

A sunset scene with a rhinoceros silhouette in the foreground, trees, and a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow. The rhinoceros is silhouetted against the water, facing left. There are several trees, some bare and some with sparse leaves, scattered across the scene. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

OPERATION NOAH

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OPERATION NOAH

by Hannah Hooton (120 pages)

Operation Noah is based on the incredible true events of Rupert Fothergill and the five-year mission he led to rescue over 6,000 wild animals from the flooding of the Zambezi Valley.

Southern Rhodesia, 1958: Rupert Fothergill, a middle-aged game ranger who much prefers a solitary life in the bush protecting wildlife, has quit his job. In this rapidly developing African colony, being a game ranger all too often involves having to destroy animals for wandering onto farms that have sprung up in their habitats, and Rupert simply can't do it anymore.

But even after moving back home to his family in the city, he can't help thinking of the thousands of animals that will die in the floods caused by the damming of the Zambezi River up in Kariba. In an act of defiance against "Progress", Rupert publically pledges to save those animals.

He discovers this is easier said than done though. Rupert and his deputy, Frank Junor, are provided with just a handful of scouts and two old motorboats to traverse the 200 miles² of crocodile-infested waters. Rupert, a bushwhacker and introvert, and Frank, a scientist and ladies' man, clash from the start, and spend much of their time at odds over the operation's management until Frank is involved in a near fatal incident that forces both men to re-evaluate their positions.

Their focus shifts to a white rhino discovered on an island sixty years after the species was thought to have gone extinct. But even with a more productive relationship, Rupert and Frank's goal of rescuing "Hookhorn" is no cakewalk and time is against them. The Federation is collapsing as the "winds of change" sweep down colonial Africa and the operation's funds have dried up. In desperation, Rupert takes one risk too great and is trampled by Hookhorn. A man, used to leading the way, must make the ultimate sacrifice and, in a parallel to the story's political backdrop, defer power if he is to see Rhodesia's last white rhino saved.

SUPER: "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you, and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea, into your hand are they delivered." - Genesis 9:1-2

FADE IN

EXT. ISLAND, LAKE KARIBA - DAY

SUPER: KARIBA, SOUTHERN RHODESIA (MODERN-DAY ZIMBABWE), 1958.

Birds squawk in alarm against a cloudless blue sky and flap above half-submerged bright red, orange and green msasa trees as their nests are carried away.

A warthog, with three piglets at foot, squeals and runs from the encroaching flood.

The sun-baked mouth of an antbear hole is stained dark red as water trickles then streams inside. The antbear bursts out and joins the panicked throngs of antelope, hog and birdlife.

A sodden genet cat paddles, meowing pitilessly.

EXT. FIELD, SABI-TANGANDA ESTATES, EASTERN HIGHLANDS - DAY

In stark contrast to the heat of Kariba, a morning mist hangs over the lush tea-growing valleys of the Eastern Highlands. A beat-up Game Department *bakkie* follows a smarter Sabi-Tanganda Estates *bakkie* to the edge of a field.

RUPERT FOTHERGILL (46), tall, athletic and tanned, dressed in khaki game ranger uniform and *veldskoens*, exits the *bakkie* with his African tracker/"Man Friday" LANGTON (40s).

The ESTATE MANAGER leads them over to a furrow where a dip in the terrain has created a small watering hole.

ESTATE MANAGER

I've had it up to here with these
pests. We can't afford to let
this continue.

Rupert scuffs his shoe against the chipped corner of a cement furrow, looks around for more damage.

RUPERT

This it?

(CONTINUED)

ESTATE MANAGER

It might not look like much, but
this is only the start, right?
They could do real damage.

Rupert blinks slowly at the man, a silent consideration for the type of person he has little time for. He looks over at the scrub border where partially broken branches indicate the path taken by the nuisance animals.

RUPERT

We'll set up camp and scare them
off when they next pay a visit.

ESTATE MANAGER

But they'll just come back. You
have to shoot them.

