peacekeepers, an Indian unit called the Fighting Fifth. It's their job to stop marauding militia attacking the villages and they mount regular patrols. How do normal people get around? The answer is they don't, unless the army escort them on the ground. No doubt about it, we were sticking close to these guys.

Strapping on backpacks and in my case a wide-brimmed hat, we joined members of the Fighting Fifth on patrol.

It was hot that day - really, really hot. My cameraman was Jonathan Young; the soundman a guy called Jon Gilbert. Jon, poor guy, was wearing a lot of kit, including a sound mixer strapped across his stomach. So with the mixer and whatever he had in the pack on his back, he was a long vehicle, about the length of your average Eddie Stobart.

During the patrol we reached a log that spanned a small ravine, with a river below it going to God knows where. Could have been crocodiles down there. All I knew was that I didn't want to drop down there, a fall of - what? - thirty foot into the water below. But poor old Jon couldn't even get his leg up on the log, and for a moment he simply stood there, wobbling, lifting his leg like an oversized Thunderbirds puppet, hoping to try and make it up on to the log.

Heavy bush to my right and left made it impossible for me to see either, but I steadied him, and helped him up on to the log.

'You're all right, mate. You're all right,' I lied, thinking nothing of the sort. Quite the opposite, in fact - that the poor lad only had to overbalance by a fraction or so and he was going to find out first hand whatever was or was not down below.

Now, picture the scene. Making their way across the log were the UN escorts with the blue helmets on. After them came Jon, the long-vehicle soundman, complete with boom. Behind him some bloke off *EastEnders*. Behind him, Jonathan the cameraman. Then, behind us, more UN soldiers, who were tutting and sounding pissed off that we were being so slow.

The UN guys were used to it, of course. The ones ahead of us scampered across with all the grace and speed of ballerinas. Us lot, on the other hand, beetled carefully forward, moving slowly but thinking we'd be OK as long as we didn't meet anything coming in the opposite direction.

And that went all right for a moment or so - until we met something else coming in the opposite direction. A group of village women, carrying pots and pans piled twenty-foot high. The Indian soldiers ahead of us danced right round them. They seemed to defy gravity, like they'd developed Spider-Man-like powers. Meanwhile we media luvvies jittered unsteadily to a halt only to get a barrage of fresh

abuse from the Indian soldiers behind, and were forced to carry on. Jon, the long-vehicle soundman, craned his head back to give me worried eyes over his shoulder, and as we nervously approached the chattering villagers I promised him that I would help him survive this tricky log crossing.

Which I did, by saying, 'Left a bit, Jon. Right a bit, Jon.'

Maybe he had something a bit more supportive in mind, but it would have to do for the time being.

That was just one moment of what turned out to be a bit of a heart-in-mouth patrol. Next we encountered members of the Congolese army. Hard-faced blokes who were as tough as any guys I'd ever met, from their narrowed, suspicious eyes right down to ... well, not quite the toes of their feet, because for some reason the preferred footwear of the Congolese militia man is the white Wellington boot. I kid you not. White Wellington boots. Little dainty things. They were everywhere. It helped to take my mind off the AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) they carried, the Chinese grenades hanging off their belts, and the fact that despite wearing the uniform of the Congolese army, they were former militiamen, and thus, probably, rapists and murderers.

One of the things I've learnt about modern warfare is that contrary to what we've been led to believe by the media, it's not waged by remote control. No, wars are fought and won by the men on the ground. He who controls the ground wins the war. Vietnam's a perfect example of that. Afghanistan is a perfect example of that. In Afghanistan it's our air superiority that keeps the Taliban at bay but the Taliban is still there at the end of the day, and will be when we've left. If you're an invader you have a home to go back to, but if you're an inhabitant you've got nowhere else to go and you'll fight tooth and nail for your piece of land. That goes for the Taliban, just as it goes for the tribal divisions in the Congo. I was reminded of that as I

stuck close to the UN guys and tried not to wither under the implacable stares of the militia men.

With the patrol over we returned to the base and I was glad to leave the jungle, looking forward to a night in the safety and comfort of the base.

Except it didn't turn out that way.

Now, if you watch the film what you hear is me saying this: 'Unfortunately the UN can't put us up at their base, and we're forced to find accommodation in town, which is basic to say the least. It has no electricity, food or running water. But during the night I discover it has plenty of bedbugs, mosquitoes and rats.'

