

NEWS YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW

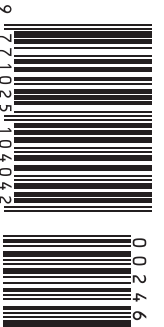
noseweek

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ISSUE 246 APRIL 2020

Owners of
44 stores
in court
battles
with
Spar HQ

SPAR WARS



Dubai:
loan scams
for Africa

George DA:
War on Waste
who's to blame?

Fêted lensman
focuses on Cape's
dirty waters



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Letters

Letters to the editor should be sent by email to editor@noseweek.co.za

Pravin's qualifications

YOUR RESPONSE TO NIGEL POTT'S LETTER IN (*nose244*) refers: while Pravin Gordhan might not have had the qualification to be appointed SARS Commissioner, it is common knowledge that he (with capable management) turned SARS into a world-class organisation.

You cannot say the same of Tom Moyane. He purged SARS of about 60 top people and closed down highly effective units. This led to a huge under-collection of revenue. It is also why we are now paying 15% VAT.

Neil Evans
By email

You have a point, but the major reason for the decline in tax revenue is undoubtedly the general decline in the economy. – Ed.

Why does Australia shelter our crooks?

IT CONTINUES TO AMAZE ME THAT AUSTRALIA, which was once basically a prison, is now populated by upstanding,

law-abiding, and wonderful businessmen. And that they are now forced by the Australian authorities/justice system to allow despicable South Africans like Tannenbaum (*nose245*), who have fleeced hundreds of people leaving them destitute, to live there, untouchable by South Africa's law enforcement agencies.

Perhaps they simply yearn for the old days? Perhaps it's time for the man in the street in Australia to demand explanations from their "justice system".

Gavin Varejes
Gallo Manor

When fair comment is foul

SO YOUR COLUMNIST VIV THINKS WHEN A MAN tells his wife she's beautiful he is in all probability lying? What a load of sexist rubbish perpetuating the ongoing abuse and violence towards women, starting with ideas of ownership and beauty.

Really surprised to see this sort of drivel in *Noseweek*. And no, it's not satirical or funny.

Mandy Katz
Oranjezicht

Viv responds: Had a good conversation on-line with various statisticians, all members of Mensa, after they had read the column in Noseweek. It is a statistically interesting topic that validates my column. In addition, the word "beautiful" presents a problem: what exactly does it describe? – Viv.

If I'm not, scientifically speaking, the most handsome, beautiful, intelligent man / woman that's just another example of an inconvenient truth. And a reminder that what matters is: I'm the man / woman my snookums loves! – Ed.

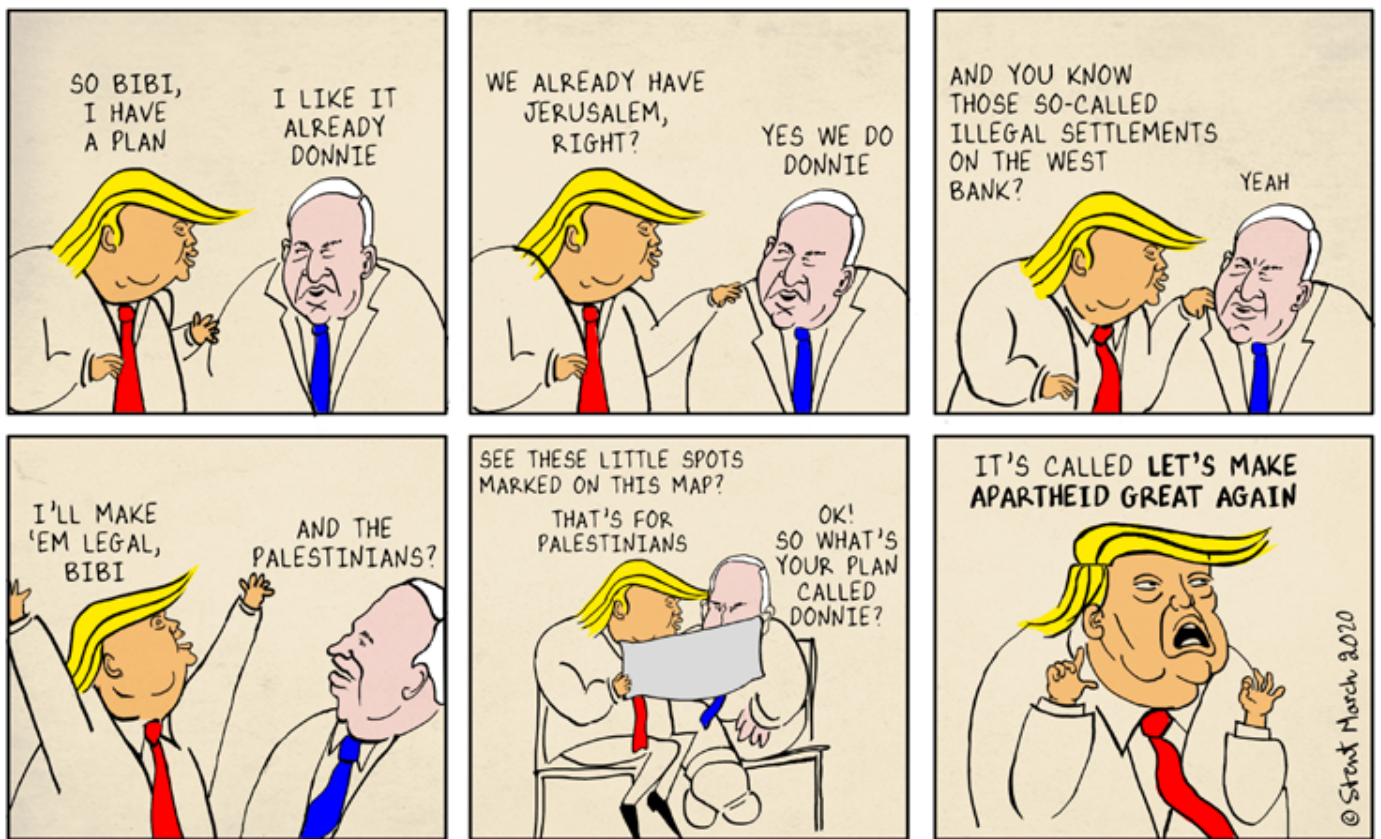
Berea highrise that should not have risen

IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT eTHEKWINI'S LAWYER is accused of hiding from the appeal court evidence of the municipality's complicity to avoid liability (*nose245*):

That's how the eThekwini Municipality rolls. Just more evidence of their less-than-legal operations in Durban.

Nav Chan
Durban

Stent



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Hands off pensions!

SHORTLY BEFORE GOING TO PRESS, *NOSEWEEK* received a letter from Adamus Stemmet, spokesman for the Association for Monitoring and Advocacy of Government Pensions (AMAGP), wanting to publicly express his organisation's thanks to the opposition MPs – those of the DA in particular – who had declared themselves willing to go to the highest court in the land to stop the government from accessing its employees' pensions for another Eskom bailout.

The ANC's labour ally, Cosatu, in February proposed a "special purpose vehicle" that would use monies from the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) through the PIC [they obviously hadn't yet read the *Mpati Commission's report*] and other state-owned developmental institutions, to take over R250 billion of Eskom's R450bn debt obligations."

Please note: Cosatu did not volunteer to invest their own pension fund's money into Eskom's perpetually rising debt.

In a media briefing to reporters, DA MPs Natasha Mazzone, Kevin Mileham and Ghaleb Cachalia (all active members of Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance [*Scofi*]), said the DA, would only accept a plan to invest government pensions in Eskom if the government implemented far-reaching reforms at Eskom, including tackling governance challenges, financial leakages and an operational crisis that has resulted in repeated load shedding.

"In the interim we as the DA will make sure government doesn't touch a cent of their employees' pension money, until we are convinced that it is a safe and secure investment," said Mazzone.

Stemmet's response: "Thank you very much for your support in this matter. We really need it as we have the dangerous situation where the ANC is in control at all levels pertaining to the pension fund: the Board of Trustees, where the government (ANC) appoints half the members, and unions, six. Only two members are elected, with only one representing the 400,000-plus pensioners. At the PIC, the whole board is appointed by the government, so effectively the ANC is in control of the management of the pension fund as well as the investments made by their corporation.

"We at AMAGP have warned before that despite the rosy picture the GEPF presented to Scofi on 19 February 2020 (repeated in their latest newsletter), the GEPF cannot afford the R254 billion to save Eskom, as suggested by Cosatu. A new factor affecting the GEPF

is the devastating effect the COVID-19 virus is having on the JSE. Just look at what happened to Sasol shares. The sustainability of the fund is now really in jeopardy.

"The government's guarantee for the investments in Eskom amounts to only 67%, and in any event can be regarded as non-existent. We are, therefore, inclined to ignore any promises regarding guarantees for the R254bn. The carrot of being able to have representation on Eskom's board or the new company to be formed should not impress anybody.

"Remember what happened when the PIC appointed two directors on the board of the VBS bank? According to the Motau committee they were ringleaders in the corruption that took place.

"You are no doubt aware that almost nothing is left of the contingency reserves of the pension fund. We have pointed out before that the income from investments can no longer cover the administrative costs and present pension payments. Already 41% of monthly contributions by serving members is used for this purpose. The eventual effect is obvious.

"Despite the truly dangerous situation the GEPF is in, the ANC and Cosatu seem hell-bent on their crazy plan to save Eskom.

"Thank you once again for your support. We rely heavily on members of the opposition to safeguard our pension fund."

Government employees and pensioners are not the only ones who need to worry about the management of their pension fund. Pension funds have generally been long regarded by the financial sector as "victim capital". The bigger the fund, the bigger the prospects to hide their misdeeds.

As *Noseweek* readers would have gathered from our recent reports on the matter, Amplats pensioners, too, have reason to worry about their employer's secretive plans to transfer their multi-billion-rand pension fund to Old Mutual's massive "umbrella fund" over which they will have absolutely no control. More about that in our forthcoming issue.