RUPERT

How many in the herd?

ESTATE MANAGER

At least a dozen. The matriarch
has a proper set of ivory on her.

The manager tries to entice Rupert's sense of greed to little effect. As they stand talking, another *bakkie* bumps along the track bordering the field towards them.

RUPERT

It's hardly worth shooting an
entire family for this. We can
scare them off, send them across
the Sabi River. Once they find
another water source they won't
come back.

ESTATE MANAGER

Can you guarantee that?

Rupert's mouth disappears into a grim line as he considers his options. He grunts in reply, distracted by the *bakkie* pulling up.

TOMMY ORFORD (21, looks 12) steps out, his pristine Game Department uniform instantly recognisable to Rupert.

TOMMY

Mr Fothergill?

RUPERT

Ja.

Tommy wrings his hands nervously and steps across a furrow to join them.

TOMMY

I'm Tommy.

He extends a hand and Rupert shakes it out of politeness. Tommy's name means nothing to him. A nervous twitch spasms the left side of Tommy's face.

TOMMY (cont'd)

Tommy Orford? Mr Fraser sent me.
I'm the Game Department's new
ranger.

ESTATE MANAGER

What are you, ten?

TOMMY

No, sir. Twenty-one last
Thursday.

RUPERT

Jesus Christ. You ever used a gun
before?

TOMMY

Oh ja. I used to hunt on my
grandparents' farm. Duiker,
jackal, you name it.

ESTATE MANAGER

You ever shot an elephant?

Tommy shakes his head. His eye twitches.

ESTATE MANAGER (cont'd)

You'll get your chance tonight,
isn't that right?

He looks expectantly at Rupert, who sighs in resignation, looks dispassionately at Tommy's eager face.

EXT. FIELD BORDER, SABI-TANGANDA ESTATES - NIGHT

The whistling of crickets and wailing of bush-babies fills the cold night. A far-off "whoo-ip" of a hyena on the prowl echoes across the sleeping valley. A full moon bathes the neat rows of tea bushes in a silvery light.

Suddenly, there is a thrashing of branches and splintering of wood. One by one, ten elephants of assorted ages wander out into the open, moonlight glancing off their hunched backs and illuminating their tusks. But for low stomach-rumbling, they move silently into the crop to drink and snack on tea bushes.

(CONTINUED)

Waiting under the cover of the bordering jesse bush is Rupert with Tommy and Langton, all dressed in thick jackets. Tommy watches with wide-eyed excitement, his shallow breaths misting the air, as Rupert raises his .425 Magnum Westley Richards to his shoulder and takes aim.

Rupert moves the crosshairs across the herd, pauses over the big tusker. He sighs, flicks off the safety, pulls back the bolt; his finger settles on the trigger. At the last second, he tilts the rifle upwards and *BANG!* The sound rolls around the valley and the elephants take fright. They trumpet wildly, and blunder in all directions.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The elephants stampede over the furrows right across the rest of the crop.

Tommy looks at Rupert in amazement.

TOMMY

But...

Rupert puts his gun down as the elephants disappear into the distance.

RUPERT

What right have we to sign their death warrants?

TOMMY

But they were being pests.

RUPERT

We might be at the top of the foodchain, but don't confuse that with being more important than everything else.

TOMMY

What about the manager though?

Rupert shrugs, smiles a little, slings his rifle over his shoulder and starts to walk away.

RUPERT

He'll get over it.

EXT. FIELD, SABI-TANGANDA ESTATES - MORNING

Standing amid the trampled tea bushes and broken furrows, the estate manager confronts Rupert and Tommy.

ESTATE MANAGER

But how can you miss a dozen big bloody elephants?

(CONTINUED)

RUPERT

What can I say? I'm not as good a shot as I'd like to be.

ESTATE MANAGER

But you're a game ranger! How the hell did you get your job?

Rupert shrugs and turns to leave.

