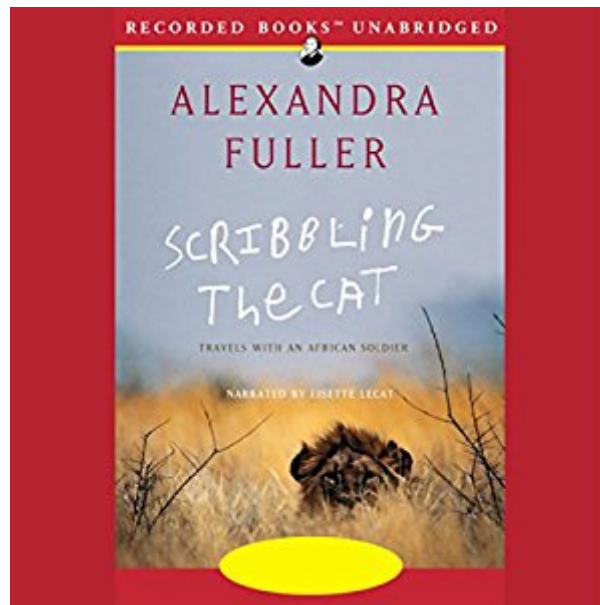


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# Scribbling The Cat: Travels With An African Soldier



## Synopsis

When Alexandra ("Bo") Fuller was home in Zambia a few years ago, visiting her parents for Christmas, she asked her father about a nearby banana farmer who was known for being a "tough bugger". Her father's response was a warning to steer clear of him; he told Bo: "Curiosity scribbled the cat." Nonetheless, Fuller began her strange friendship with the man she calls K, a white African and veteran of the Rhodesian war. With the same fiercely beautiful prose that won her acclaim for *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Fuller here recounts her friendship with K. K is, seemingly, a man of contradictions: tattooed, battle scarred, and weathered by farm work, he is a lion of a man, feral and bulletproof. Yet he is also a born-again Christian, given to weeping when he recollects his failed romantic life, and more than anything else welling up inside with memories of battle. For his war, like all wars, was a brutal one, marked by racial strife, jungle battles, unimaginable tortures, and the murdering of innocent civilians, and K has blood on his hands. Driven by K's memories, Fuller and K decide to enter the heart of darkness in the most literal way, by traveling from Zambia through Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) and Mozambique to visit the scenes of the war and to meet other veterans. It is a strange journey into the past, one marked at once by somber reflections and odd humor. What results from Fuller's journey is a remarkably unbiased and unsentimental glimpse of men who have killed, mutilated, tortured, and scrambled to survive during wartime and who now must attempt to live with their past and live past their sins. In these men, too, we get a glimpse of life in Africa, a land that besets its creatures with pests, plagues, and natural disasters, making the people there at once more hardened and more vulnerable than elsewhere. *Scribbling the Cat* is an engrossing and haunting look at war, Africa, and the lines of sanity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was very unclear about how to rate this book. It's brilliantly written and about a subject -- the brutality of the war in Rhodesia and the human fallout from it -- that we don't know much about in the US. It's an amazing, up-close picture of a desolate part of Africa, that is nonetheless teeming with life and interesting individuals. But there is a kind of patent dishonesty going on here that clouds the book's best intentions and the author's considerable storytelling gifts. The story is straightforwardly presented as autobiographical, but Ms. Fuller is incredibly stingy with revealing herself (while she virtually guts her subject, the former White Rhodesian soldier she calls "K"). In order to get "K" to open up to her and tell his absolutely wrenching, devastating story, Ms. Fuller manipulates him in an unusually cruel way -- she allows him to fall in love with her (even though she is a married woman with two children back in the US) and continues her deception throughout a long road trip, during which he confides his darkest secrets to her, believing that she is "the one" -- the perfect mate sent to him by God to heal his loneliness and his pain. Although the stories of military violence, racism and horrific African poverty are deeply affecting, I was profoundly disturbed at the way Alexandra Fuller obtained K's life story. In many respects, she hurt and victimized this terribly damaged man in ways that are psychologically worse than violence -- by betraying his trust. (When I was in high school, there was a not-very-nice term for women who use their sexuality to keep men on a string.) Furthermore, Ms. Fuller is coy enough not to let us know if the attraction was at all mutual or what the state of her marriage was.

Alexandra Fuller is a white woman who grew up in Rhodesia in the 1970s. Life was harsh and there was a war on. Eventually, her parents lost their farm and had to leave the country which is now called Zimbabwe. Eventually the family settled in Zambia and still live there. Alexandra, however, married and moved to Wyoming, where she lives with her husband and two children. One day, while visiting her parents, she met a man who had been a soldier in the defeated Rhodesian army. She was fascinated by him as well as the whole story of what had happened in Rhodesia during her childhood. A few months later she planned a short trip with him into the land where the fighting occurred. It was a journey of discovery for both of them. This book is the result of that journey. Let me explain the title. The word "scribbling" means "killing" in the slang of the region. And it refers to the expression "curiosity killed the cat". She decided to take this trip because she was curious. It's as simple as that. The former soldier, who she refers to as "K" is war hardened. He's now a loner,

living on a farm he literally carved out of the African bush himself. Some native Africans work for him but his relationships with them are simply that of boss and worker. His former marriage had ended in divorce and it was clear from the beginning that he was interested in Alexandra even though she was married. She wasn't interested in him in that way. And I'll say right up front there that even though towards the end of their trip there was some romantic tension between them, it never materialized. The book instead is about their relationship to Africa and the way that Africa itself has shaped their personalities.

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