In the meantime maybe they will find some perverse consolation in the recent words of respected financial commentator Magnus Heystek: "The other day I still read about some company promising a 'carefree retirement'. There is no such thing. Traditional retirement strategies (equities, property and a little cash) have been gutted over the past 5-10 years. Most retirement dreams have been shattered..." – **The Editor.**



SPAR WARS

Owners of 44 Spar shops go head-to-head with HQ

SPAR GROUP LTD AND THE GROUP OF stores owned under the Spar banner by the Giannacopoulos family, are involved in a dirty war of words and actions that could eventually reflect on the share price of the JSE listed company.

The 44 Giannacopoulos-owned Spar shops, that employ close on 3,000 people, claim in documents submitted to the KwaZulu-Natal High Court in Pietermaritzburg, that there has been an orchestrated series of attacks on them driven by the Spar Guild of Southern Africa (an association of Spar shop owners) and Spar Group Limited.

Spar in turn accuses the family group of bringing the brand into disrepute because of the numerous and ongoing labour court cases brought against them.

But it seems as though even the Labour Court cases could be part of the onslaught because once the newspaper headlines have subsided, the outcome of Labour Court cases is often

a much watered-down version of what was originally claimed and reported in the media.

The trouble started more than a year ago when Spar decided at a closed meeting to cancel the Giannacopoulos Group's membership of its Guild. Spar then took over all the Giannacopoulos-owned stores on the back of an order obtained in the North Gauteng High Court, without prior notice to Giannacopoulos. After hearing the other side two days later as a matter of urgency, the very same court overturned the order and the stores were returned to the legal owners.

Shortly after the Guild lost in court they proceeded nevertheless to cancel the membership of the Giannacopoulos Group, who, when faced with the real possibility of losing their businesses, instituted a court action of their own against both Spar Ltd and Spar Guild, asking the court to overturn the guild's decision because it would force them to close down their stores.

The case was set to start on 13 March

in the High Court in Pietermaritzburg when it was postponed until late May.

In yet another move, Spar also changed the family group's terms of trading from a 30-day to a seven-day credit line, claiming that the group was about to go into liquidation. They also kept the shops short-supplied of bread and milk.

"This meant our stores, that buy stock of around R40m per week from Spar warehouses, had to fork out R160m to honour the new terms of trading," says Harry Giannacopoulos, one of three brothers in the family business. (They paid cash on the turn.)

In an affidavit before court Harry Giannacopoulos says the dispute is the result of a personality clash between his brother Chris and Spar directors Desmond Borrageiro and Brett Botten.

"The real reason for kicking us out is money," he says. "Our group is sourcing stock from suppliers other than the Spar Group, which we are entitled to do, but this has led to Spar



The Giannacopoulos owners; Harry (left), Kleomenis and Chris



Daniel Ademulegun

losing revenue. The loss of revenue has negatively affected the performance bonuses of Borrageiro and Botten.”

But the fight with Spar is not the group’s only concern. Inspectors of the Department of Employment and Labour have been arriving almost daily at their stores to investigate alleged contraventions of the labour laws. At one point the police, inspectors from Home Affairs and the labour department raided 11 of their stores, and in February the CCMA hit them with eight arbitration awards totalling R12m.

These were granted without the group’s labour law attorney Mary Erlank being informed that the arbitration matter was due to be heard. The group then launched an urgent application in the Labour Court asking for a review and a stay of payment of the R12m. The judge ruled in their favour as *Noseweek* went to press.

The Giannacopoulos family, on a more personal level, has had to deal with house robberies, death threats and extortion. Aggressive social media campaigns, even aimed at their young children, have forced them to obtain court interdicts and restraining orders against the ringleaders of about 60 disgruntled former workers who are staging ongoing protest action at the family-owned stores in Gauteng, North West and KwaZulu-Natal.

The protesters have recently joined hands with the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) but are allegedly being steered by the Hartbeestpoort Community Development Initiative (HCDI), a non-profit company based in Schoemansville in North West. Its chairman, Mmeli Mdluli, is one of the people against whom the family has obtained a restraining order.

Mdluli says it is clear his organisation is a threat to all businesses that do not adhere to labour laws and the Constitution.

“Right now the EFF is at the companies’ head office in Sinoville, Pretoria where they will close them down today,” the 47-year-old told *Noseweek* during a phone call, not short of big talk about his organisation’s ability to trigger the red overalls into action, in order to once again cause chaos at Spar and Tops stores owned by the family group.

Mdluli introduces himself as the HCDI’s human rights ambassador on the letters he has written to government ministers and heads of departments, complaining about alleged human rights abuses by the Giannacopoulos brothers. But in spite of the ambassadorial title there is no sign of diplomacy when his cronies protest at the stores. They focus on a specific shop, scare off the staff, the customers and the passing public, lock the doors and even take hostages, all seemingly without any consequences.

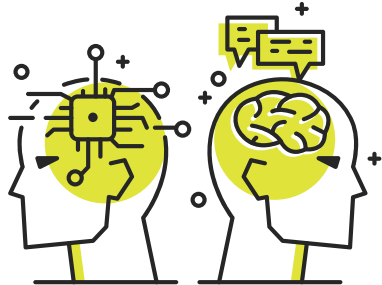
The ringleader’s first lieutenant is Daniel Ademulegun, a former Spar employee who was fired after he allegedly failed to report for work in March 2019. *Noseweek* has established that Ademulegun tried to lodge his case at CCMA offices in three provinces and in all instances the case was dismissed.

Ademulegun lives in Richards Bay and it seems as though the Nigerian has made it his mission to try and trash the Giannacopoulos group. In a verbally abusive and convoluted reply to questions from *Noseweek*, he says he has contacted the relevant law enforcement departments to start investigations based on evidence he supplied.

When asked about his role in the on-going dispute between Spar and Giannacopoulos Group, Ademulegun said Spar had invited him to present his evidence of how the family runs their business and treats their staff. Some of this evidence was also forwarded to *Noseweek* in response to what Ademulegun called our “suspicious, malicious and biased questions”.

We received 19 screenshots of WhatsApp conversations on chat groups named “Manager group” and “Spar managers group” but there was no proof that the messages and names were indeed authentic.

Last year the Giannacopoulos family obtained an urgent high court order to confiscate Ademulegun’s phones and shut down his defamatory WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages where death threats were made against them. A professional data analyst has since compiled a 60-page report that shows who Ademulegun contacted and where some of his money came from.



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Mmeli Mdluli

According to the report, Spar senior legal advisor Gordon Pentecost and the MD of Spar North Rand distribution centre Desmond Borrageiro, were members of the chat groups, “Anti Giannacopoulos Match” and “The Whistleblower Hotline”.

The report states that Pentecost received and read 1,621 messages and, while he never participated in the

conversations, he also never disagreed or denied any of the highly inflammatory statements made against the Spar Group and the Giannacopoulos-owned stores. In one conversation on the chat group Ademulegun tells someone that he had received money from Pentecost.

Pentecost and Borrageiro did not reply to questions but Ademulegun told *Noseweek* the money he received was for travel costs.

However, the collusion between Spar, the Department of Employment and Labour and Ademulegun can clearly be seen in a WhatsApp message from Edward Khambudi of the Department of Labour, who asked Ademulegun about annexures to which his memorandum referred.

Ademulegun answered that he had asked Gordon Pentecost to share the annexures with Khambudi. “This included statements from South Africans of this slavery in our land by the Giannacopoulos family. Let me ask Spar to assist.”

The following is a conversation on WhatsApp between Ademulegun and

someone called Brightness:

Ademulegun: “Spars in Empangeni and Spars in Richards Bay, why are we not telling customers this is hippopotamus meat they are eating?”

Brightness: “Shall I post it now or [is] it already posted [?]”

Ademulegun: “Now, now comrade, wake up! We are saving South Africans’ lives”

Brightness: “Post on your Facebook now. Let [s] start to win.”

In response to questions sent to Mdluli this was presented as fact to *Noseweek* and one of several accusations that he made against the Giannacopoulos family.

“Evidence of game meat such as hippos, zebra, kudu, wild pig and giraffe was circulated by workers from Empangeni in 2019. This game meat is processed and sold to unsuspecting consumers.”

Giannacopoulos lawyer Mary Erlank responds: “Harry (Giannacopoulos) has a permit to sell game meat as such. To suggest that has included giraffe and hippo is ridiculous.” - **By Susan Puren** ■



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Dubai's loan scams for Africa

Multi-million-dollar loans are, it seems, just a mirage

THE THREE VERSTER BROTHERS OF Somerset West were delighted when a supposed global financial giant in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) offered them a loan of US\$14 million (R219m) to get their Western Cape start-up company off the ground.

Equally thrilled was budding Johannesburg entrepreneur Fidelis Phiri, to whom the Dubai-based Aras Group offered \$7.4m (R115m) to fund his ambitious start-up.

In what appears to be an operation targeted at Africa, *Noseweek* has details of six more punters – in Botswana, Tanzania and Nigeria – who have received offers of loans from Aras totalling \$1.2 billion (R18bn).

However, no one appears to have received a cent, which has aroused the interest of the Hawks, for Aras insists on substantial upfront payments from its loan-seekers. These, they claim, are to pay for the establishment and capitalisation of SPV companies (special purpose vehicles) which they would register in Dubai's Ajman Free Zone to handle each transaction. Aras would own 52% of these SPVs, with the loan-seekers' contributions giving them 48%.

In what seems to be a regular pattern, after shelling out these upfront payments – more than \$241,000 (R3.8m) each for the Versters and Fidelis Phiri – and with no evidence

that Aras has chipped in anything for its 52%, Aras finds spurious reasons, such as late payment of SPV fees or failure to supply required documents, to level large dollar penalties against its clients. And if the loan-seekers don't pay up, Aras moves to cancel their contracts.

Needless to say, none of the punters' substantial upfront payments are returned, though when contracts are cancelled Aras graciously offers to

The three of us are working through our personal financial positions and making great adjustments as a result of this fake loan

offset initial contributions against the hefty additional cost of a new contractual relationship.

The plan of the Verster brothers – Johann, 57, Craig, 52, and Jaco, 48 – was to establish manufacturing plants in Somerset West and Thailand

to make brass ammunition cases and bullets for the civilian market. The aim was to fill the gap between cheap Chinese product and “exorbitantly priced” stock from Europe. Elder brother Johann is a mining explosives technologist, Craig has a background in information technology and Jaco is a former plant-hire operations manager. They formed a company, Quadrastar, and worked on the brass casings development plan for two years.