ESTATE MANAGER (cont'd)

Hey! Where are you going? What about those elephants?

RUPERT

They'll be over the Sabi River by now. They won't be back.

ESTATE MANAGER

The Chief Game Officer will be hearing about this! Someone is going to pay for all this. It's a goddamn bombsite!

With Tommy at his heels, Rupert strolls on. Over his shoulder:

RUPERT

It'll be in the report, but you tell him too if it makes you feel better.

EXT. CAUSEWAY, SALISBURY CITY CENTRE - DAY

SUPER: SALISBURY, SOUTHERN RHODESIA

Salisbury buzzes in the hot October sunshine, awash with the purple bloom of jacarandas lining the avenues of the colonial cosmopolitan city. It is a world away from the bushveld.

Rupert strides down the street. African pedestrians step off the pavement in deference; the men doff their hats. Rupert rubbernecks in surprise, sees them move back onto the pavement. He nearly gets run down by a cyclist.

EXT. MEIKLES HOTEL, JAMESON AVE., SALISBURY - CONTINUOUS

Rupert passes the Meikles Hotel where a loud but peaceful protest is being staged by both white and black people bearing placards reading "Bar the Colour Bar", "Drinks All Round", "No More Segregation".

Rupert steps into the road and is nearly knocked down by a hooting car. Clearly out of his depth, he gestures an apology and steps back.

EXT. GAME DEPT. HQ, SALISBURY - CONTINUOUS

Rupert mounts the steps, two at a time, up to a bright white colonial-style office building. He holds the door open for a black man and woman to exit. They are both too shocked to say thank you.

INT. ARCHIE'S OFFICE, GAME DEPT. HQ - CONTINUOUS

ARCHIE FRASER (40s), a stocky man with a brow that carries the burden of great responsibility and a determined jaw that put him there, sifts through paperwork on his desk. His office overflows with books on ornithology and wildlife. Stuffed birds glare glassily from their perches on the shelves, and charts on game native to southern Africa plaster the walls.

Rupert enters and slaps more papers down on the desk.

RUPERT

Your reports.

ARCHIE

Ah, just the man. I got a call from the manager over at Sabi-Tanganda.

Rupert gives an insolent shrug.

RUPERT

I missed.

ARCHIE

That why they call you Katosvora, hey? Come on, Rupert.

RUPERT

He didn't need the elephants dead, he just needed them gone.

ARCHIE

And where are they now? Plundering crops on some other farmer's land?

RUPERT

How are they meant to understand that those crops aren't for them? They are simply taking advantage of what has been put before them on pathways they've been treading for generations. Then we accuse them of being pests and shoot them all. This whole... thing is messed up.

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE

You can't stop Progress, Rupert.

RUPERT

What is that? An excuse to go around destroying everything that doesn't fit in with our "Grand Plan"? I spend most of my time shooting animals you hired me to protect.

ARCHIE

It's all part of animal control.

RUPERT

Which is just a nicer way of saying "Go out and shoot the bastards."

ARCHIE

What do you want me to do? I let you be a game guide to Dalhousie and his lot, and you didn't like that either.

RUPERT

I took this job because I wanted to be a game ranger, not a nursemaid to VIPs or to this kid you've gone and lumped me with.

ARCHIE

I don't know what you want me to do, Rupert. The job is what it is.

Rupert stops pacing and digs out his wallet. He tosses his Game Department-issue hunting license onto the desk.

RUPERT

Then you'll have to find somebody else to do it.

EXT. FOTHERGILL HOME, SALISBURY - AFTERNOON

Rupert pulls up his dirty Land Rover in the driveway of his modest Salisbury home - a bungalow with large garden and swimming pool. A second cleaner urban car is already parked.

INT. KITCHEN, FOTHERGILL HOME - CONTINUOUS

HILARY

Daddy!

By the open back door, Rupert goes down on one knee and holds his arms wide as HILARY (5) runs into them. He pretends to get knocked back by her.

