

INTERVIEW

THE SILVER-TONGUED DEVIL

PD JAMES AT 90. BY NIGEL FARNDALE



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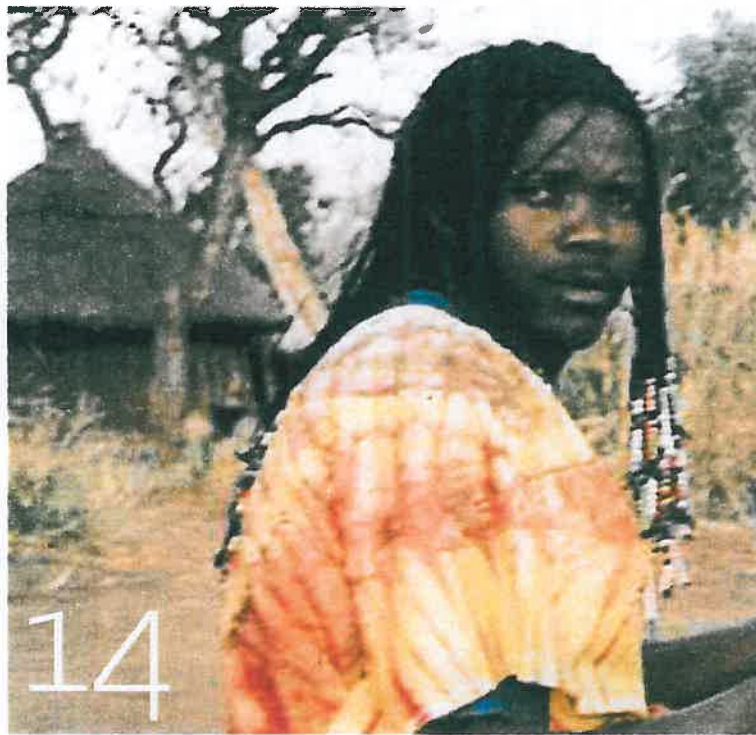
**The child-killer
waging Africa's
bloodiest war**

And one British woman's
fight to stop him

**Christopher Nolan's
cloak of invisibility**

An audience with the
enigmatic director of 'Inception'

18.07.10



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Over the years I've become part of a very close group of about 30 friends, who I consider my second family. We don't manage to get everyone together very often, so I'd love to throw a day-long party for them all at my hilltop home in Beverly Hills.

It would be great to have a lie in but I'd also want my friends and their children to have stayed over the night before, and the kids never let me sleep for long. I'd probably be woken up nice and early by 15 little ones jumping on my bed shouting, 'Auntie Stacia! Get up! It's time to play!'

Wandering bleary-eyed into the kitchen I'd find my fridge and cupboards fully stocked with everything we needed, and set about cooking up a huge feast of pancakes, sausages, scrambled eggs and bacon. I don't really like breakfast, so am happy just to watch the kids tucking in.

Then the kids vs adults activities would begin. There would be games of Marco Polo in the pool, a bowling tournament on the Nintendo Wii and a snooker competition going on downstairs. Every corner of the house would be taken up.

In early afternoon the barbecue would get fired up, a task I leave to the men. It's not that I'm lazy, it's just that fire and I don't mix. In fact, I'd go so

We'd barbecue every meat imaginable, and drink my killer cocktail made from tequila and banana and watermelon schnapps



far as to say that I am a walking fire hazard. My friends are a bunch of carnivores so we'd barbecue every type of meat imaginable, from eye-poppingly spicy shish kebabs and marinated chicken, to sticky pork ribs and juicy beefsteaks. There might be a few vegetables but the main accompaniment would be jugs of my killer cocktail, 'The Anastacia Special'. It's made from top-grade tequila (Patrón is my favourite) and banana and watermelon schnapps. It may be pure alcohol, but it tastes fabulous, and goes down very easily indeed.

After lunch, we'd round up the children and say the magic words: 'Who wants to watch *Shrek*?' Every hand would shoot up, despite the fact they've all watched it 50 times before, and the adults would get a couple of hours off together, which we'd spend playing charades. I absolutely love charades, but my skills are hit and miss.

Then the afternoon activities would resume, until it's time for the kids to go to bed. All of them would have fallen asleep by 10pm, leaving the adults to drink, chat and laugh late into the night.