The Versters came across the Aras Group through a colourful Bulawayo local named Wilson Sezi, who had worked with Johann Verster in Zimbabwe. Sezi was acting as a partner with Aras's agent in the Emirates, fellow Zimbabwean Mfowethu Nkala. When he was unemployed in 2018 Wilson Sezi hit the headlines after filing a \$3,800 (R59,545/month) maintenance claim against his former girlfriend, Ruth Ncube, boss of the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair. His claim that they were “customarily married” was rejected by the magistrate who agreed with Ncube that the marriage was never lawful as Sezi had not paid *lebola*.

Nkala introduced the Versters to Aras Group, who agreed to loan them \$14m for their start-up. First, though, Aras insisted they must establish a new company in Mauritius or Botswana. They obliged with

Oakbridge (Pty) Ltd, incorporated in Botswana. Also, they must pay Aras \$241,287 (R3.8m) upfront for the establishment and capitalisation of the Dubai SPV.

In its many trade press write-ups, Aras Group claims to have 100-plus employees in Dubai and to have arranged US\$816m worth of loans to more than 100 start-ups across the globe. They have explained their niche to the trade press: “With banks remaining asset focussed and becoming more risk averse, mid-market firms can struggle to access traditional forms of funding. This creates a clear opportunity for private debt to fill the gap.”

However, the loans – no recipients have been named – don’t come from Aras Group, who say that they, in turn, raise the money from financial institutions and wealthy Gulf Arabs.

Last September the three Verster brothers flew to Dubai to sign the final documents for their \$14m loan. On arrival they were wafted from the airport in a Rolls-Royce Ghost to the Aras offices high in The H Dubai Office Tower, with a panoramic view over the old city.

In the boardroom they met the group’s top dog, “key account manager” Frank Khan, and the head of audit, Hassan Najjar. The tanned and balding Kahn, who appeared to be in his 60s, was casually dressed in cotton jacket and jeans. Khan, a German national, claimed he could not speak English – unheard of for a German global businessman – so conversation with him was tedious, conducted through an interpreter.

Hassan Najjar, clad in an expensive grey suit and sporting an oversized wristwatch, told the brothers that he was a Jordanian chartered accountant. “He came across as arrogant and controlling,” says Craig Verster. Also present was managing director Ashraf Mahmud, resplendent in full Emirati dress, who said his family were pearl traders. A corporate data report lists Mahmud as Aras Group’s sole shareholder.

At the meeting, the Versters were told they had just five days to pay the \$241,287 establishment and capitalisation fees for the SPV. What with travelling time and two public holidays looming in Botswana, the brothers said this was impossible. In the end, thanks to an incorrect IBAN

code (International Bank Account Number for cross-border transactions), their payment was reversed and it took 16 days before the transfer finally went through.

Aras sent them a certificate of incorporation in Dubai’s Ajman Free Zone of the SPV company named Aras Project 739 Ltd, incorporated on 21 October 2019, to handle the loan transaction. There was no proof that Aras had injected any capital for its 52% share of the company.



Stung: Fidelis Phiri

Previously, Aras had concentrated its activities in Frank Khan’s Germany, but between 2017 and September 2019 Aras featured in what a Level 1 red flag corporate intelligence report, commissioned by the Versters, describes as “approximately 15 highly derogatory articles” in the US-based German language website *Gerlach Report*.

The primary allegation in *Gerlach*, says the intelligence report, “is that Aras Group fraudulently makes money by charging clients up to US\$290,000 to secure massive loans that ultimately never materialise”. They “also contain claims of terror financing, extortion and defamation, and that an investigation into the company was active in Germany.”

The intelligence report concludes that the identified issues are not considered severe, that the information is unreliable or not credible and the risk “minimal”.

Ten days after the Versters received this report, Aras raised an invoice demanding a \$15,822 (R247,900) fee for their late SPV payment. The brothers paid this under protest. Aras’s Najjar then claimed that they had failed to meet the four-week deadline for the supply of documents – although, along with the accusation, Aras admitted that the required documents had been received the night before the deadline.

Aras’s \$14m loan to the brothers’ Oakbridge company was due in tranches; the first, on 20 November 2019. It never arrived. On 26 December Najjar emailed that the group was “initiating prearrangement of pay-out”, but no funds were forthcoming.

On 31 December Najjar emailed: “We are entitled to withdraw from the contract. We have not yet made use of this because we are still convinced of the implementation of your project.”

On 8 January 2020: “The delays that have occurred so far are solely due to your omissions and we have been entitled to withdraw from the contract for a long time.”

On 21 January: “We are still convinced of the project planning, especially that it can be successful. We therefore propose that a new financing contract be concluded. We will credit the cost contribution you made to the new contract.”

On 30 January (by which date the first three tranches of the loan should have been paid): “In order to proceed further with your project the existing contract should be cancelled. Our company waives the claims for damages which we are entitled to under the contract, but only on the mandatory condition that you apply for a new project or the revised old project again.”

On 9 February the Versters informed Aras that they would not sign the cancellation contract and gave Aras notice of breach of contract.

On 17 February Aras responded, stating it had terminated the loan agreement contract without notice and was withdrawing. They said the Versters had failed to comply with the documents deadline, had been unable to provide “proof of invested funds” in valid documented form [*presumably the SPV payment*] and had declared their company’s income in rands instead of US dollars.

Aras demanded \$503,406 compensation (R7.9m) by 25 February, failing which “we will seek judicial assistance”.

Says Craig Verster: “Total funds paid to the Aras Group amount to \$257,109 (R4m). And now they claim compensation of another \$503,000!

“The three of us (the Verster brothers) are working through our personal financial positions and making great adjustments as a result of this fake loan. It’s impossible to attach an accurate value to our direct and indirect damages and losses at present, as we are still busy cancel-

‘Apart from two exceptions, there is no contractual relationship with the other companies you have mentioned’

ling and reversing our contractual obligations. This has come at a huge personal and financial loss to the three families and will have a knock-on effect for many years.”

This sorry scenario has been virtually duplicated in the case of would-be Johannesburg entrepreneur Fidelis Phiri, 34, former maintenance engineer with SunEdison Energy Southern Africa, whose solar giant parent in the US filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy

protection in 2016.

Phiri, who holds a degree in mechanical engineering, decided to form a company called Dekha Cables. He was offered a \$7.5m loan (R117m) by Aras to set up a plant making electrical cables. However, like the Verster brothers, Phiri was first required to finance the establishment and capitalisation of an SPV company in Dubai, for which he duly handed over \$241,316 (R3.8m) to Aras.

As with the Versters, no loan money was forthcoming, just the usual accusations of outstanding documents etc from Dubai.

On 30 January Hassan Najjar told Phiri that the “next step” was for him to cancel the contract, after which “we will initiate further steps to ensure the refinancing.” Najjar added the carrot: “A pay-out by the end of February beginning of March seems to be realistic.”

In a separate email Najjar said that an advance payment of 400,000 dirhams – that’s \$108,916 or R1.7m – was required as “down-payment” for a new contractual relationship. “Due to the cancellation agreement we have incurred an inconsiderable [sic] financial loss, which should be compensated with the planned new contract,” said Najjar.

As *Noseweek* went to press Fidelis Phiri was veering between joining the Verster brothers in bringing criminal charges and civil claims against Aras in Botswana and Dubai and playing a waiting game in the hope that Aras would pay back his R3.8m. Having initially promised to tell the whole story to *Noseweek*, Phiri changed his mind and would not accept calls.

And those six other African would-



Evidence for the Versters’ case piles up

be borrowers from Aras Group in Botswana, Tanzania and Nigeria? Aras’s agent for all of these deals was Mfowethu Nkala, who also set up the Versters/Quadrastar deal, as well as Fidelis Phiri’s. It won’t please Aras, but *Noseweek* holds a document from Nkala’s files that includes details of all eight “loans”, as well as Nkala’s frank comments on the status of each at 17 February. Some extracts:

- Quadrastar (South Africa): loan \$14m. “Project has exceeded the pay date and client taking legal action.”
- Dekha Cables (South Africa): loan \$7.5m. “Client not paid. Tricked into cancelling his contract and now being asked to pay an additional \$100,000.”
- Catfin Finance (Botswana): loan \$75m. “Client made to pay a fine for late payment of SPV of \$140,000. Project documents currently being reviewed and client not yet told me outcome or when he will get his funds.”
- MilkAfric (Botswana): loan \$9,422,939. “Client to sign contract.”
- Power Tower Integrated (Botswana): \$800m. “Client requested to show proof of funds, ie \$10m for [SPV] equity which will be paid to Aras.”



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● Champrimo Innovative Livestock (Botswana): loan \$246,075,266. “Client being asked to pay \$240,000 for due diligence. Client refused and Aras has reverted back and said they are going the SPV route and will disregard due diligence fees.”

● Swiftline Logistics (Tanzania): \$8.9m. “Client being asked to pay \$240,000 for due diligence. Client refused... (as above).”

● Coal to Power plant (Nigeria): \$100,000m. “Client being asked to pay \$240,000 for due diligence. Client refused... (as above).”

Noseweek asked Mfowethu Nkala if any of the African loans have been paid out, as well as the status of his clients’ deals listed above. We said we understood the Versters and Dekha Cables had encountered problems.

Nkala, who is based in Dubai’s neighbouring emirate of Abu Dhabi, replied: “Quadrastar [*the Versters*] had contractual issues with Aras. They are better placed to explain to you what went wrong. Dekha Cables

is progressing with their funding and had [*sic*] since resolved their issue with Aras.

“With regard to the other projects you mentioned, I am not aware of any problems. You can also contact Aras directly. I am just an independent agent and thus not authorised to speak on their behalf. With regards to the Quadrastar issue, please ensure you get the real facts from the project owner as he is very much aware of what went wrong.”

We emailed Aras Group’s head of audit Hassan Najjar. We asked whether any loans to companies in Africa have been paid out, as well as the position regarding the Versters’ Quadrastar and Phiri’s Dekha Cables. We also asked about the Aras policy of requesting clients to pay large sums upfront to capitalise SPVs in Dubai and the summary cancellation of contracts for late upfront payments and documents delivery, leaving clients substantially out of pocket with no loans

materialising.