(CONTINUED)

RUPERT

Hey! You've got to stop eating
all those beans, Hils. You'll be
taller than your mother soon.

Hilary makes herself comfortable on his knee.

HILARY

No, I won't, silly!

PETER, the Fothergills' African domestic servant, is doing
the ironing. He is pleased to see Rupert, but shows the
required restraint.

PETER

Hello, *baas*.

RUPERT

(English subtitles)
Peter! How's things! Is the
Madam around?

RUPERT

(Shona translation)
Peter! Kanjani! Ndiye Madam
pano?

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

I'm here.

Rupert stands, propping Hilary over one hip, and walks
through to the lounge.

INT. LOUNGE, FOTHERGILL HOME - CONTINUOUS

CHRISTINE (36) appears from the bedroom wing - pretty *au
natural* and petite with blonde hair and an English accent.

Rupert puts Hilary down.

RUPERT

Why don't you go find your
brother?

Hilary runs through to the bedroom wing, leaving Rupert to
gather Christine to him and kiss her. He buries his nose
in her hair.

CHRISTINE

I wasn't expecting you home.

RUPERT

Mm, I hope I haven't interrupted
any of your plans, Mrs
Fothergill.

CHRISTINE

I do have a rather attractive
date this weekend. Could be
awkward.

(CONTINUED)

RUPERT
I could babysit the kids.

CHRISTINE
I knew there was a reason I
married you.

MARTIN (O.S.)
Hello.

The shy greeting comes from MARTIN (9), dressed in school uniform, half-hiding behind the door frame.

RUPERT
Hey, Martin. Come here.

Martin steps out and Rupert tenses. Martin is proudly holding out a green grass snake for him to see.

RUPERT (cont'd)
Wh-who's that?

MARTIN
Humphrey. I found him by the
pond. Do you want to hold him?

Rupert attempts to disguise his fear of snakes with a casual smile.

RUPERT
We don't want to scare him. Where
- um - where are you keeping him?

CHRISTINE
Martin's built a home for it.

RUPERT
Where?

Martin is quickly losing his shyness.

MARTIN
In my room. D'you want to see?

Rupert sucks his teeth in mock disappointment.

CHRISTINE
Let Dad sit down and relax a bit
first. He'll come see it later.

The children depart.

RUPERT
Humphrey?

CHRISTINE
In memory of Humphrey Bogart.

RUPERT
Who?

Christine laughs, shakes her head.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET, SALISBURY - AFTERNOON

Rupert, Christine, Martin and Hilary walk away from an ice-cream cart with their purchases. The children run ahead. Rupert and Christine both appear tense.

RUPERT
I spoke to Archie-

CHRISTINE
So, I bumped into Noreen
the other- Sorry, you
first.

RUPERT
No, you go ahead.

Christine takes a deep breath of courage.

CHRISTINE
She mentioned some opportunities
at the clinic...

RUPERT
You want to go back to work?

CHRISTINE
Only once Hilary's at school, of
course. Not before then.

Rupert looks blank.

CHRISTINE (cont'd)
In the New Year. She starts in
January.

RUPERT
Ah, right. Okay.

They walk in silence as Rupert digests her news.
Eventually:

RUPERT (cont'd)
Well, I'll come home then.

CHRISTINE
What?

RUPERT
Ja. I'm sick of killing animals
instead of protecting them.

CHRISTINE

But what will you do instead?

RUPERT

I can do engines again. Seems to be a lot more cars on the roads now.

CHRISTINE

But...

She hides her doubts with a smile.

CHRISTINE (cont'd)

If that's what you're happy doing. What were you going to tell me?

RUPERT

Doesn't matter now.

He smiles, looks away as doubt clouds his expression.

INT. LOUNGE, FOTHERGILL HOME - DUSK

NEWSREADER (O.S.)

...November has seen above average rainfall across all territories with forecasters predicting a second consecutive "100 year flood" this rainy season...

