

Michael Stanley, *Deadly Harvest: A Detective Kubu Mystery*.

New York: HarperCollins, 2013, 477 pages, ISBN 978-1-59420-397-8.

Deadly Harvest, the latest Detective Kubu mystery from the combined pens of Michael Sears and Stanley Trollip is the fourth, and certainly the best (so far) of the series of multiple murder mysteries—multiple because so many are those that die in each volume—on the voluminous Gaborone CID detective of traditional build, Assistant Superintendent David ‘Kubu’ Bengo of Acacia Street.

The previous three Detective Kubu mysteries have been reviewed in *Mmegi*: *Death of the Mantis* (3 June 2011); *A Deadly Trade* (9 October 2009); and *A Carrion Death* (31 October 2008). If you wish to know more about them, please look them up on the web. The authors also have a *Detective Kubu Newsletter* that is now up to number 18 that is available on the web.

Deadly Harvest is dedicated ‘for Alice Mogwe and Unity Dow who fight the battles we just write about’. What makes this thriller so good is that it cuts so close to the bone. When you are reading it you have to keep reminding yourself that it is fiction. The authors are also particularly thankful to a number of policemen: the previous Commissioner of Police in Botswana, Thebeyame Tsimako, and Senior Superintendent Roger Dixon of the South African Police. Each part of the novel is graced by relevant quotes from William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

This is important to know because this work of creative imagination features not only Kubu, who is already well known to many of you, and his immediate superior whom you should know well, Jacob Mabaku, Director of the Botswana Criminal Investigation Department (CID), plus Kubu’s other colleagues at CID at Kgale View, including the forensic expert Zanele Dlamini, IT expert Helenka Koslov and Ian MacGregor the Botswana Police’s pathologist. In addition two senior security officers enter this novel as people who rely on the powers to be gained from muti. An opposition politician accompanies them in this ill-gotten pursuit.

In the background hovers the unsolved mystery of Segametsi Mogomotsi in 1994—she was ‘fourteen when she disappeared while trying to sell oranges to raise money for a church excursion’ (p.19). The authors then say, with unusual understatement, ‘Her dismembered body was found months later’. Those in Botswana who experienced the rolling strikes, shooting of an innocent woman by the SSG, and the continuously failed investigations, culminating in a report by Scotland Yard that was never released, know that Segametsi’s body was dumped soon after she vanished near the gates of the Radikolo Community Junior Secondary School in Mochudi, and that many people believed that those in high offices who used muti to enhance their powers were being protected.

Deadly Harvest reflects this stance, and introduces a new character to the series, a crusading detective, the forces first woman, Samantha Khama, from Mochudi. She is angry and wants action because she knows what happened to Segametsi and this time doesn’t want to let anyone be protected, no matter who they are or how high their office. Samantha is a welcome addition to Kubu’s team—at least for the reader. For Kubu she is a challenge. He was allocated Samantha to break her in, and found her prickliness difficult. She said to him at one point, ‘I was told you would be sympathetic, that you weren’t like the others! But you’re the same, aren’t you? In favour of women’s rights in words, but not in action’. When in secondary school Samantha was a friend of Segametsi Mogomotsi.

Detective Kubu still likes his favourite drink steelworks, but with a good meal, a fine dry red wine. Joy still works at a preschool. Where Dr Pilane volunteers as the physician for the children. Kubu and Joy add an orphan to their family, little Nono. Soon she and their daughter Tumi are fast friends. Kubu’s father Wilmon Bengu is aging and beginning to lose his memory. Overtime the deaths escalate, and the police and CID seem useless. In all, before the riddle of the muti killings is solved, seven people will die. Detective Kubu is in a quandary. Samantha is smarting with anger at what she sees as incompetence, even a possible cover up. The trail rises higher and higher until it reaches to a Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Kubu wondered if Mabaku was serious. He was taking about a deputy commissioner of police! An educated man, respected through Southern Africa. Then he thought of the man in the room next to them, scared and sweating and shivering. He'd probably absorbed his belief in witch doctors with his mother's milk (p.278).

First a ten year old girl, Lesego Betse, disappeared in Mochudi. Then some time later, a fifteen-year-old girl, Tombi Maleng, vanished. Samantha Khama was finally assigned to the cases nearly five months after they had gone stale. She seeks out the help of Professor Kees van der Meer at the University of Botswana. He briefs her on the nature and practice of the use of *muti* from humans in Southern Africa. He also tells her, 'Many, many people believe in witchcraft ...and many in the police also believe. That's why so few cases are solved' (p.45).

This was followed by a *leswafe*, Mabulo Owido from East Africa, vanishing after having a few drinks at 'Big Mamma Knows All' bar and restaurant. Mabulo had come to Botswana from Tanzania to escape witch doctors. One year 50 albinos had been murdered for *muti* there. Albinos are desired, as Kubu says, because they have 'very powerful spirits. The spirit has sucked up everything from the body, even the colour of the skin. It is very bad to free one of those spirits by force. It's very powerful *muti* for a witch doctor, but extremely dangerous' (p.306).

Witness Maleng, Tombi's father, has an idea who took his daughter. He pursues his hunches, and suspecting William 'Bill' Marumo, a charismatic opposition politician whom he had seen talking to his daughter along the road, takes revenge into his own hands. Witness has been told by another Sangoma, Mma Gondo, whom he consults to find out what had happened to Tombi, 'You will know the man when you see him'. He thinks he does, and kills him. He was convinced because Marumo had unexpectedly won an election he was meant to lose. He stakes out Marumo at his home on Pela Crescent in Gaborone, when his girlfriend Jubjub Oteng is out. Dr Jake Pilane, pediatrician, lived next door to Bill Marumo. A Suspicious undertaker, Kopano Rampa, removes his body.

Deputy Commissioner Tebogo Gobey, has used a Sangoma, and fears his nephew, Joshua Gobey, head of the police diamond division, is consulting the same traditional doctor who has an evil bent, who uses human body parts to make *muti*, to enhance the powers of his clients. The Sangoma's clients fear him intensely. They refuse to talk to the police. '*Muti* from a young girl is very powerful. It is used to bring success and power ...If I say anything, a *tokoloshe* may kill me when I sleep. Or I may get very sick. Or my children may disappear. Witch doctors who make *muti* using humans are very powerful. The most powerful' (p.176).

Kubu tries to get assistance from Mrs Gobey after her husband has died. He tells her about the three *muti* killings they are following 'We think all of these people were killed by the same man. How many more are there going to be?' (p.349). Joshua Gobey used a computer in the shadows of an isolated shebeen in north Gaborone and a secret programme on hushmail to communicate to his Sangoma. Breaks in the case will come from unseal quarters. But very few readers will probably be able to guess until near the end of this mystery novel, who is responsible for the *muti* killings. Unlike Scotland Yard's involvement, there is a final resolution with Detective Kubu in fiction.

Reviewed by Sheridan Griswold
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