The response came from one Nader Al Laithi in the Aras legal department. “Your questions have somehow left us astonished,” runs his note. “First of all, we assume that you as a journalist are aware that the data requested by you about companies and individuals are subject to data protection, which is applicable in both UAE and your country.

“In principle, we are happy to give a statement about the companies and the individuals you have mentioned provided you send us a statement by the respective company or person where we are explicitly exempted from data protection. Basically, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that the information you have is apparently taken over by third parties without verification, because our company does not require large advance payments, as you write, which are subsequently lost by the customer.

“However, it can be communicated in advance that, apart from two exceptions, there is no contractual relationship with the other companies you have mentioned.”

The following day another missive arrives from Nader Al Laithi. Aras has now received an email from Craig Verster, who “has been urging our company to do certain things, including paying out a very large amount of money. However, Mr Verster has no claims whatsoever, which will also be the basis for a legal dispute in Botswana.”

Al Laithi’s note continues: “Mr Verster literally writes that he will have media accreditation studies carried out with the help of a journalist from South Africa. He further states that he will only refrain from this media accreditation if we fulfil his demands. Since there is no legal and justified claim by Mr Verster currently against our company, we will not be fulfilling any unjustified claims under the threat of a media investigation.

“We are not making a legal evaluation of this procedure at this point. According to jurisdiction of our country, it is a matter of coercion, if not of extortion, as Mr Verster threatens to be a ‘sensitive insidious’ if we do not meet his unjustified demands.” – **By Jack Lundin** ■

Hot money oasis in the Middle East

THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES IS THE primary financial and trading hub in the Middle East – and Dubai is now a popular tourist centre. But there’s a darker side to the sun and sand haven. A 2018 assessment by FINTRAC, Canada’s financial intelligence unit with a mandate to detect money laundering and the financing of terrorist activities, said that the UAE’s open and relatively unrestricted free trade zones, as well as its exposure to higher risk jurisdictions including Somalia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, left the Emirates at elevated risk of terrorist funding.

“Al Qaeda, the Taliban and Daesh

Khorasan all raise significant revenue in the UAE, funnelling this money through Dubai via Iran and Pakistan,” said FINTRAC.

Risk factors to be taken into account included “general trading companies for which client information is difficult to obtain, particularly those operating in economic free zones, and the country’s frequent role as an intermediary for international financial transfers.

“General trading companies that engage in what appear to be non-business-related transactions with multiple unrelated parties pose a heightened risk, since their intermediary role can obfuscate the true sender or beneficiary of funds.”

In other words, UAE tricksters use documentation provided by distant loan-seekers to create a paper trail, raise the loan money, then divert the funds elsewhere.

International reports have categorised the UAE as a major hub for terrorist funding and money-laundering, estimated to have a global annual volume of around \$2 trillion. ■



George mayor's War on Waste raked in illicit profits for pals

DA initiates probe which reveals host of transgressions in Eastern Cape municipality – which NPA has ignored

IT READS LIKE THE PLOT OF A CRIME novel; here we have a picturesque South African town nestling against the backdrop of a majestic mountain range, bordered by ancient yellowwood forests and endless white sandy beaches on the Indian Ocean. Yet this pleasant town conceals a dark underbelly of corruption, where the main accused is none other than the mayor – who denies any wrongdoing.

In true South African style, residents on both sides of the railway track (there really is one running through town) are incensed at the allegations, along with the thinly disguised racial friction, discrimina-

tion, BEE and its counterpart WMC.

Then the A-Team arrives in town and, without further ado, seizes the mayor's phone and car tracking records. These reveal that the first citizen is not only a liar he is also corrupt. Obvious next question: is he a lone ranger? According to the script, no – but there are still a few more pages to be written.

Welcome to George Municipality where the Democratic Alliance has been trying for months to purge itself of fraud, theft, corruption, maladministration, malpractice, undue influence, nepotism, irregular appointments and inflated payments made to service providers.

The latest municipal project under scrutiny is War-on-Waste (WoW), which promised to provide employment through the government's Expanded Public Works Programme.

The Hawks investigated WoW in 2018 and the results were handed to the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) almost a year ago.

With no further action taken by the NPA, Western Cape MEC for Local Government Anton Bredell appointed forensic investigators Anthony Botha and Annelita Mentoor to conduct a further investigation.

Botha and Mentoor lined up more than 30 people for questioning, including municipal manager Trevor



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Executive Mayor of George, Melvin Naik and Trevor Botha



Jean Säfers

Botha; director of community services, Walter Hendricks; cleaning services manager Wessel Robertson; DA politician Jean Säfers and municipal employee Rowan Botha. Their main persons of interest, however, were the DA's executive mayor Melvin Naik, and Myron Bruiners, a businessman based in neighbouring Mossel Bay.

Naik introduced WoW to the George town council as a so-called mayoral project in early 2017. His first step was to source BEE companies to fulfil the contract and then carefully select one that was allegedly willing to give him and his cronies a kickback share of the payment.

Enter councillor Jean Säfers; he reportedly introduced Bruiners to Naik at an after-hours meeting in the mayor's office. Bruiners told the investigators that he and Naik held follow-up meetings at: the local strawberry farm; a private game lodge in Port Elizabeth; the Spur in Hartenbos; and at the Wimpy in George. These clandestine meetings would eventually link Bruiners and Naik by supplying compelling circumstantial evidence to support the allegations made against the mayor, the municipal manager, Trevor Botha, and municipal officials Hendricks and Robertson.

During their get-togethers, said Bruiners, Naik promised him a long-term contract without having to go through the legally required supply chain process. To justify this diver-

sion, an emergency situation would be needed. Coincidentally, at that very moment a bulldozer at the municipal landfill site broke down. And although a second one is said to have been available on site, the municipal officials obtained approval to procure a bulldozer from outside the George region.

Bruiners's company, Mr Noodles CC (not a joke), was then verbally appointed to deliver the bulldozer on an emergency basis. The investigators later found this emergency situation to be "wholly misconstrued and incorrectly applied".

Bruiners told the investigators that Naik had also advised him to form a new company, as there was much illegal dumping in George and the municipality needed to lease tipper trucks and excavators for the clean-up. The new company, Numocento (Pty) Ltd, was quickly registered but did not supply an address in George, which was a requirement.

Unperturbed by this small technicality the resourceful Naik reportedly arranged for Bruiners to use the George address of Rowan Botha, a Naik relative. But the favour came with a price tag of R100,000.

Sometime later Botha threatened to spill the beans after Bruiners only paid him R60,000. Once again Naik allegedly saved the day and covered the shortfall by arranging a job for Botha as the supervisor of the War-on-Waste project.

The two firms were paid more than R9m but the council had no record the services were rendered

There was no service level agreement in place during the nine months that Mr Noodles and Numocento supplied the trucks and earth-moving equipment to the municipality – which was unable to provide any record that the services were in fact rendered. Yet the two companies were paid more than R9 million.

Bruiners told the investigators he had handed R19,000 to cleaning services manager Robertson and that Hendricks, director of community services, received furniture to the value of R20,000. Hendricks denied this while Robertson admitted that Bruiners paid him R19,000. Part of this amount apparently went to Robertson's church.

Naik and municipal manager Trevor Botha allegedly received kickbacks of R600,000 each from Bruiners. Both men denied this during questioning by the forensic investigators.

Botha explained that his visits to Bruiners in Mossel Bay were in connection with inquiries regarding property investments in the area as well as discussions about other issues, while Naik told investigators that he had only met Bruiners for the first time after Mr Noodles started rendering services to the municipality. He also denied that Rowan Botha was a family member and that he had requested Bruiners to pay Botha for the use of his address in George.

This is where the irrefutable evidence of phone and car tracking records enter the story; the forensic report says the municipality allocated a Toyota Fortuner (registration number GRG WP) to Naik and that its tracking records show it spent hours at an address in Mossel Bay belonging to Bruiners, and at the Spur in Hartenbos, where Bruiners had said one of the meetings had taken place.

The records of Naik's office phone showed that he had called Hendricks, Robertson and Sáfers at the time when Mr Noodles was appointed and rendered services to the municipality.

The investigators came to the conclusion that bribes were indeed paid to Naik, Trevor Botha, Hendricks and Robertson and that it appears as if Naik also benefited from the proceeds of crime. It was recommended that they all pay back the money they received and that the more-than R9m payment made to Mr Noodles and Numocento must be recovered.

Trevor Botha was placed on precautionary suspension. (He has since been reinstated as municipal manager by the high court.) Naik was asked to resign but refused to step down, saying the allegations against him had not been proven in court. When the DA subsequently cancelled his membership, Naik approached the Western Cape High Court to obtain

an interdict against the party. Trevor Botha followed suit.

DA George constituency head, Geordin Hill-Lewis told the *George Herald* that the party had expected Naik to follow the legal route but that would not change anything. "Our lawyers will defend any legal action from his side," said Hill-Lewis.

The DA was much criticised by opposition parties who accused them of running a public relations campaign in the run-up to the 2021 elections.

Dawid Camfer of the Independent Civic Organisation of South Africa (Icosa) told the *Oudtshoorn Courant* that the DA was targeting coloured

leaders, hoping to prove they are corrupt and not capable to lead.

Three DA councillors who voted with the opposition against suspending Botha – Edmund Bussack, Dawid Willemse and Belrina Cornelius – have also lost their party membership.

Myron Bruiners told the *George Herald* his conscience was clear about what he had stated on record. "I'm glad something happened, but I am not happy with the time that has elapsed.

"I believe there are also corrupt ministers for whom he does favours trying to protect Naik."

Indeed, there is much of this story still to be written. – **By Susan Puren** ■



Stag Cronjé

Nepotism cloud hangs over DA's finance portfolio councillor

IN APRIL LAST YEAR, FORMER DA MEMBER and now Minister of Public Works, Patricia de Lille, handed a dossier to the Public Protector in which it was alleged that "VBS-style" corruption was happening in George Municipality. It referred to a 2018 case of kickbacks allegedly received by the son of Stag Cronjé, DA Portfolio Councillor for Finance.

