

## **Hippo Wealth**

by ilbv

Ken stumbled around in the jungle for what felt like hours. "I would be the only one to go left when everyone else went right." he muttered to himself. "It's common sense man, go RIGHT, it's the RIGHT way to go, not left! Idiot."

Ken, always the tropical environment enthusiast was looking forward to his latest rainforest trek, all in the hopes of getting more footage for his self-made Documentary. He was hoping to have it submitted to festivals and raise awareness of the rainforest's suffering at human actions and why it was such an important and cause to preserve it the way nature had intended.

Ken, a man of 28 was no stranger to this environment, having been trekking through various rainforests around the globe, studying and learning about them.

He had gained some internet fame on his Youtube Channel from the footage he had shot and for his speeches he gives at conferences about the topic of preservation of endangered locations and species.

Turning his hand-held camera to himself, Ken grinned and began to record. "So not to worry, I have come away from the group in order to bring to you, my loyal viewers a personal in-depth view of the rainforest and all it has to offer." Turning his camera, Ken recorded gorgeous views of tropical trees and huge swelling red fruits and a small brook that streamed off to join a much larger river across the way. "These fruits, while looking enticing are actually poisonous to the human body, so it's a no go my friends, better to munch on a vine, which can be filled with water as well and nourish you for longer if you ever get stranded in such a place." Ken filmed himself walking along the rugged terrain as he narrated more of his discoveries and occasionally he would standby his camera and record notes and memorandums.

After an hour Ken decided it was probably the smartest option to employ the use of his survival kit of he was to make it out alright. Getting lost was not his idea of the best professional move but it did enable him to have a closer relationship with his cause, and he had actually enjoyed it more than he thought he would when he first found himself separated from the tour group. "I can actually better relate to my cause in even a deeper way."

A few whistle blows later from his emergency kit, and another tour group not too far off had come to investigate. The guide was concerned and the tourists intrigued, but Ken raised a hand, "not to worry, I am perfectly alright, not even a scratch or abrasion."

The guide had radioed in to Ken's group and reported his status. His own group had just arrived at base and were in the middle of a head count when the news was sent so while there was some mild concern, also relief that a disaster had not unfolded.

When Ken returned with the group, he was immediately flooded by guides and a medic team that insisted he be checked out, "all for the sake of safety" Ken chuckled at his camera as he recorded this behind the scenes part of his adventure.

"The company probably just wants to cover their asses and avoid a lawsuit." Ken mused, but he was not bitter toward anything that had happened and after being cleared by medics he was sent on his way. The head of Department of his tour group came and met with Ken right away to apologize and insist that better methods of crowd control were going to be implemented. He also mentioned he planned on firing the guide of Ken's group. "That won't be necessary, I kind of wandered off myself, it was my mistake, and honestly you do not need to worry about me filing a lawsuit." The head's eyes widened only a little bit to Ken's enjoyment but he took it all with good sincerity. "I would at least like to offer you a trip with our company, free of charge." He handed Ken a package of documents. Ken took it and smiled. "Why thank you, I would enjoy a second trip." He opened the pamphlet on the front and his eyes widened, looking up at the director he said, "Africa? Really?"

Within the next week Ken had made the arrangements and found himself heading out to the West Coast of Africa. "Now I'm not much about the 3<sup>rd</sup> world, but it should really add to my film." Ken had written in a journal as he flight was getting ready to land.

Aside from the heat and bugs sized beyond the normal level of human comfort, Ken took in the smell of heated air free of the scents and influenced of Western World Big Cities. He flipped up his camera and recorded away, commenting on everything. "This is sure to be an experience I remember!"

Ken was housed up in a Motel that had basic amenities and an Air Conditioning unit that was barely able to click on. Swiveling his camera around the room he commented, "I am surprised there is at least running water and a shower here. This trip might not be so drab after all." Now the running water was the color of peanut oil and smelled a bit metallic, so Ken didn't plan on drinking any but it washed him well enough. His bed was a single and had a mattress that had its fair share of lumps. The springboard let out a chorus of screeches as he laid down on it his first night, enticing a scuttle-beetle the size of a large dinner plate to wriggle out from its dark nook and scurry up the wall giving Ken a start. It met a crunchy end when he hammered it with his shoe half a dozen times.

After a day of getting used to his surroundings, Ken went for a hike along the river that ran past his drab motel. The water was on the blue side, but it looked a little foggy. Along his hike he saw the remains of a Hindu funeral and burial ceremony, the people were each taking turns tossing ashes into the river. "I thought that was something that happened in India...hmm." Ken pondered; he filmed some of the proceedings as part of historical research and moved along.