Anastacia is a judge on the talent show 'Don't Stop Believing', which airs on July 18 on Five. She was talking to Lucinda Everett

ME, THE DEMONIC MASS-MURDERER AND A VERY WAUGH-LIKE WAR

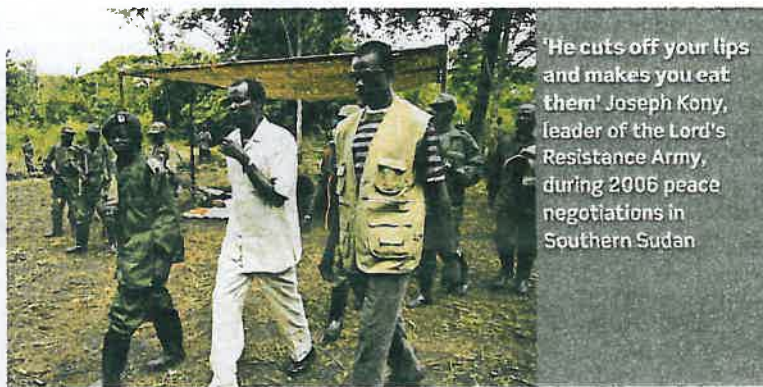


Joseph Kony, a child-killing Ugandan rebel, has evaded capture for decades. Could it be his magical powers? Or something even more farcical? Jane Bussmann (left) tried to find out



A few years back, I decided to get a more noble career. I sent my CV straight to Doctors Without Borders, who were sadly not currently recruiting celebrity journalists (I was hurt, but noticed on their website that Doctors Without Borders also 'does not currently recruit... aromatherapists', and were somewhat taciturn on which international incident led to this ruling). It soon became clear that with only one qualification, writing about stuff, my new career would have to involve writing about *better*, more important stuff.

All I needed was a story, so I Googled 'Most Evil Man in the World' and got Joseph Kony, a random warlord trying to overthrow a random government, Uganda. Then I read the small print. Joseph Kony says he can read your mind, do magic and talk to God. So how did an obvious loon like Kony come to have his own army? Because Joseph Kony kidnaps kids. Since the late 1980s he has abducted somewhere between 20,000 and 66,000 children, and nobody has stopped him. One day you'll be an eight-year-old at school, the next



'He cuts off your lips and makes you eat them' Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, during 2006 peace negotiations in Southern Sudan

you'll be in the Lord's Resistance Army. Or you'll be a 'wife': Kony has 60-odd sex slaves, his commanders up to 15 each. A staggering story to report on.

However, there was an obvious problem in today's media climate. The kids were African. Not a problem, you say? When I pitched Kony and the kidnapped children to a film company, the Hollywood heavy-hitter frowned and said, 'Does it *have* to be in Africa?'

Fortuitously, I came across an American who was going to Uganda to help negotiate a ceasefire with Kony. He was John Prendergast, a hero: a former White House

peacemaker (kicked out by George W Bush, obviously) and one of the world's leading conflict resolution specialists. Even better, he was also extremely attractive. Ignoring the hurdles – for a start, he specialises in conflict resolution; I'm British middle class, we specialise in conflict avoidance – my future was clear. I bought a ticket to war-torn Uganda to follow Prendergast and cover the demise of the most evil man in the world. What could possibly go wrong?

Today, I am not living in a safari lodge with 10 Masai warriors, a chimp that deals blackjack and John Prendergast. In fact, by the time I got

to Uganda he'd been called back to Washington. And because of what I found in Uganda, my career change didn't go as planned either. Kony has not been stopped. He's spread his loathsome operation across three countries. And after five years following this story one thing became clear even to me: Kony was the most evil man in the world all right, but the authorities didn't want to stop him. This is how my career change led not to searing current affairs but to satire – a book called *The Worst Date Ever* – because I arrived in Africa to find I'd stumbled into an Evelyn Waugh farce.

Take the policemen of Gulu Police Station, northern Uganda, where I went to report the theft of my computer and camera. Both had vanished in suspicious circumstances after I had been spotted asking the wrong questions about Kony and his cronies in the wrong hotel bars. The desk sergeant was a skinny cop in gumboots. His stripes were held on his jacket with staples. 'Can I help you?' he said.

'Yes. Someone's stolen my computer,' I said.

'Where is he?' the policeman said. 'I'll shoot him in the head!'

spirit medium. Part of Kony's MO is to cultivate the image of a fiendish monster who cannot be defeated by a mere very well-equipped army.

Even the most respectable experts give credence to Kony's 'mystical' status, the *New York Times* describing him, in all seriousness, as 'a former altar boy who became possessed by spirits'. The spirit apparently responsible for Kony's survival is called Lakwena, the ghost of a First World War Italian army medic. Kony claims Lakwena has helped him avoid Ugandan army attacks since the spirit first possessed him in the 1980s. Except that deep in the backstreets of Gulu, at the headquarters of the Holy Spirit Movement, is a man who claims that Lakwena is actually possessing him.

The movement was started in 1986 by Alice Auma, a peasant who one day announced to her neighbours that Lakwena had made her bulletproof and they should do what she said.

Lakwena, truly the Peter Mandelson of the spirit world, eventually 'abandoned' Alice and took refuge in one of her followers. But was it Kony?

Inside the tiny church the walls were painted with strange religious symbols and a skinny old white-haired man in a white robe was waving his thin arms in prayer. This was Kony's great uncle, Father Severino, a former warlord nicknamed Otong-tong, one who chops victims to pieces. Father Severino claims he, not Kony, is Lakwena's current host.

Father Severino's young, prodigiously smelly assistant priest came up to me. 'You haven't come to fight him, have you?' he said. 'Only last week we had a German lady who came to fight.'