An investigation by FTI Consulting found that an investment agreement concluded with Old Mutual provided for a referral fee of 0.18% to be paid to Daniel Cronjé, who is the son of Stag Cronjé, and that this contractual undertaking constitutes a breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Cronjé snr is yet again under scrutiny after the George council appointed a special committee to investigate his involvement in the investment.

The committee, consisting of one ANC and two DA councillors, has to

report back to the council in 90 days.

Attorneys Brand & Van der Berg, said in a recent letter that FTI Consulting's findings are "patently wrong" in fact and in law and that the council should not take further steps. They said that Old Mutual's decision to pay Cronjé jr a referral fee stands apart from the contract between Old Mutual and the municipality.

The *George Herald* reported at the end of January that a Daniel Cronjé was to appear in the George Regional Court in connection with several counts of fraud and theft.

It said the case stemmed from several alleged incidents in 2015 when Cronjé, then a broker at a bank, allegedly transferred some of his clients' investments into his personal bank account.

● *Stag Cronjé has confirmed that the Daniel Cronjé charged in court is his son.* ■

History revisited

Ponzi accomplice cheekily accused Investec of fraud for calling in loans

Tannenbaum's top agent, Dean Rees, tried unsuccessfully to block bank's R34m in mortgage claims by accusing it of devious dealing

IN JUNE 2009 *NOSEWEEK* WAS THE first to expose Barry Tannenbaum's R3-billion cash pyramid or Ponzi scheme – an illegal form of gambling. Major players who were tempted to participate in the “game” that started in 2004 and crashed in 2009 included scores of South Africa's ultra-rich. (See box story.)

The scheme generated a turnover of over R3bn (some estimates put it at double that), capping Brett Kebble's massive gold share frauds.

A more recent follow-up investigation by *Noseweek* (*nose245*) has found that, despite extensive and extremely costly investigations by insolvency trustees and forensic auditors, a lot of the money that flowed in and out of the scheme to offshore bank accounts remains unaccounted for. Of the money that was recovered, most was seized by the state as the proceeds of crime.

And the two main perpetrators, Tannenbaum himself and top accomplice Dean Rees, remain safely ensconced abroad – in Australia and Switzerland respectively – out of reach of South African law enforcement agencies.

Noseweek's recent research has found one further ironic chapter in the story that largely escaped media attention: how Rees attempted to dodge a R34-million claim Investec brought against him by accusing the bank of devious dealing and fraud.

Dean Rees was one of Tannenbaum's top collaborators, along with lawyer Darryl Leigh, in a multi-billion-rand Ponzi scheme that was launched in 2004 and went bang in 2009.

The Ponzi scheme, with its too-good-to-be-true promises of quick profits, attracted hundreds of wealthy South Africans. The funds deposited with the scheme were ostensibly going to be used

to fund the importation of raw materials used to manufacture drugs for the treatment of HIV/Aids. However, Tannenbaum faked the documentation used to prove that the scheme was lawful and ultimately the plan fell apart, as all such cash pyramids inevitable do, when the flow of new investments no longer grew fast enough to cover the profits promised to earlier investors.

The battle between Rees and Investec started in June 2012 when Investec filed a court case against Rees as well as his business partners Benjamin and Edward Jowitt. Edward Jowitt was also one of the larger investors in the Ponzi scheme.

Investec submitted 14 claims totaling R34m, excluding interest.

The 14 claims were backed by loan agreements between Investec and a number of companies in which Rees had an interest.

The majority of these principal debtors who concluded loan agreements with Investec, had been put into liquidation following an application by Rees himself to the high court when they all defaulted on their debt obligations.

Rees wrote in an affidavit that seven

of these “principal debtors” were wound up by the high court in 2010 and 2011 while in July 2010, a further two were wound up by way of voluntary resolutions by the members.

To ward off Investec's claims, Rees accused Investec of misconduct and tried to discredit the supporting documents on which Investec based their claims by calling for handwriting analysis of the signatures on these documents in an attempt to prove forgery.

In addition, Rees alleged that Investec had colluded with the liquidator of the wound-up companies and that Investec conspired with auctioneers to sell certain of the properties owned by these entities for prices well below their actual value.

He also alleged that Investec had not adequately accounted for the proceeds of the sales or dividends received from the wound-up companies.

However, an acting judge at the South Gauteng High Court and later five judges of the Supreme Court of Appeal largely pooh-poohed Rees's allegations.

On top of facing the Investec claim, Rees's own South African estate was placed in the hands of insolvency prac-



Dean Rees on his boat



Private Boeing

tioners in 2009 by the courts after the Ponzi scheme went under and investors scrambled to get their money back.

In addition, in 2011 the National Prosecuting Authority's (NPA) Asset Forfeiture Unit (AFU) confiscated his Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano that he bought for R4m as the car was considered to have been bought with the proceeds of crime.

Rees had fled to Switzerland in early 2009 in a Boeing he had hired for the occasion, after making off with tens of millions of rand in loot, and he remains at large as the NPA has never applied for his extradition.

On July 13, 2012, the defendants gave notice of their intention to defend the action. On August 1, 2012, Mirielle Ackermann, then Investec recoveries officer, launched a summary judgment application against Rees and Edward Jowitt.

The court hearing into the matter was held on 18 and 19 February 2013 at the South Gauteng High Court in Johannesburg. Acting Judge AJ Hutton gave judgment on March 5, 2013.

Hutton said that Investec's combined summons was a work of "epic proportions". "The particulars of claim run to some 250 pages... These claims are supported by annexures which run to a further 700 pages. The annexures consist of various loan agreements, mortgage bonds, deeds of suretyship, certificates of balance and the like."

In the particulars of claim, Investec indicated that either a judgment by default had been made against the relevant principal debtor or that the principal debtor had been wound up, Hutton said.

The Aljebani Trust, of which Benjamin Jowitt was a trustee, and Rees alleg-

edly provided sureties for the indebtedness of the principal debtor in each of the claims. Edward Jowitt allegedly provided surety for two of the claims.

Rees argued that Investec had nullified his suretyships as a result of the bank freezing his company accounts.

He accused Investec of manipulating the debtors into defaulting in terms of the loan agreements by unlawfully freezing their accounts, and that this prejudiced the sureties and released him from these obligations.

These sureties were "removed sureties", Rees alleged.

"I find the contention that the respondents are 'removed sureties'... to be wholly unconvincing. In my view no bona fide defence has been disclosed on this score," Hutton said.

Rees also accused Investec of having a "collusive relationship" with his former business partner, Christopher Harris, who in most instances was a co-surety in respect of the principal debtors in the Investec summons, either personally or on behalf of one or more of his trusts.

However, Hutton said that Rees's allegations accusing Investec of collusion with Harris were devoid of any detail whatsoever.

"Sweeping assertions of misconduct are made in Rees' affidavit, but are not backed up with anything of substance.

"I find that the manner in which the defence of prejudice has been averred to be needlessly bald, vague and sketchy. I cannot, in these circumstances, find that the defence of prejudice has been bona fide raised," said Acting Judge Hutton.

Rees claimed that Harris had negotiated with Investec regarding the debt defaults and had been successful in securing his position to the detriment of

Rees and Edward Jowitt.

In one of the claims, Investec relied on a suretyship that was not signed by Rees.

The allegations made by Rees relating to the claims were not set out with sufficient particularity to defeat what was prima facie evidence established by the certificates of indebtedness which Investec relied upon as proof of its various demands, the judge said.

"Accordingly, I do not believe that any bona fide defence has been raised in this regard," Hutton said.

Hutton found that one suretyship relied on by Investec was of inferior quality.

"Investec pleads that it is the only copy in its possession. Mr Rees has seized on this and states that this is one of the documents he would wish to have analysed by a handwriting expert. He also denies that he signed the suretyship. The document attached to the particulars of claim is certainly of a poor quality, but it is not so illegible that the essential requirements of a valid suretyship cannot be easily ascertained from it," Hutton said.

The names of the creditor and the principal debtor, as well as the limitation of the surety's liability to R5m, can be "discerned with great difficulty", the judge said.

Rees's denial that he bound himself as a surety in this instance was "an opportunistic one which is not worthy of credit," Hutton said.

"In the circumstances, I conclude that, save in the respects specifically conceded by Investec's counsel, the respondents have failed to demonstrate the existence of a bona fide defence.

"In my view, Investec, as the overwhelmingly successful party, is entitled to its costs on the attorney and client scale, as agreed to in the suretyships, including the costs occasioned by the employment of two counsel," Hutton said.

In his judgment, Hutton granted summary judgment to Investec for 13 out of 14 claims totalling R31.9m, excluding interest.

Of that amount of R31.9m, R26.6m was payable by Rees, and R5.3m was jointly and severally payable by Rees and Edward Jowitt.

Jowitt and Rees challenged Hutton's judgment, and the South Gauteng High Court granted leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) in



Barry Tannenbaum

Bloemfontein.

The high court granted Rees leave to defend one of the claims as to the suretyship that Investec relied upon in support of that claim as it was allegedly not signed by Rees.

Investec also dropped its application for penalty interest concerning the claims.

The SCA matter was heard on February 20, 2014, and five judges considered the issue. They were at the time: SCA Deputy President Justice Kenneth Mthiyane, Justice Carole Lewis, Justice Visvanathan Ponnar, Justice Mandisa Maya, who is now President of the SCA, and Madam Justice Halima Saldulker.

The SCA ruling, written by Saldulker, with the other four judges concurring, stated that Rees's affidavit did not dispute that many loan agreements had been concluded between the principal debtors and Investec and that mortgage bonds had been registered against various immovable properties as security for the debts owed to Investec.

Besides, various deeds of suretyship had been concluded as additional security for Investec's debts, and each of the

principal debtors had defaulted on its obligations to Investec, Saldulker said.

Rees's contention about "removed sureties" had not been explained, Saldulker said.

"Rees's affidavit is replete with conjecture and speculation for which there was no factual foundation.

"In my view, Mr Rees was sparse with the truth and deliberately vague," the judge said. His claim of prejudice was hollow and smacked of desperation, as did his charge that Ackermann's affidavit lacked effectiveness.

"Looking at the matter at the 'end of the day' and all the documents that [were] properly before it, it cannot be said that the high court erred in granting summary judgment against the appellants," the judge wrote.

"The result is that the appeal must fail," Saldulker said, and so the SCA dismissed the appeal with costs.