Rupert stands by the patio doors, smoking a cigarette, listening to the thunder rumbling all around and looking out at the threatening clouds. The first few drops of rain stain the glitterstone patio.

NEWSREADER (O.S.) (cont'd)

...A spokesperson for Impresit, part of the consortium responsible for the Kariba Project / shared his relief that now construction has been completed there is no chance of a repeat of last rainy season's disaster // that saw the cofferdam washed away. Skies remained clear just long enough for Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, to open the Kariba Dam hydro-electric plant in a ceremony held earlier today.

/At the mention of Kariba, Rupert's attention is caught.

(CONTINUED)

HILARY (O.S.)

//DAD!

The black and white television shows a footage of a new very large lake dotted with tree-thick islands. The water laps near the base of a magnificent convex concrete dam wall, rising 128 metres high and half a kilometre wide.

QUEEN MOTHER (O.S.)

I pray, with all my heart, that this may be a symbol of a new and wider understanding throughout the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and / indeed, throughout this mighty continent of Africa.

HILARY (O.S.)

/DA-AD! Come say goodnight!

A largely European crowd, clustered around a small gazebo in the centre of the three-lane-wide wall, cheer and applaud. The QUEEN MOTHER (50s) stands behind a microphone in the shade of the gazebo. A row of dignitaries sit behind her.

QUEEN MOTHER

I now have great pleasure in completing this ceremony of inauguration... I declare the Kariba Dam undertaking open!

She pushes the handle of a detonator box.

More shots show water spewing out of the concave side of the wall.

EXT. KARIBA - CONTINUOUS/RUPERT'S DREAMSCAPE (B/W-COLOUR)

In black and white, the Queen Mother is escorted to a waiting Daimler as the rain starts to fall. Umbrellas spring up. BBC camera crews hurry to cover their equipment.

As we pull away, the shot turns from black and white to colour. Kariba Dam Wall is reduced to a rain-blurred speck as we pull further out and focus on a half-submerged island where a herd of bushbuck struggle to swim for the mainland through the downpour.

In a half-submerged acacia tree is a vervet monkey, one hand clinging to the branches, the other clutching a baby to its breast. Choppy waves slap around its feet. The mother attempts to climb higher but the branches are too thin and she shrieks, liquid eyes panicked. A wave crashes into them, leaving the tree empty and the monkeys nowhere to be seen.

INT. LOUNGE, FOTHERGILL HOME - CONTINUOUS

CHRISTINE

Rupert!

Rupert is jogged out of his rumination. Christine stands in the doorway, fiddling with an earring. She is dressed in a cocktail dress. By her tone it is clear that this is not the first time she's called him.

CHRISTINE (cont'd)

Are you deaf? Hilary's been yelling the house down, and you're not even dressed. Come on.

RUPERT

Ja.

Looking outside again, the rain is lashing down.

NEWSREADER

...have been praised for the dam wall's engineering marvel and symbolism of Progress / that will bring electric power to both Southern and Northern Rhodesia.

/Rupert snorts in derision.

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

RUPERT!

RUPERT

(startled into action)
Coming.

INT. TREVELYAN HOME - NIGHT

A large opulent house is teeming with European guests dressed in smart evening wear. African waiters, dressed in white uniforms pass unacknowledged through the rooms distributing drinks and canapes. A large Christmas tree takes up most of the reception hall.

Rupert moves through the crowd in an old suit and tie, looking incredibly uncomfortable, dragging on his cigarette to calm his nerves.

MARTHA TREVELYAN

Christine! So glad you could make it. And Rupert, what a surprise.

CHRISTINE

We're both thrilled to be here.
But what weather!

(CONTINUED)

MARTHA TREVELYAN

I know. Theo's thinking of trading in the Chevrolet for a boat. Do come through. Rupert, I have just the person for you to talk to. Have you met Minister Stumbles? Arthur! Arthur!

ARTHUR STUMBLES (60s) a small wiry man turns at the hostess's call.