'No, no, just to talk about Lakwena.' I beamed, and on cue Father Severino spun round. He smiled, showing an explosion of teeth. 'Where is the spirit? It is here! In me! It is talking to you right now!' he railed. 'Why this messiah claim he is having the spirit?'

'But if Kony has no spirit to protect him, why haven't they caught him?' I asked Father Severino/Lakwena.

'Don't ask of me, ask the spirits. Are you not listening to me? John, chapter 8, verses 42-8. Write it down!' Then Father Severino/Lakwena took a sudden swerve.

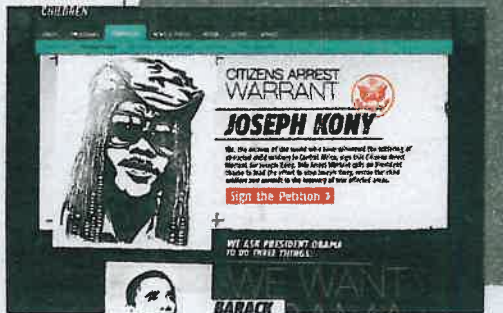
'My wife stoned me to death on November 11 1984.'

'Pardon? Your wife killed you? But you're still...'

'Then I rose from the dead,' he explained. I was the stupidest woman



Get Kony An LRA soldier wearing a necklace of bullets, above; an online petition set up by the charity Invisible Children, below; and the group's rally at the White House last year



he'd ever had to preach to. Soon, he'd been on full rant for an hour, gathering up a pile of stones to represent refugees. Here before me was the magical myth the world had bought into for more than two decades as Kony rampaged unchallenged, stealing children from classrooms and bedrooms - this bonkers old twit pushing pebbles around in his nightie.

Kony is a con man, nothing more. A middle-aged rapist who talks about magic to scare children (and Western newspapers). He communicates not by spirit god but by scratching pay-as-you-go top-up cards or using a satellite phone. He didn't conjure his grenades from rocks but from President al-Bashir of Sudan, who in return got the children as a junior army. Other times, Kony simply lived off the land, quietly getting on with his hobby, raping and torturing thousands of kids, undisturbed.

I've heard every excuse under the sun for why Kony is still kidnapping.

British and US politicians talk about diplomatic restrictions. Military experts say Kony keeps the children in land that's difficult to access. Well, that's all right then. The international community's laissez faire attitude to the children, combined with the Ugandan government's claim to have things under control, amounts to criminal negligence.

I found something else in the cardboard box: a map dated 1997. It shows the location of Jabulen, a 'City of Kids' Kony was able to build freely, a city of several thousand children in the Sudanese desert. This giant rape camp was not destroyed until 2002, yet the map shows the location was known five years earlier. All that time the children were being tortured, anybody could have found them, but only a tiny Italian nun did.

The nun, deputy headmistress Sister Rachele Fassera of St Mary's Aboke school, had lost dozens of schoolgirls to Kony. When she arrived in Sudan

to rescue her girls, what did the international community do? Send her home. Sister Rachele was told these things were best left to the powers that be. The nun still breaks down when she talks about it.

There have been jollier exchanges since my book was published. Dozens of total strangers got in touch with equally farcical tales. There was the United Nations worker based in Uganda, whose American boss couldn't tell different black people apart. He was late for his Ugandan secretary's wedding because he'd been at the wrong ceremony, sitting at the front facing the wrong bride. He'd spent the time writing a speech about his sincere respect for his secretary. Then there are the Ugandans in London who tell me they're glad I said 'what we can't say for obvious reasons'. I'm too much of a coward to ask what those reasons are.

Just as I was losing my mind, from nowhere I got an email suggesting a solution. To my immense relief, it did not come from 'experts'. It came from a group of youngsters, supporters of three protest groups, and it was an invitation to go to Washington DC with 2,000 teenagers, college students and their mothers. Over two days, I joined them as they simply went door-to-door in the corridors of the Senate telling politicians about Kony and asking them to sign proposed legislation to stop him. Time and again, I was amazed to hear politicians say: 'This guy did what...? Really? Sure I'll sign.' After five years of excuses, it was a warm bath of can-do.

In May, the US government passed the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, which mandates President Obama to devise a strategy to apprehend top LRA leaders, demobilise child soldiers and protect civilians from rebel attacks within six months. Thanks to a few American kids, one of the blackest farces of the 21st century may yet have a happy ending.

Almost as encouraging was the package I received from the managers of the Red Chilli Hideaway youth hostel, my base in Uganda. I was a little apprehensive as I gave the place a less than four-star review in the book. But rather than upbraid me, they presented me with a gift bag of local produce. Today, I do the laundry with Uganda's finest Toss detergent, and then get stuck into a jar of Not Tonight Honey. ☺

'The Worst Date Ever' by Jane Bussmann is available from Telegraph Books for £7.99 + 99p p&p. Call 0844 871 1516 or visit books.telegraph.co.uk

Kony was able to build a 'City of Kids' in Sudan, a giant rape camp that was destroyed in 2002. Yet the location was known five years earlier