● When approached shortly before this issue of *Noseweek* went to press, Investec declined to reveal how much they succeeded in collecting of the R34m that they claimed from the indebted companies and Rees as surety. – **By Justin Brown** ■

From *Noseweek's* exposé in June 2009...

A DECADE AGO SCORES OF SOUTH AFRICA'S rich and famous were caught up in Barry Tannenbaum's illegal ponzi scheme, a fraudulent scheme on a scale to rival that of Brett Kebble.

Noseweek had the names of many, starting with former Pick n Pay CEO Sean Summers, who invested over R50m, and who claims he is now owed over R100m. Just so he shouldn't feel too bad about it, former CEO of OK Bazaars Mervyn Serebro invested R25m and believed he was by then owed over R50m.

The 400 investors were believed to have lost R2 billion or more between them. All of it has disappeared, most of it via a Hong Kong bank account, to... well, only Barry Tannenbaum and two or three of his local recruiting agents know where.

Many were so seduced by greed, that they emptied their offshore dollar and euro accounts into Tannenbaum's account. By the time *Noseweek's* exposé appeared in June 2009 they were frantically selling the fancy cars they'd bought in a fit of euphoria only months earlier.

"If you're looking for a good deal," we told readers, "go to Investment Cars in Bryanston, who have on offer a new stock of good-as-new Porsches, Lamborghinis, Rolls-Royces and Bentleys, only slightly used by Tannenbaum's victims. Poor Mr Serebro has even put his house up for sale."

Shortly thereafter about 200 of the investors attended a meeting at the offices of attorneys Routledge Modise in Sandton. The meeting was chaired by a partner in the firm, Warren Drue, who introduced himself as a fellow investor. There to represent a whole clutch of Cape investors who had put in over R100m between them were attorneys Craig Delpont (see past noses about him) and Richard Goudvis. Surprisingly, also there to address them was Dean Rees.

It has been estimated by some of those in the know that Rees made "hundreds of millions" out of commissions he earned by recruiting investors for the scheme. That February, when Tannenbaum had already defaulted on interest payments two months in a row and some investors had started asking nasty questions,

Rees hired a private Boeing and flew to Switzerland with his wife and two small children. Talk had it that he had bought a house in Lausanne for several million euros, and another in Barcelona.

Back in Johannesburg, he was booked into a suite at the Michaelangelo (R10,000 a night) to attend the meeting of panicked investors at Routledge Modise's office – apparently hoping to persuade them he was as much a victim as they were, and was "on their side" in attempting to recover their money.

Despite his best efforts – and attorney Drue's attempts to protect him from unsympathetic questioners – the majority of investors present clearly weren't going to take Rees's word for it. His Prada shoes, Ed Hardy Jeans (\$1,000 a pair) and spectacular gold watch did not help the situation at all. (Friends said he has a collection of "investment" watches equal to that of the late great Brett Kebble.) Immediately after the meeting Rees booked out of the Michaelangelo and was on a flight back to Switzerland. ■

The flying activist

Fêted aerial and underwater photographer Jean Tresfon trains his focus on the City of Cape Town's contamination of its coastal waters

FLYING OVER CAPE TOWN IN his light aircraft in 2014, marine conservation photographer Jean Tresfon noticed distinct "plumes" of strange-coloured water drifting off some of Cape Town's favourite beaches. Long plumes of sewage stretched across the blue sea water, having entered the ocean off Camps Bay, Hout Bay and Green Point via underwater pipes called outfalls.

"I guess I've always known about the outfalls. I know we pump sewage into the sea," Tresfon told *Noseweek*. "But, like everyone else, I always assumed it was treated first and that it was safe going into the sea."

Shocked by the stark contrast between brown sewage and blue ocean, Tresfon posted the photographs on to his popular marine conservation page on Facebook. But to his surprise, none of his nearly 16,000 followers was outraged.

"I realised the two things missing were scale and context. So I went to take photographs on a day when it was really bad. The plume rises to the surface most days, but it varies. On some days it's really bad and on others it's not as horrendous.

"I took the standard tourist shot of Robben Island, with a 5km-long plume stretching out to sea. It showed exactly where it was and the scale of it. I posted it to social media and it went viral.

"In the post, I had said it was unbelievable that in this day and age we just dump raw poo into the sea, as it's out of sight, out of mind. The issue ended up on the front page of most newspapers and in other media."

Tresfon then made it his business to find out what was actually happening in the City of Cape Town's marine

outfall programme – and he has continued his research into the subject for the past five years. In the process he has got to know several scientists working on this issue, including UWC water treatment expert Professor Leslie Petrik and water pollution fundi Professor Jo Barnes (*nose245*).

"The three outfalls – one in Hout Bay, another in Camps Bay and the third in Green Point – have a combined capacity of 55 million litres of untreated effluent per day that goes into the sea. I was horrified that

very misleading when they talk about "treated effluent" being pumped out to sea. When pushed, they refer to 'pre-treatment', not 'primary treatment'. It's a play on words, but pre-treatment – what is that?

"What they actually do is pass the sewage through a series of screens. There is a 5ml or a 3ml screen to remove larger objects like nappies and sanitary towels. Whatever is left just gets pumped straight into the sea. No chemical treatment. Nothing to negate the bacteria. That's not treatment, that's just screening.

There's a big difference. It's done on purpose because it's the cheapest way to do it. It's that out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality. Nobody sees it from the land as the different pipelines go out about a kilometre.

"The sewage goes through what is called a diffuser. It's like having a sprinkler on the end of a hosepipe. It's meant to break the flow up and let it mix. But the fresh water and the sea don't mix for a long time."

According to Tresfon, the City's website used to say that the deep water outfalls occur far from shore so that the effluent is dispersed at the level of the sea floor, doesn't reach the surface and is far from the shore.

"Even if you deem it acceptable that we are using the sea as a dumping ground, the fact is it doesn't work that way. The effluent bubbles to the surface on a regular basis and often gets blown straight back to shore.

"On the Atlantic Seaboard, on any westerly wind – which is our prevailing winter wind – like a north-west or a west or a southwest – the effluent blows straight back to the shore. You walk along that Atlantic Seaboard and you smell it. Kayakers



Jean Tresfon: photographer, pilot, diver...

55 million litres of raw, untreated sewage and greywater is pumped into the ocean every day via the outfalls. I discovered, with the scientists' input, what a disaster this is.

"Worldwide, there are different protocols for effluent treatment. Terms like primary treatment and secondary treatment have specific meanings in terms of what you do to that effluent. The City of Cape Town is



Spotted from the air: the 'mysterious phenomenon' of a supergroup of humpback whales feeding on krill on the West Coast

paddle though it and surfers get sick.”

He said he and scientists like Barnes, Petrik and others, have documented many cases of illness.

Barnes says of Tresfon: “He is a superhero – not only for what he does but for his persistence in the face of some unpleasant treatment at the hands of the authorities – like all of us he mentions. I can produce hard-drives full of data yet not equal the impact of one of his evocative photographs. He is both dedicated and extremely skilled at what he does.”

Previously sales director for a brick company, Tresfon has been diving in the Western Cape oceans for more than 30 years and working full-time as an underwater cameraman for the past ten years.

“I was one of the youngsters of my generation who was inspired by photographer/conservationist Jacques Cousteau. I was snorkelling at the age of 11, got my scuba ticket at 16 and I’ve never stopped diving.”

He learnt photography through trial and error and was soon winning awards, including Getaway Gallery Photographer of the Year in 2007.

A decade ago, Tresfon, who is married with three children, started

flying a light aircraft as a hobby and was soon taking wildlife and landscape photographs from the sky. Since then he’s taken footage that most photographers can’t even dream of. His Facebook page, *Jean Tresfon – Marine Conservation Photographer*, has over 15,000 followers. On the page, he describes himself as “a wildlife and landscape photographer specialising in underwater and aerial images, with a passion for showcasing his city and his country”.

“I always wanted to study marine biology but my dad wouldn’t let me,” Tresfon told *Noseweek*. “He had this theory that the world is full of starving scientists. He said, ‘go and get a real job and when you’ve made money, you can do what you like’.”

So Tresfon, who went to school at Bishops in Cape Town, studied commerce and then worked in “a real job” as a sales director at Cape Brick for years while doing his diving and photography on the side.

“Then, ten years ago, I started doing full-time photography. The photos I take are so varied. I’ve photographed dusky dolphins, common dolphins and bottle-nosed dolphins; whales mating – and whales with calves. I’ve taken

photos of hundreds of fish species; the sardine run, the chokka spawning and squid mating season. I used to do the surveys for the shark spotters (before the white sharks started disappearing).”

His photographer role models are *National Geographic Magazine* photographer Paul Nicklin – “an amazing advocate for nature” – and local photographer Thomas Peshar. “They both told me to tell a story with my images.”

For Tresfon, taking photographs from his aircraft was a game changer. He’s been flying once or twice a week for ten years. “It’s a fantastic way to see the marine environment. You start seeing patterns and you see when those patterns start to change.”

He has assisted the authorities by reporting poaching, pollution and illegal fishing and helps scientists with their work, by flying whale surveys for the whale unit and helping with other fisheries surveys.

He also did a lot of photography of Western Cape dams during the drought. “I kept track of water levels in all Cape Town’s six major dams.”

“It’s taken years, but today, I’m privileged to have a solid relationship

with most of the marine scientists in the Cape. It's an exchange. I offer my time, I fly them for their surveys, and in return, I get massive knowledge and education. It's super interesting."

Tresfon's series of photos called *The Abundance Series* features photographs of shoals of yellowtail ("thousands of them boiling on the surface in spawning aggregations"). One of his photos features three different marine mammals in one photo – "whales playing with dolphins playing with seals."

He also writes a weekly blog on his Facebook page. "I focus mostly on the bounty we have. I get to see things most people don't dream exist. You have to see what I see to believe what we have under water. We have such an abundance of life and it's so crucial to protect it. You can't see what I've seen and sit by and do nothing about protecting our oceans, rather than waiting till they are empty."

In November, 2015, Tresfon spotted something from his plane which astonished him: a humpback supergroup. This mysterious phenomenon, which is fairly new to South African whale scientists – sees up to 1,000 humpback whales gather to eat krill on the West Coast, between St Helena Bay and Cape Point.