And that's that. The film moves on to the following day.

It wasn't just bedbugs, mosquitoes and rats I had to worry about, though.

We'd been expecting to stay at the Indian UN base on a hill overlooking Walikale, but the UN guys had a sudden change of mind.

It wasn't that we were unwelcome, explained the commander pleasantly enough, just that we weren't permitted to stay. However, he continued, we were quite welcome to return and have curry with them on Friday night. Nice offer, you'd think, but this was very bad news. In the meantime we had no supplies. No food, no water, no mosquito nets, nothing.

Disgruntled and a little scared, we clambered into Mark I Land Rovers and were given a lift down the hill and into Walikale below. It was beginning to get dark, and by now we were thinking of our stomachs, too, so at the director's insistence we stopped at a couple of ramshackle stalls. Waving away a proffered fish that looked distinctly unappetising, we opted instead for cans of tuna and corned beef each. It's not like any of us were great fans of tuna or corned beef, just that that was all they had, and believe you me they charged us way over the odds for it too.

With that done, the Indian army drove us to what they said was the best guest house in town. Which meant it was the only guest house in town, the only one from which we might possibly emerge alive next morning.

It was located inside a compound, which, as it turned out, was guarded. Across the entrance was a dilapidated vehicle, and for a while there was a stand-off between the Fighting Fifth and some weed-smoking militia men hanging around outside.

As it turned out, the militia men seemed to back down. On the other hand, perhaps they were like the spiders enticing the flies. Into the trap we went, like the obedient insects that we were. The vehicle was there to protect the compound from attack, of course, but it was also going to stop us leaving, too. Second thoughts? Too late for them. With the Fighting Fifth waving goodbye from their departing Land Rovers we stood near to the entrance of the guest house, surveying the groups of ne'er-do-wells lounging around the doorway. Like those we'd seen on patrol earlier, they were carrying RPGs, hand grenades and AK-47s. Any chatter had died down to silence and in the air hung the distinctive sweet smell of ganja as they regarded us silently from behind heavy-lidded eyes.

We checked in - if handing a few dollars to an uninterested guy on reception was what you'd call checking in - then made for the 'bar area'. In fact, it was a courtyard, featuring a table under a covered section at the far end and plastic chairs around the outside. We collected bottles of revoltingly warm beer from the bar and took our seats on the chairs, feeling uncomfortable beneath the stares of the locals. On a television the movie *Black Hawk Down* was showing on a loop. In the distance we could hear the beating of drums. They were beating down the sun.

Yes, that's right. We were in a part of the world where they beat down the sun. Hungry, we used our knives to open the tins we'd bought from the ramshackle stall.

Dominic, the director, had managed to get hold of a half-bottle of whisky. Before you knew it, he'd dragged himself to his room where he was out for the count before his head hit the pillow - successfully made comatose by the alcohol. Tom had his iPod and was consequently insulated against everything that was about to happen.

The rest of us, meanwhile - me, Jonathan and Jon - had decided the bar was not a safe place to be. There was the small matter of being told 'white men not welcome'. That and the fact that the militia men seemed to be really enjoying *Black Hawk Down*. These were stoned, heavily armed guys, and they were watching a war film. Call it extreme caution, although I'll call it prudence if you don't mind, but we decided to leave them to it and get the first look at our rooms, which were located on the floor above the bar.

They were horrible.

The walls were two-ply. There was no lock on my door, which wasn't even a proper door. It was like a saloon door, with huge gaps top and bottom, through which you could see the tops of people's heads and their legs. I had a thin, blue mattress, on a rickety wooden bed (still sturdier than the roof itself). I had no sleeping bag but at least the guest house provided a mosquito net. Only trouble was, you had to fix it up yourself. From nowhere, cameraman Jonathan produced a hammer and began to hammer the net to the beams above my mattress. Bad idea. From over our heads came a deluge of bug corpses that had collected in the floorboards above, raining down on us like something straight out of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Hundreds if not thousands of them. I was still finding these things in my clothes weeks later.

Recovering from the dead-bug attack, we stared at the result of Jonathan's labour. A mosquito net peppered with holes you could have driven a truck through. No, let's not exaggerate. Holes that birds could have flown through.

There wasn't much in it, but I had the worst room. I was thinking, 'I own the company and I've got the worst room. How does that work? I own the company. I should have the *best* fucking room.'

