



The Last Lions

Dereck Joubert

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A symbol of mythic potency, the African lion has ruled the human imagination for millennia. But in Botswana's Okavango Delta, the world's most awe-inspiring hunters are challenged not only by their waterlogged territory, but also by their formidable prey—the buffalo—who wield their massive horns with deadly accuracy. Pulsing with ancient rhythms of wild Africa, this harsh and eternal struggle is compelling, powerful, and poignant. Award-winning filmmakers and National Geographic Explorers-in-Residence Beverly and Dereck Joubert, give us an unforgettable glimpse of this iconic drama in the official companion book to their feature film, *The Last Lions*, and warn that due to declining numbers of lions in the wild, it may soon end forever.

In fascinating text and breathtaking images, the Jouberts reveal both the beauty and danger of the Okavango Delta and its inhabitants. We follow a lone lioness, Ma di Tau—Mother of Lions—and three newborns as they flee a ferocious rival pride. Braving the Delta, despite their instinctive hatred of water, the lioness and her cubs head for an island lost in a labyrinth of streams. She and two cubs escape successfully; a lurking crocodile snatches the third.

Soon, their refuge is invaded by a vast buffalo herd—aggressive, unafraid, a constant threat, yet the lions' only prey. But even as Ma di Tau hones her tactics and stalking skills, she is trapped between throngs of buffalo and a rival lion pride. So she does what all of her kind must—adapt or die.

The Last Lions is a story of family and hope in a world of wild beauty and relentless predation that is a superbly photographed, sharply detailed intimate portrait of one dauntless mother struggling to protect her young and preserve her bloodline. It is a vivid, universal vision of the fate of lions everywhere, isolated on tiny islands amid a sea of humanity. Can we rescue them, or have we already, heedlessly, met the last lions?

For decades the Jouberts have lived among great cats in the wild, observing, documenting, and often discovering unsuspected facets of lion behavior. A key message is that the inexorably rising tide of human population will soon drown what remains of that world unless we act now. The book draws attention to the numbers (500,000 in the 1950s to only 25,000 lions today) and highlights projects that have been enacted to help preserve wilderness for lion habitat.

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