When they first encountered the phenomenon, whale researchers said they'd never seen anything like this. Humpbacks, despite migrating, feeding and mating in groups, are normally known for being the loners of the sea. Most of their lives are spent in solitude, or in small groups of up to seven individuals for short lengths of time. But in recent years scientists have reported more than 22 cases where humpback "supergroups" – of 20 to 200 whales – have appeared off the southwest coast of South Africa.

Tresfon, who wrote movingly about his first supergroup encounter on his blog, was the first person to get an aerial photo of the phenomenon. "I took a photo with over 100 humpback whales tightly gathered in a dense aggregation that has never been seen in the world before. In fact, the scientists who wrote the paper on the supergroup phenomenon published a peer reviewed paper on it, using my photograph.

"I saw a disturbance offshore and went to check it out. At first I thought 'wow, a lot of dolphins', then I thought, 'hold on, those are not dolphins, they

are whales – 40 tonnes apiece. More than 100 animals. It was one of the most incredible sights I've seen."

He was one of the first people to dive and film them feeding.

"It's because of these beautiful sightings and my passion to protect our beautiful oceans that I have become an environmental activist. I'm doing this through necessity."

Tresfon said that when he flies – about twice a week – to take photographs, he takes note of the plumes and takes photographs whenever they look particularly bad. He has five or six years of photographs of the plumes. Through the years, he said, the City's response has varied. "Initially they denied it, to the point where they said the plumes I had photographed were from passing ships.

'It's such a cheat, only half of Camps Bay beach has Blue Flag status – they don't tell you that!'

"When I pointed out that the plumes were at the exact coordinates of their own outfalls, the story changed to, 'Okay, maybe it's not a passing ship but its not harmful to the environment'. Then, two years later and after millions of rands were spent on a report that was too damning for them to release to the public, they changed tune to say, 'Okay, it might be harmful to the environment but there are other sources of pollution, like stormwater drains and informal settlements.'

"Now we're at the stage where they are saying, 'Okay, it's harmful but what choice do we have?'"

In the past, said Tresfon, he has, been invited to meetings of the City's Water and Sanitation committee – "I assume to shut me up".

"The bottom line, as per the people in charge, is budget. They say there isn't the money to build a treatment plant."

While Tresfon concedes it is a huge

problem for the City to deal with, he believes there are a number of measures that should be taken.

"I am a realist. I know they have a practical problem to deal with. Obviously it would be better if they didn't put anything into the sea, but that's not a reality. So I believe they need to build a sewage plant to treat the sewage to secondary level before pumping it into the sea. The treatment won't do anything about the bacteria and chemicals going into the sea, but one problem at a time.

"There are other things that are important here, such as the fact that if you treat sewage to a secondary level, you can recover at least 50% of the water that came down the sewer line. So, assuming you have got a capacity of 55m litres a day, you have 25-odd million litres of water a day that you are saving.

"Yet the City tried to build a desalination plant to save 2 million litres!

"Added to that, the methane and solids you recover from the treatment plant are a potential fuel source so there would be a lot of benefit in treating the sewage other than just helping the environment. There are a lot of other benefits to doing it properly.

The City say their main objection is cost and availability of land. They say there is no land available and it costs too much. I find that amusing because when we wanted a stadium we could suddenly make a couple of billion available, build a stadium in a year and have a piece of land available but something as important as City sewage, we can't do.

"Also the DA is hellbent at the moment on selling off that Maiden's Cove piece of land in Camps Bay and

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Visible pollution: sewage from the City Bowl is discharged into the sea from the Green Point marine outfall

having it developed into shops, hotels and restaurants, but it is the last available piece of land and it is the perfect spot for a sewage plant.

You don't have to have the old-fashioned sewage plant that's an open water source that smells. That's technology of 40 years ago. You can build an underground plant. It doesn't have to be smelly, or invasive or an eyesore. These things can be done if there is a will.

"They say it is all about money, but the rates paid by the Camps Bay or Atlantic Seaboard ratepayers' associations, for example – who are very anti what's going on – are some of the highest in the country. They pay three or four times more for sewage removal than other people and yet the sewage literally goes down a pipe and gets pumped into the sea.

"And don't even get me started on the Camps Bay's Blue Flag status as it's such a cheat. Only half the beach is a Blue Flag beach. They don't tell you that. Testing is done only three months a year when the prevailing wind is southeast and offshore. The testing is once every two weeks or something like that. It's a total cheat, and it doesn't reflect the fact that Camps Bay itself has a pipeline that comes out near Maiden's Cove. And very often the sewage goes straight back into the bay that acts as a reten-

tion zone. So you are basically swimming and surfing in raw sewage – yet it's a Blue Flag beach. So this whole thing is a joke."

Tresfon said second prize, if no plant is built, would be to cap the output at current levels. He explains: "The three main outfalls have a capacity of 55 million litres a day, and the sewage obviously increases at a corresponding rate to the population, which doubles every seven to ten years, so there comes a point when the sea cannot cope with the amount of sewage being dumped into it

"I think we are already at that point but if you accept we are not there yet, we need to start planning now for an alternative. The City has done nothing in the five years I've been hammering home the message. Not a single thing. In fact, it's got worse."

Tresfon referred to a report from the CSIR, commissioned by the City ("but which was not independent because the City insisted on doing a lot of its own testing") which concluded that there is not an imminent ecological disaster from dumping raw sewage into the ocean.

"But, in the conclusion, the CSIR scientists still distanced themselves from that and said the practice is frowned upon, has to be changed and that there are significant areas along

our coast where people can be at risk of getting seriously ill.

"When the report was released, the City did not release the publicly funded report to the public. Instead they issued a press release referring to the report, and it said that the report absolves the City from any wrong and shows there is nothing wrong with the sea and it's all fine to swim there. That's not what the report said at all. So there's been a lot of sneakiness along the way from the City.

"On top of this, the City used to have a coastal waters discharge permit to discharge the sewage into the sea. But in 2003, most of our Cape Coast was declared a Marine Protected Area. The National Environment Management Act and the Marine Living Resources Act both prohibit the dumping of waste into a marine protected area without permission."

Jean Tresfon will continue taking photographs and being an activist for the Western Cape's waters. "As my wife put it, I've become the poster boy for shit in the water in Cape Town!

"I never wanted that. I don't want to fight with the City. I don't need the recognition, fame, or notoriety. I am not looking for attention.

"What I want is for the City of Cape Town to just do their job." – **By Sue Segar** ■



The subtle art of changing minds

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A SCIENCE communicator, someone who helps other people understand complex or technical information about our world, before I even knew it was called “science communication” or understood it to be a viable career.

From a young age I have been sharing interesting knowledge with my friends and family based on what I have learned. Looking back, it felt good when they would see something brand new, in things they previously took for granted, just like I had.

I like to share how something new I have learned has changed my world view, and if something is complex, I break it down into simpler bits in the same way I did to wrap my head around it first.

This brings me to an important lesson in science communication: facts do care about your feelings.

Those of us who consider ourselves rational thinkers have a tendency to overestimate our ability to change people’s minds simply by presenting the facts. Smoking tobacco, driving without a seat belt, and choosing an unhealthy diet are just a few examples of how people do not necessarily make the best decisions even with access to the best information.

Since climate change science became a political football in America, the whole world has caught a cold from that sneeze of greed and stupidity. The United States of America is a global powerhouse of science and technology, yet president Donald Trump tells the World Economic Forum 2020 – where delegates gathered under the theme of sustainability – that the climate change message is “alarmist”.

On that note, Professor Amanda Lynch of Brown University, told me that climate scientists made a mistake in how they chose to let the world know about climate change from the very beginning. She’s written a book called *Urgency in the Anthropocene*, about how narratives

around climate change have shaped action to combat it. She says scientists mistakenly believed that the facts alone would prompt governments to take action.

But human beings do not work like that. Too much room was left for debate, and money has played an important role in pushing the narrative of “climate scepticism.”

At an academic science communication conference (SciComm 100) that I attended at Stellenbosch University in 2018, some speakers lamented the many failed efforts to change people’s minds by just dumping facts on them.

Dietram A Scheufele, a science communicator at University of Wisconsin-Madison, told me that growing political divides and online echo chambers are reasons why facts do not easily convince people.

“To protect our identities and our belief systems, we’re adjusting the facts to fit our beliefs, instead of adjusting our beliefs to fit the facts,” he said.

The key is to understand why people have certain beliefs in the first place, and to realise that distrust in authority and expertise might be why they recoil when presented with new information.

Ridiculous as purveyors of the flat earth movement may be, at the core of their perception of reality is a very real distrust of authorities they feel have lied to them before: “if the government lied about this or that, they could well be lying about the shape of the earth, couldn’t they?” their thinking would go.

I believe there’s a bigger chance that you’ll change someone’s mind if you acknowledge their fears and feelings about a topic. This is not the same as agreeing with or condoning their belief, but it leads to a human

connection, where they feel heard and understood rather than attacked.

Think of people who believe in things like “white genocide,” or that vaccines cause autism in children. Their fears are very real, but their conclusions are flawed.

Of course, some people cannot be reasoned with; they can refuse to be. So, it might be helpful to address individuals instead of groups as you can’t reason with a blood-thirsty mob.

To me, nothing beats human conversations full of empathy and kindness. And to start conversations with a goal of learning and teaching, instead of “destroying” your “opponent”. They call this the Socratic method of debate

and we need more of it today. ■





8000 Days – Mandela, Mbeki and beyond

ON NOVEMBER 5, 1985 AN interview with Oliver Tambo, the president of the banned African National Congress appeared in full in the *Cape Times*. At the time it was against the law to quote anyone from a banned organisation and Tony Heard, the then editor, knew full well the risks he was taking in publishing the interview.

This book is not about Heard's journey as a journalist and editor of the *Cape Times*: that story was told in *Cape of Storms*. This is the story of what happened in his second career after he had been booted from the editorship of the paper in August 1987 by Times Media Ltd, who gave no real reason for removing a principled and respected journalist and editor, merely saying that he had been in the position for 16 years and it was time for a change.

There is a poignant link though in the story of his unexpurgated interview with Tambo and his new book, which bears a cover of Heard giving then President Nelson Mandela a framed picture of Tambo and himself.