Ken followed the river until he came to a fruit and flea market which was milling about with many people, vendors called out for people to come and buy their products and customers browsed and made purchases. "Seems as good a place as any to grab some lunch". Ken filmed all over the market, and he even interviewed customers and vendors. He tried some foods he had never heard of before and found them to be similar to things he had eaten in America, but the authentic version.

While pondering over the corruption of the American Food Industry, there were loud shouts and screams erupting from near the river. Ken looked up and saw people fleeing, like any action seeker he grabbed his camera, abandoned his plate and headed toward the commotion.

As he got closer there were loud grunts and crunching sounds, and Ken had imagined that perhaps he was going to find a warthog that had gotten loose out of a pen. Rounding a kart, Ken stopped suddenly, his camera rolling as a huge Hippopotamus turned around, crunching on a melon. The thing was gigantic, and bits of fruit fell from its jaws as it bit the melon to pulp before making an audible gulp even from far away. The beast took Ken in for a moment, probably wondering if the camera was a weapon, but then losing interest it turned back to the fruit stand it had plowed over and proceeded to feed. Ken filmed and watched with fascination as the large mammal engorged itself, eating and eating, his stomach growing bigger and bigger just with the sheer volume of fruit that it was eating. The Hippo had gained so much weight from its feast that it was barely able to turn around and wobble over to the river again from where it had come. Ken filmed it splash into the water and sink beneath the surface, then turning back to film the carnage left in its wake.

The hippo had obliterated several stands and vendor stations, smashing merchandise and feasting on the stock of nearly fourteen farmers who shook their fists at the river and howled in outrage.

"Curse you Olamilekan! May you die a thousand deaths!" one vendor shouted, "Drown in the river you scum!" another yelled out. "I hope the ashes of our ancestors choke you're greedy throat beast!" The yells and jeers died down after a while and the people went to work cleaning up the mess. Ken felt obligated to lend a helping hand and as he was picking up wood beams from a collapsed canopy roof he looked over to a man picking up fruit that had somehow survived the attack. "What happened exactly?" he asked.

The man was inspecting the fruits and found one to have a puncture in it's flesh, he threw it down angrily as it splatted on the ground.

"For years our riverside has been tormented by that beast, he comes out of the water and storms our markets and villages in search of food for his greedy belly. We call him Olamilekan."

"Olama-what-i-can?" Ken tried to say it but was having a tongue twister time if it. "Lekan, for you foreigners. It means, 'my wealth has increased' bah!" The man spat on the ground in disdain. "If only that were true, for whoever captures the beast will indeed be a king, and have the wealth of all who are grateful to be rid of it! Alas, many have tried, but met their deaths at his teeth or his crushing weight. It is not wise to best a Hippo. but his name is a slap to us, as we all struggle to make it through each day, then when that monster comes for our hard-earned work and produce, it is a jest from the gods."

Ken had wished he recorded all of this man's speech, and was almost tempted to ask him to say it all again, but instead just asked, "why doesn't the village move away from the river?" The man laughed, "This has been our home for generations, we will not sacrifice our history and memories for a bully of a Hippo! We will all die before he gets to push us out of our home!" Ken went back to tossing wreckage in a pile while the man tried to recover fruit.

That night in his bed after he had rid it of the family of spiders in his pillow, Ken wondered over the Hippo's attack and wondered how he could help the people. "Being a king would be something, but I don't fancy being stomped to death."

The next morning after a mild breakfast, Ken set out with his camera and his desire to help and walked the river, looking for the Hippo. He had walked for hours one way, passing the wreckage of the market and even another village down the river, but seeing no sign of the Hippo he turned back and make the huge hike all over again. However upon passing near the wreckage of the market on his return, when the sun was going down, Ken heard a spray of water and saw the Hippo emerge from the water, snuffling and smelling around. It lumbered out of the water, Ken noticed it's huge stomach had shrunken flat, seemingly having digested its hoard of the last raid.

Ken hit record and started creeping up on the Hippo, watching as the beast sniffed around piles of wood and wiring. It licked at the mushy fruits still strewn about that the birds and bugs hadn't finished off yet and grunted contently. "Here is the Hippo that I witnessed laying waste to the carnage of the fruit market, it has returned to clean up any scraps it may have left behind. I am going to try to scare it off like how you do with bears, by making myself seem bigger and shouting. Wish me luck." Ken set his camera down facing the Hippo, and then took a deep breath, "arms wide, loud shouts" he told himself, and then he dashed forward and began to wave his arms wildly and shout.

