

## Book One – The Story of Pachacuti

the first feature seen as they approached. The singing swelled in volume and mood as the distance diminished and the straggle of mud daub huts became distinguishable, their darker thatched roofs seeming to bob and weave, detached, in the haze. They laboured noisily up the rutted dusty rise, the singing rising to a crescendo of sorts as though seeking a response from the village.

Then the melody of voices died abruptly as they entered the circle of huts and could see, strewn on the ground among them, a dozen or so human bodies. At first Adam thought he was looking at bundles of discarded clothing and his eyes moved from one to another seeking comprehension, oblivious to all save the still and ragged bundles dotted on the dusty ground and the fearful horrifying possibilities lurking half identified on the fringes of his imagination. The Tojo stalled and jerked to a halt, unnoticed. The colours of the clothing were those of Sudanese peasants, greens, yellows and blues, and a preponderance of red, mostly red. It was the incongruity of colour that finally impressed on Adam's consciousness the reality he was trying desperately not to see. Like a final jig-saw piece it dropped into place revealing other details he could no longer deny. He saw the unnatural sprawling of limbs and the open sightless eyes, mouths that gaped in soundless screams and under every crumpled pile, a still glistening mat of red and black that was the lifeblood of a discarded human being merging back into the soils of a land that could not protect it. And about the whole horrible scene there was a freshness, an immediacy like a movie scene paused, a stage play in intermission, to be continued. But it took Adam a while to register this nuance, and when he did it was too late. He and the group had become players in the latest horrifying act of a religious saga whose beginnings were lost in some ancient conflict that no-one alive could truthfully reconstruct.

All had dismounted from the vehicles, the ex-pats mechanically, unthinking, temporarily stupefied, and the Sudanese leaping down in desperation, racing, searching from one bundle to the next. There was a brief period of anguished cries and sobbing that burned indelibly into Adam's ears and then a shattering rattle of gunfire and the scene changed from that of an atrocity already enacted to one in progress.