Being fired at 56 isn't great, and in *8000 Days*, Heard chronicles his concern about what he would do next. What happened next likely fell into place because of the respect in which Heard was held by the newly returned members of the ANC, who had won an election and needed to form a functional government.

Heard was not a member of the ANC, and yet in 1994 he was approached by the irrepressible Kadar Asmal at a party in leafy Rondebosch. Asmal was about to become Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, then a strange portfolio for a man of keen intellectual and legal gifts. But, having put together a team – that included Heard – Kader went on to prove that water could be fun, while focusing on bringing water to people as a human rights issue. Ah, those were the days when ministers actually thought they were meant to be making a difference.

Next he's relating his experiences

working under Mandela in the Office of the Presidency, and the quandaries he faced when he visited England – because of Mandela's support for the IRA and his open and friendly style.

Heard also served under Thabo Mbeki, alongside colleagues who had to devise strategies to mitigate Mbeki's peculiar obsession with trash-talking the link between HIV and Aids, a strange blip in the behaviour of a man who was a scholar and, as Heard says, would probably have been happier as an academic than a president. (Heard recalls: "Some days before Mbeki's political fate was sealed, I had an SMS from Bheki Khumalo, who was right at Mbeki's side at Polokwane: "The Chief has decided to leave it to the vagaries of the vote.")

The story that Heard weaves in *8000 Days* is by no means an exact chronicle of the times and politics of the years he spent as a presidential advisor. Nor does it pretend to be a definitive critique of the politics of the time. Rather, it gives

a personal glimpse into how the first four presidential administrations functioned, and sometimes scraped by with the luck of the gods on their side.

From the ebullience of the Mandela days, through the scholarly and often egg-shell diplomacy days of Mbeki, to the caretaker presidency of the Kgalema Motlanthe after Mbeki's ouster as leader of the ANC, to the horror of the arrival of the Zuma years, this is a book for the reader who enjoys good storytelling. It is a mild and humble evaluation of one man and his contribution to South African politics in the trenches of Parliament rather than in the corridors of the Fourth Estate.

There are moments in the book and incidents where the reader feels one would like a little more juicy detail, but Heard has not set out to be salacious. He is free in his criticism of those he deemed to be doing a bad job, but he also has the ability to see that most people are a mixture of good and bad, or competent and incompetent. Perhaps that is his journalistic experience that allows him to see the world as grey, and not black and white.

This story also mixes in moments of personal reflection, as Heard became a single father with a demanding job, about learning to sew buttons on school shirts, after the tragic death of his former second wife. In fact, for those of us who knew Mary Ann Barker, his retelling of the night she died is one of the most difficult parts of the book to read, but Heard tells it with economy of style and a lack of hysteria, while allowing the reader to sense just how much of a seismic shock this was to his younger children.

8000 Days tells a story about our recent history, peppered with human observations and some recommendations offered as ways to take back the country Oliver Tambo once dreamed of and discussed with a wayward brave editor. It's a great book to read to remind yourself of the things – dear heavens – the things we have been through since 1994. ■



8000 DAYS
by Tony Heard
(Missing Ink)



Letter from Umjindi

On the light side

THE LIFE OF A NEWSPAPER (OR IN this case) magazine columnist is not an easy one, particularly for one's state of mind. Herein lies the problem: there is absolutely nothing that slips by us. Our minds have been programmed to comment on everything we come across, observe, hear, see, watch etc whether we want to or not. We become very keen observers and analysts, sometimes too keen.

Unfortunately all too often we find ourselves being compelled to comment on serious issues, like the recent Roundup herbicide threat I wrote about in *Noseweek's* last edition (*nose245*). But hey, every once in a while one is drawn to comment on something that makes this columnist thing enjoyable. So here are a couple of fun observations I recently made that I must share with you.

Let's begin with our free TV station e.tv, I was miffed, gatvol, peed-off that it had stopped airing the likes of *Forensic Files* and *Unusual Suspects*. Oh, wait a minute, they did not stop airing them altogether, they relegated these true crime stories to ridiculous early morning insomniac hours. But hey, thank goodness they have since been brought back to a reasonable 10pm time slot on Tuesday.

But before then I was yelling, screaming, shouting out like a lunatic and asking why can't e.tv at least run these interesting crime stories in the time slots in which they air trailer park trash entertainment. You know, the rubbish that is *Couples Court with the Cutlers*, *Impact* (the wrestling) *Paternity Court* and *Judge Judy*. (Okay, leave the Jud she's a hoot).

And at one point I end my mad-man-talking-alone rant at e.tv by saying, "The next thing we know these idiots will bring us *Jerry Springer* the king of trailer park trash tv".

A few days later e.tv announces the upcoming airing of *Judge Jerry*, oh yeah, like I said, we columnists are keen observers. Okay, the Jerry

rubbish is on e.tv Extra. So what? Well, my keen observation was spot on.

Here is another gem: in February for the almost the entire month, at least for weeks, our little town of Barberton and its surrounds was rocked by service delivery protests. And we all know how these things play out.

First, the protesters take to the streets and highlight reasonably legitimate gripes – followed, of course, by the customary looting and disturbance of all activity, schooling, traffic flows etc.

Now, I guess they feel they have done a pretty good job in destabilising Umjindi township as well as the town centre, so they decide they're now going to disrupt the surrounding rural areas.

Alas, I wake up in my usual jolly good mood, look out the window, and what do I see? There are five protesters putting up a roadblock right in front of my gate.

I am like "What the f***k?"

I think for a bit, and I decide to call the taxi associations.

So the taxi guys show up and pull a Trojan horse manoeuvre, hiding inside the taxi, and pop out when the idiot protesters move closer.

Man, oh man, I thought I was seeing the 1980s all over again when the apartheid police did the same thing in

Cape Town. That scene made international news.

Suffice it to say I have a new-found respect for taxi drivers; you do not mess with their livelihood. It's a good thing those kids ran like cheetahs because, as God is my witness, if one of them would have been caught, the taxi lads would have killed them and I would be writing about murder at my farm gate.

Oh, by the way, four police vehicles showed up right behind the taxi and the taxi guys said they we will handle this. The police stood there dumbstruck, not knowing what to do.

Once again a word to the wise: don't mess with taxi drivers.

Like I said, we journos are very perceptive. I saw this coming and like an idiot I stood there in front of my gate watching all this go down. It was only later, after it was all said and done, that I realised I could have been killed. I mean, what if one of the taxi guys had a gun and came out shooting? Your favourite columnist would have taken a stray bullet – like happens so often in Cape Town.

Yes we are keen observers, but sometimes we are stupid for the story.. Argh! Such is the life of journos, so I implore readers to appreciate what we do because, in the words of Canadian rocker Brian Adams, What we do, we do it all for you. ■



Service delivery protestts



The President's speech reimagined

THE PRESIDENT'S RECENT SONA address was described as a "lame duck" and "a lead balloon". Same old, no action. There were also people who didn't like the speech. Cyril Ramaphosa intended to inject some hope and realism into the nation with his oration but instead, it acted as a general anaesthetic. It needed some punch and vooma. What if history's best scribes conspired to re-write the event?

EFF Pre-Show (As written by the Looney Tunes)

While suitably animated, entertaining and cartoonish, this part could have been much shorter. *Bugs Bunny*, *Fred Flintstone* and *The Simpsons* have some pearls which perfectly summarises the sound and fury of the EFF, signifying the same nothing, but saying everything of worth in their antics:

"Yabba-dabba-doo! Zoinks! Pik-Pik-de Klerk! Beep! Beep! Eat my shorts!"

The Main Event (Reworked by Shakespeare, Churchill et al)

This part lacked gravitas and brutal honesty. We borrowed from the heavy-weights of literature and the silver screen, including some input from the Statue of Liberty and Alfred E Neuman:

"Friends, comrades and fellow countrymen, lend me your fears. I have nothing to offer, but the blood, toil, tears and sweat of the tired, poor and huddled masses yearning to be free.

"What, me worry? Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

"To those who have remarked upon my presidency, it is clear you do not understand; I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am. As you know, being a member of the ANC means never having to say

you're sorry. The ANC will rule until Jesus comes back.

"To the 1% who pay 61% of our taxes, do you want the truth? You can't handle the truth – never before has so much been owed by so many to so few. So, I am going to make you an offer you can't refuse: we are going to tax you on the beaches, we shall fleece you on the landing grounds, we shall expropriate you in your fields. For Eskom, for SAA, for corruption we have not even invented yet. We shall never surrender.



"So show me the money! Show me the money!!! Everyone will say this has been my finest hour. Go ahead, make my day."

Extra Feature A Grimm Fairy Tale

The President's speech had some good fantasy elements, but if you are going to sell people fairy tales, you should make them more memorable, according to the Brothers Grimm. They also suggested stronger main characters, so the story could be illustrated as a children's book, perhaps. We could sell some copies to make up for the budget shortfall.

"Mzansiland was renowned for

its territorial disputes and its feisty birds. There was a striking girl called Sleeping Duty and a fearsome chick called Godzille. But the goose who got all the attention was Snow White Monopoly Capital. Everyone wanted a piece of her because she was the goose that laid the golden egg. Snow White Monopoly Capital was always pursued by seven dwarfs. They were all dopey, but their names were: Julius, Floyd, Mbuyiseni, Andile and Expropriation Without Compensation.

"One day, a big bad wolf, aka 'Reality' arrived in Mzansiland 'I am going to huff and I am going to puff and I am going to blow this whole place down!' he warned. Nobody listened. It was if Reality did not exist.

"The wolf took a megaphone he got from the ratings agencies and repeated his mortal threat. 'I am going to huff and I am going to puff and I am going to blow this place down!'

"The President was shocked, but apart from that, no one changed their behaviour.

"The wolf shook his head. What more could he do, really? Then he took a deep breath. He huffed and he puffed and he blew the place down like he said he would. Even as the country lay in ruins, people seemed to not notice Reality had hit them. The big bad wolf was frustrated. He decided that he would make himself even bigger; surely then people would notice him? On his next gig, he showed up as the elephant in the room and was again ignored.

"It is not clear whether anyone lives happily after. Could go either way, I guess.

"Thus, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country. More importantly, you've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?'

"Well, do ya, punk?"

Th-th-th-that's all folks. ■

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