

The truth is, that in dealing with life in South Africa, that adventurous land in which everything under the sun that a writer can imagine seems to have been said or done by someone, it is extremely difficult, however carefully one may step, not to tread on someone's toes. But when it comes to dealing with Rhodesia at a period when there were only a few hundreds of English-speaking people in the country, where everyone knew each other, and of which no episode of public interest can be mentioned without conjuring to memory a score of people who would rise up and say: "I was there!" "That must have been me!" the ground becomes dangerous. Agag himself could not step delicately enough! In fact, the difficulty of the situation is insurmountable. The only way over it is round it; and that is the way I have taken. I have used the history of the country as faithfully as my memory will permit, and I have tried to show the temper of those who lived there in the early days, and how they lived; but to avoid the old vexatious charge of stealing character and using ready-made incidents, I have invented towns that were never on the map, and peopled them with persons who never had existence save in my imagination. Once, it is true, I have let a living figure step across the page—what book about early Rhodesia could make any pretence of being "Rhodesian" that did not contain some word of "Dr. Jim"? And I have let intrepid Burnham, the Scout, tell the tale of those splendid men who fell at Shangani, as he told it just after his escape from the disaster; and I have ventured to speak of what all felt concerning the loss of those heroes who sleep now not far from where the great man whom they loved and served lies at rest in the Matopos.

For the rest—they are people of the land of imagination, all; and if anything they say or do stirs up old griefs and pains, or brings to the mind of anyone some memory that aches, I beg to be acquitted of the intent to do aught but recall with such poor art as I possess some of the alluring sorrow and terrifying charm of old Rhodesian days.

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