From downstairs I could hear the sound of *Black Hawk Down* accompanied by raucous cheering from the stoned militia men. Gradually it dawned on me what they were doing - they were cheering every time an American character got shot and died. I don't know if you've seen *Black Hawk Down*, but in it a lot of Americans get shot and die. Consequently, there was a lot of cheering coming from downstairs. It wasn't a *good* kind of cheering, either.

Upstairs, I was slathering myself in Deet in anticipation of being eaten alive by mosquitoes. I'd avoided the blue mattress so far, but even so I swear I could feel bedbug bites already, plus I'd already drunk most of my water by this point and was beginning to feel dehydrated.

I reached for the tin of overpriced tuna and my knife. Grappling in the dark, I found my head torch and went to work in earnest, prising open the tin of tuna with my knife, and as I sat there in my pants and head torch, I wondered why I'd ever left *EastEnders*. I found myself craving a warm dressing room, a nice egg sarnie and a cup of tea.

I held the open tin of tuna in front of the meagre light from my head torch and inspected what could only be described as a dried biscuit, like a communion wafer of tuna after someone had somehow sucked up all the juice inside the tin.

That was the least of my problems, though. Suddenly, I badly needed a piss. God knows why, I was that dehydrated, but I needed a piss. I couldn't face going to the toilet. There was the small matter of the guys downstairs, plus I'd already seen the state of the toilet and it was foul. Really, really bad. Believe you me, I've had the misfortune of using some fairly rotten toilets in my time, but this one took the shit-encrusted prize for the worst in all history.

From a hole protruded a family of squeezed-off turds stuck up at right angles, as if they were growing in there, like evil brown triffids. But even if you could somehow close your mind to that, there was no way you could stomach the horrific stench.

There was no way I was chancing that.

Instead I tried to use my water bottle, a plastic bottle of Evian. But it filled too quickly and I wasn't nearly done so I rushed to the window, planning to finish off on to the dust below. The window was nailed down. Desperate now, I hobbled to a corner of the room where a section of floorboards slanted away, and I breathed a grateful sigh of relief as I finished my piss and hoped - no, prayed - that it would soak harmlessly into the wood below.

But it wasn't that kind of night. Instead my piss rained into the bar below. *Kemp Piss Down*. I realised my mistake at the same time as an enraged shout went up below and the next thing I knew footsteps were thundering up the stairs towards my room. There was screaming in the corridor outside, and I imagined assault rifles and machetes being brandished as I shouted back, 'Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.'

'TV hard man Ross Kemp' here.

I listened. My apologies seemed to have placated them and they withdrew back downstairs to the film as I breathed a huge sigh of relief and took a seat on the bed. Well, I say bed ... the blue thing in the room masquerading as a mattress. I sat in my pants with my head torch on, clutching my Gerber knife and listening to the mosquitoes and the sounds of the film from downstairs. *Bang. Bang. 'Ha, ha, ha, ha!'* And I thought to myself, if I can just sleep, then things will be all right in the morning. If I can just make it through the night ...

It was so hot - that close, stifling heat you get at night - and I was sweating buckets, conscious I was losing fluid and only had a fifth of a bottle of water to get me through

the night. Settling on my blue mattress in the forlorn hope of getting some kip, I became aware of the noises around me: from the room next door, two guys snoring; from outside, the sounds of the jungle – crickets, monkeys whooping, the rustle of nocturnal creatures. I'd seen the bats they have out there and they're huge – the size of cats.

I began to doze.

In the next instant I jerked awake. There was a sound – the unmistakable sound of two men moving along the corridor and tapping on a door, saying, '*Où est le boeuf?*' And, '*Avez-vous le boeuf?*'

Despite my limited French I knew what they were after. The beef. The corned beef. They'd seen us with it in the courtyard earlier and now they'd come out of their room from down the corridor in search of it.

'*Où est le boeuf?*'

They were whispering. Don't ask me why they were whispering. There was a bit of giggling too. I suppose it went along with the whispering. Giggling and whispering like a pair of schoolgirls – a pair of drunk or stoned schoolgirls.

'*Où est le boeuf?*'

They came closer to my room. I got off the mattress and went to the door, just a thin piece of wood between me and the two beef-hunters.

'*Où est le boeuf?*'

They were outside now.

Tap-tap on the door.

'*Où est le boeuf?*'

'No *boeuf ici*,' I said, praying that I sounded more assertive than I felt.