The Hippo, Lekan turned with a snort and look of indignation. Ken shouted and yelled at the beast, but instead of fleeing the Hippo grunted and barrelled at Ken. "Oh Shit!" Ken screamed and as he turned to run, Lekan with a mighty bellow came upon the man and opened his might mouth wide, as wide as hippos on children's cartoons can open, and clamped it shut on Ken's body. Ken shrieked in horror and Lekan opened and snapped his mouth shut again and took the entire human into his massive maw. Ken was pressed against the Hippo's tongue and wedged up against the back part of the pallet. His butt was already at Lehan's throat and Lekan was crunching hard down on Ken. He was shrieking and thrashing, and while the teeth tried to press down on him, because of how he had been scooped up and the angle at which Lekan had wedged Ken in his mouth, he could not bite the human, and since Ken was struggling it was hard to toss him into the right place for his teeth to bite. Frustrated Lekan huffed out of his nostrils and threw his head back, opening his throat and swallowing. Ken was almost about to pass out from fear as the sound he remember from last night with the fruit was now in his ears up close and ten times louder. This time HE was the fruit, and the hippo was swallowing him alive! Lekan swallowed again, and again, and Ken slipped into the tight squishy folded of the Hippo's thick and tight esophagus and was consumed.

As soon as Lekan made the final swallow, he lowered his head and shook his head and flopped his little ears. The human had put up a struggle but was now sliding down his neck and into his large ever-hungry body. He had tasted good, like the other villagers he had eaten in his past, but this was the first time he had swallowed a human whole and alive, he liked it. He rumbled as he felt the bulge of the struggling human slide into his stomach and grunted as his stomach bulged large and proud, full of a squirming new meal.

Ken had slid down into the Hippo faster than he had thought possible, one minute he was shouting at it, the next he was inside the belly of the beast and suffocating on the noxious fumes of a Hippo's interior. It was sulphurous and sticky with heat, not just salvia and stomach slime. "holy shit, I've just been swallowed alive by a damn Hippopotamus!" Ken swore in terrified stupefaction and started beating and struggling against the strong gurgling stomach walls. He beat and kicked and scratched at them as they flapped like rubber curtains.

He stopped as a rumbling tremble rolled under him and then went up the esophagus and throat and as Lekan belched like he had never belched before, the stomach sac quaked and shook while all of the air was sucked out and Ken thought he was going to suffocate before Lekan also found how tired swallowing a human made him and he drew in a breath as he opened his maw to the sky and yawned, inhaling fresh air right down his throat and into his lungs, the buildup of in-rushing air went into his stomach and Ken breathed with relief.

Lekan shook himself and snorted, he blinked and bent his head, sniffing around to see if by chance he could find more food. The hippo wondered over to where Ken had been crouching,

following his scent and happened upon Ken's still recording camera. Lekan licked it, nipped it, then pulled it into his maw and swallowed that too. Satisfied there was nothing else around to eat, Lekan waddled back into the river, his human filled belly swaying and wriggling from his capture.

Ken felt his camera bash his head as it landed down inside the beast's belly, and he picked it up amazed. "That bastard ate my camera" he exclaimed. There was little to no light inside the foul smelling chamber but the camera had a little light that helped Ken see a bit. He was surprised to see the camera had survived it's swallowing and was still recording. "Well folks, it seems I may have made the biggest mistake of my life going against a Hippo. I don't recommend you try it, unless you want to end up like me." He knew while his camera was on and recording he couldn't let his audience see how truly afraid he was, it helped him calm down and try to regulate a plan. Ken could hear Lekan belch occasional and grunt often, and even the sounds of things like the Hippo's breathing and heartbeat. Soon Ken heard splashing and underwater sounds, realizing the hippo had sunk back into the river. "I'm basically in a living submarine." Ken had to smile for the briefest of moments, "but I won't be living much longer if I can't get out of here." He thought grimly. "How long does it take to be digested inside a hippo?" He asked his camera questions in good humor, but the concern was mounting.

"Hippo's don't have long throats...maybe...hmm..." Ken waited until he heard the Hippo breathe from surfacing and waited for the great lump to go on shore to sun itself and nap.

Lekan had felt his human meal come to rest inside of his stomach and so now decided that he should begin to digest him, so he crawled out of the river and found a nice comfortable place to rest and nap, to sleep off his human meal. He enjoyed as his belly swayed while he walked and once he lay down on the dirt, he rolled a bit and rested one of his front legs on his stomach, feeling the human inside and rubbing over him. If he could have chuckled, he would have. Then after a deep yawn, Lekan closed his eyes and went to sleep.