MARTHA TREVELYAN (cont'd)

Arthur, this is Rupert Fothergill, the former game ranger I was telling you about. He used to work with Archie Fraser, you remember you met him earlier? Rupert looks around warily for his ex-boss, catches sight of Archie across the room.

MARTHA TREVELYAN (cont'd)

No one knows the bush better than Rupert. He's just the person you want to talk to about your land clearing plans. And Rupert, this is Arthur Stumbles, Minister of Roads, Irrigation and Lands.

Stumbles holds out his hand for Rupert to shake.

STUMBLES

How do you do? Good to meet a like-minded lover of the land, eh?

Rupert mumbles a polite response. Stumbles gestures to his cigarette.

STUMBLES

Still, a little less wilderness and a few more tobacco farms would be a vast improvement, I think we can both agree?

Unamused, Rupert's polite façade drops.

EXT. VERANDA, TREVELYAN HOME - LATER

Tie loosened, Rupert stands beneath the shelter of the veranda and chainsmokes. He cannot escape the chatter of the party though and his expression grows darker the more he overhears the conversations around him.

PARTY GUEST #1

...that Batonka lot up in Kariba are an ungrateful lot, eh?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PARTY GUEST #1 (cont'd)
They've been given new clinics,
new schools - what more do they
want?

PARTY GUEST #2
A good thing their children are
being taught in English. Give
them half a chance at a future
anyway.

PARTY GUEST #1
Exactly. Get them away from all
that voodoo nonsense.

RUPERT
(under his breath)
Wankers.

PARTY GUEST #3
Pardon?

The guests look at him in surprise. Rupert looks taken
aback that he was heard. After a moment's hesitation he
addresses them head-on.

RUPERT
Have you any idea what all this
mass development is doing to the
country?

PARTY GUEST #1
Certainly, it's pulling it up out
of the Dark Ages.

RUPERT
You're killing this place - its
cultures, its wildlife. You talk
about stamping them out like it's
a good thing!

PARTY GUEST #1
You do realise you are one of us.

PARTY GUEST #2
(eyeing Rupert's tan)
Although one can be forgiven for
being mistaken.

Titters drift around the eavesdroppers.

PARTY GUEST #3
Progress can't happen without
stepping on a few toes.

He gives Rupert a superior smile as other guests call out "Hear! Hear!" Their raised voices are attracting attention, amongst the onlookers steps Stumbles and Archie.

RUPERT

You call the removal of 35,000 Batonga people from their ancestral homes Progress? The needless drowning of wild animals? I'm sure they don't see it as Progress.

PARTY GUEST #3

Those animals have more sense than you give them credit for. They'll sure to move to higher ground.

RUPERT

But this is no flood they've ever experienced. Two hundred square miles of their habitat will be underwater.

PARTY GUEST #1

(scoffing)

Save us your sentimental blubbing!

RUPERT

I'm / not-

STUMBLES

/What would you have us do, Mr Fothergill? It's all well and good you standing there preaching to us about preserving Mother Nature and her children but I don't see you doing much else about it.

RUPERT

I-

STUMBLES

You going to go up there and save all the animals? Fancy yourself as a modern day Noah?

Everyone laughs. Rupert looks around uncertainly, catches the eye of Christine, who nods. *Sock it to 'em.* Rupert squares his shoulders.

RUPERT

Maybe. Yes. I-

He is interrupted by guffaws.

(CONTINUED)

RUPERT (cont'd)
I-I'm not prepared to sit back
and watch our wildlife disappear
because of our - your ignorance,
your arrogance.

Rupert despairs at his laughing audience.

ARCHIE
Minister Stumbles!

Archie's authority shuts up the guests.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
The Game Department are putting
together a rescue operation. Mr
Fothergill here will be leading
it.

Rupert looks at him in surprise.

ARCHIE (cont'd)
We may not save all the animals,
but we have the responsibility to
at least try.

Rupert and Archie share a look of mutual resolve.