There was a pause.

'*Avez-vous le boeuf?*'

'No,' I hissed back. 'I mean, *Non. Non boeuf. Pas de boeuf.*'

That French CSE was really coming in handy.

There was a pause and I relaxed slightly, allowing myself to believe the message had got through. That they had finally accepted my room was a *boeuf*-free zone, and that they'd return to wherever they had come from, their own rooms or downstairs to enjoy war films on loop. Wherever. Frankly, I didn't care where they went, just as long as they left the immediate vicinity of my room.

Silence.

'Où est le boeuf?'

Ever seen *Apocalypse Now*? Colonel Kurtz losing it in the jungle? You might know that *Apocalypse Now* was based on a book by Joseph Conrad called *Heart of Darkness*, except that for the film version, Francis Ford Coppola moved the action to Vietnam from ... guess where? That's right, the Congo.

And here I was, having my own Colonel Kurtz, *Heart of Darkness* moment. A desperate and unhinged man losing it in the jungle: I was starving hungry and dehydrated. I'd been bitten to pieces and itched all over. It was stinking hot. There was no air-conditioning, nothing, not even a rickety ceiling fan. Just men with guns downstairs, drinking - beer? I don't know what they were drinking. It could have been human blood for all I knew - but whatever it was they were drinking, and whatever they were smoking, it was making them scary-wild.

So I snatched up my knife, threw open the door to my room and charged out.

Outside stood two men in jeans and short-sleeved shirts. Confronted by a man in pants with a knife and a head torch they stopped and looked at each other then back at me and they backed away holding up their hands like, 'No harm meant, no problem,' and off they went.

I watched them retreat back down the corridor to the stairs, and only when they'd gone did I breathe a huge sigh of relief and let my knife-hand relax.

The following morning, I woke to the sound of drums beating up the sun. The crew were met by a strange-looking figure. Wide-eyed and still traumatised from the events of the previous evening, I'd barely slept. I was a man on the edge of sanity. Dehydrated. Bitten. Emotionally traumatised. Hungry.

'Have you seen what we've got for breakfast?' said Tom.

Set out in the courtyard was breakfast, which was being cooked on a skillet that resembled the upturned lid of a dustbin and upon which a porcupine and a monkey were being roasted.

Not 'porcupine meat' and 'monkey meat'. Oh no. This was 'a porcupine' and 'a monkey'.

All of a sudden it dawned on me exactly why the two guys last night had been so keen to get their hands on some *boeuf*. If all you've got to look forward to is porcupine and monkey then a tin of corned beef must seem like foie gras in comparison.

Still, we had a job to do. And we were going to do it. We'd made contact with a group called the Mayi-Mayi, and were due to meet them. This was a Congolese militia group set up to defend themselves against other militias. Prior to meeting them I was told they used child soldiers and were involved in rapes, so I was dubious about the venture to say the least, but they turned out to be accommodating and gracious hosts. Laid on for us at a nearby parade ground was a traditional African welcome (although they had a few tricks up their sleeve, see [L is for Lost in Translation](#)), and afterwards, I spoke to a group of Mayi-Mayi leaders, where I was told they are the enemy of the Hutu.

Next they told me something quite extraordinary. When the Mayi-Mayi was formed they called upon the spirits of their ancestors, who gave them the names of special herbs they could use to fight their enemies. Not only do the Mayi-Mayi believe that the herbs made them strong, but also

that if they take a solution of herbs in water it makes them bullet-proof.

I put it to them that the Mayi-Mayi had been involved in rape and they denied it vehemently. 'The magic wouldn't work if we did,' they claimed.

It's an understatement to say that we were glad to leave Walikale. We *could not wait* to get on that Sikorsky. But I'll leave you with two thoughts to demonstrate just how volatile and unpredictable life is in the Congo. Firstly, one of the Russian loaders helping to board the Sikorsky that day went missing. Taken by locals or militia, maybe because he was wearing a bit of gold, who knows? But he simply disappeared.

The second thing is that not long after we left, members of the Mayi-Mayi were accused of joining up with Hutu militia, raiding a village and over a four-day period systematically gang-raping over 200 women and children.

Was it true? The same Mayi-Mayi whose leaders had assured me that they hated the Hutu and that they would never be involved in rape because it would stop the magic working? I wondered: had the magic stopped working?