Ken rolled over and around as the Hippo played with him from inside its stomach, he even felt the indignency of pushing at the hippo's belly wall when he felt the hippo pat and rub over him.

"It's time to make my move." he told the camera, "here goes nothing." Ken plunged his hand and arm up the esophagus of the Hippo, he pushed at the back of the throat as hard as he could. He also covered the opening to Lekan's lungs with his arm, cutting off the airway and stimulating the gag reflex.

Lekan bugged his eyes open and began to choke, retching and shaking his head and getting up and wobbling around, trying to focus and unclog his throat, he swallowed and tried to breathe, nothing was working, he would have to give up his meal or risk dying. Instincts took over and Lekan hacked and coughed, heaving his stomach and Ken felt himself lurched up and lurched

out, forward and in a heave of stomach slime, sulphurous gases and vomit, he was upchucked out of the Hippo's body and sprawled in the hot African dirt.

Ken stood so fast he felt light headed. He shook himself and swiped at his arms and tried to rid himself of as much grime as possible, the smell was so foul he wretched up his breakfast.

Ken and Lekan felt gross and winded, but Ken came to his sense faster and yelled at the Hippo, genuinely startling it this time, and Lekan, afraid of the human that had tasted so good but that had nearly killed him grunted in fear and ran for the river, with a splash he rumbled into it and sank below the surface. Swimming his lazy ass as fast as he could to get away, and Lekan decided Humans were not too good to mess with and decided to stay clear from them.

Ken sat down and put his head between his knees, he breathed deeply and then lay back, relieved he had actually managed to escape the belly of the Hippo. He stayed like that for about a half hour, and then decided he was going to get ready to leave. He had enough of this African excursion. Sitting up, he went cautiously to the riverside to wash himself. Now soaking wet, Ken started to make his way along the river, following the moon's light. As he passed the mess of where he was vomited out, he saw his camera and picked that up. It was sputtering and dying, probably worn away from the time inside Lekan's gut. Ken popped out the memory card and kept it clutched in his fist. "Best to keep this" he thought.

Once he managed to get back to his hotel, it was near 4 in the morning, Ken took a cold shower and washed himself clean of the Hippo grime and then went right to packing his suitcase. He checked out around 7am and grabbed a bread roll for the road. His cabbie took him to the airport and Ken boarded his flight without looking back.

He slept the whole flight back and had mixed dreams of sulphur smelling fruits and grunting men and crunching bones...he woke up as the plane bumped along the runway, the sensation kind of reminded Ken of the feeling or rocking along inside Lekan's stomach.

When Ken was in the comfort of his own bedroom, he flopped on his bed, then thought better of it and had another shower, with hot water and Western shampoos and cleaning products. He scrubbed every inch of himself and probably shed a layer of skin doing it.

Then he sat at his desk and looked at his camera memory card. "The things you have seen." he told it. Ken watched for the first time the very clear videos of his encounter with Lekan, the footage was dramatic and startling and the sound was really excellent. The hippos' chilling swallowing of him made Ken shiver. "This is incredible footage, I've got to show everyone."

Ken may have been somewhat famous before, but his brush with death and Lekan had garnered him way more attention than he had thought. "Man eaten by Hippo and lives to tell

about it” was a popular and trending news story. Ken was interviewed by dozens of news stations and even was put on Talk shows, where he shared his story and also used the attention to focus on his causes for rainforest preservation, which caught the attention of major preservation groups who wanted Ken to be front man for their causes too. There was a lot of money in it, and Ken was able to use his new wealth to fund countless treks into the rainforest and plant trees. Ken was in the process of writing a book about his adventure and even green-lit a survival TV show to feature him on a two-part episode.

As a crowning touch, Ken traveled back to the African village where it all started, bringing a news team with him as he recounted where things took place, and he visited the fruit market again, finding the man he had talked with as well as vendors who had suffered and was amazed to learn that Lekan had not been seen since Ken had left. It was a joyous victory for the village, and Ken made sure cameras were rolling when he made the announcement of his very large donation to the village so that they could live better. It was a very tear-jerking moment for many of the villagers and Ken was hugged by everyone.

“Thank you so much for this generosity!” the man had exclaimed to Ken. Ken patted him on the shoulder and said, “Olamilekan.” The man was confused. Ken smiled and said, “my wealth has increased.”

**THE END**