

TEN

VICTORY AND DEFEAT

NOORAK sits by his fire sunk in dreams of Sandawara, seeing again in vision those days when fear is in the white man and the campfires of the people buzz with the tales of their hero's exploits, of how the patrols seek him here, there and everywhere while he roams at will with his band across his earth, while he rests safely in one cave or the other, while he watches, strikes, runs and turns to strike again.

The old man's eyes reflect the flickering flames of the fire playing with the darkness and creating shape and form, illusion and reality. His eyes are motionless, unblinking, unseeing—freed, his mind can roam at will, in words and in images, over the land and into the past.

Sandawara is strange, men whisper. The white fellows call him, Eaglehawk, a bird. Birds love the sky, it is their land, but this man always seeks the secret underground places far from the sky. It is not so strange, for do not the cloud-messengers, the rain bringers love the dark secret places too? Wandjina that made the earth and everything, that made man and gave him his land on which to live. Wandjina lives in caves and gives rain to the earth which is warm and breathes, live with their breath of steam which rises to fall as rain. Wandjina is the earth and sky and everything between and, like his spirit ancestors, Sandawara loves to live close to them in the earth. Like a serpent, his line of retreat is always back into the earth and he alone knows the underground places. Those which enter the ground and stay there and his own holes which go a long, long way in to meet other tunnels until finally, at last, after many miles they turn up to come out into the clear day or soft evening light far, far away from where he had gone to earth and where the white men lie waiting in ambush, confident that they have him trapped.

Time and time again with a patrol hot on his heels, racing along

before the keen eyes of the Queensland trackers, he vanishes, sometimes even on the bank of a deep pool surrounded by bush and easily searched. The police and trackers spend many hours thrashing about in the scrub and even set fire to it to drive him out, but this country is not theirs and it has taken its own to it. He cannot be found. At last, they give up, puzzled and angry and ride away from the desolation they have caused. Cursing, the white men ride back to their base, promising never to take him alive. He has outwitted them too often, far too often. But the trackers, taken far from their own earth, sit around their campfires and murmur throughout the night, creating legends of this man who is more than a man. They whisper that he creates the caves into which he descends.

And how does Sandawara escape? He swims a river, or pool to a cliff or hillside to haul himself up into a hole which covers him quietly. The hot sun quickly dries the wet imprints of his feet and hands. They search in vain while Sandawara writhes through the ground to where he has left fire-making sticks and torches of gummy bark and leaves. Igniting them, he continues on his journey until he finally emerges into the open air on a ridge-top or a tableland far from his pursuers.

The police come to hate and to fear Sandawara. They see him not as a valiant fighter to be treated with respect, but as something inhuman from the dark depths to be exterminated. After a raid when Sandawara and his men scatter to confuse pursuit, it is after him that the patrols thunder. His men joke about it and he laughs along with them. A loud laugh which suddenly clicks off. The leader cannot afford to relax. His men watch and wonder. Sandawara's eyes have grown cold, like the floors of some of his caves, like the eyes of a serpent, and his voice sounds often like a distant echo, or the roar of the bullroarer summoning men to secret ceremonies. He listens to his men and chuckles and says: 'Those white fellows really love me. They run after me all the time and how can I say "no" to them. They love me so much that they want me to be with them for ever—in a little hole in the ground with no way out. You better watch out that they don't start loving you and come chasing after you. They want you just a little now, and once they catch you, you'll never be free of them.' His voice hisses, then echoes on: 'So take care and always cover your tracks. Always be on your guard and be sure that no tracks lead towards your refuge in the earth. Never leave a mark for them to follow; never sleep with both eyes closed, or one day you'll sleep on with lead in your guts.

Just remember what happened to Alinda, the moonman, and you'll never be caught unawares. Alinda wronged his wives by killing their children. They found out about it and wanted revenge. At last they caught him sleeping in his hut. Those women burnt it to the ground with him in it. How they laughed when they watched him die in great pain amid the burning logs. But he was more than a man and their laughter ceased when he came to life before their very eyes.

'That moonman began to laugh now and he changed into a thin snake which gradually flattened into a large silver ball, like a giant honeyant. It floated to the top of the trees and from there, Alinda spoke to every thing in the world. "You will all die," he declared, "and never come to life again in the same form. You women that have tried to kill me, when I have grown as round as this in the sky, will shed blood for your crime in seeking to destroy me. My home'll be in the sky so that everyone will know that I am still alive. I will die for only three days of the month and then I will come alive again and live, then die again, then live, then die and so for ever!" We are not like Alinda,' Sandawara says with a dry chuckle, 'and must take care, for once we are dead we will never be as we are now.'

His men look at one another with moist eyes. Death is ever present and as warriors they face it with a jest, but now it hits them with all its reality. They whisper that it is love of death that leads Sandawara on, that chills his eyes and makes him seek out the caves of the Wandjina. They believe that he wants to conquer not the white man, but death itself, that he wants to become a Wandjina and recreate the Law.

Around the campfires the tales are formed and merged with old myths until the trackers go in fear of meeting Sandawara. They believe that he is no longer a man, or if a man, a great mapan (shaman) who can control the forces of nature. When Sandawara disappears and is nowhere to be found, it is because he travels in the spirit land. Even the white police call him a devil and shake their heads over their failure to run him down. For over two years he has been out against the invaders and has become the hero of countless corroborees throughout the Kimberleys. Sandawara transcends tribal boundaries just like the spirit men of the beginning. He is taken to the hearts of his people and in the terrible future he will be there to give them strength.

Noorak's eyes stare right through the fire, down into the earth

and into a cave—the cave of the Wandjina. The tall, broad-shouldered man with the warrior scars across his back and shoulders, huddled over a dim fire, is Sandawara. Wild eagle feathers are knotted into his hair. He broods in the home of his ancestors.

Noorak knows the cave well. It is a sacred dreaming place of his people and well hidden from the uninitiated. To enter it a man has to wade along a creek almost lost in a tangle of jungle-like bush that is alive with snakes and spirit guardians. The entrance is a narrow slit in the rock which gives into a narrow low passageway winding deep underground where finally it opens out into a wide, high chamber.

The place of the Law and the secret ceremonies. Here, Wandjina live on in essence so that men might visit them, learn their laws and walk the right paths. Here also lie the skeletons of tribal dead who have returned to the source. In this holy place, surrounded by the white bodied and haloed faces of the Wandjina, Sandawara broods over his next move in the plan to liberate his earth—the land given to him, his ancestors and successors by the creative spirits whose white faces and dark pits of eyes gaze down upon him in understanding.

He ponders on what to do. To raid a cattle station for guns and then to retreat to a secure area to train more men to handle them, and then to raid and raid until enough arms have been captured to equip all the fighting men of the tribes in the last great struggle to drive the invaders from the countryside into Derby and at last into the sea, or—he comes back to the immediate future. A simple plan, without risk, to get guns is decided on. Always, the need for arms, and always Sandawara plots to capture them. Alone, they can free his land.

II

The heavy supply waggon creaks along the Derby to Fitzroy River Crossing Road. It groans under a heavy load. Six months' rations together with arms and ammunition for the police patrol guarding the ford. Behind it, for protection, travels a cattle station waggon. Each vehicle is guarded by three well armed mounted troopers ready to blaze away at the slightest sign of trouble. The teamsters are four very apprehensive black men with six savage dogs for added safety.

Well along on the journey, they move through liberated country.

On edge, the troopers constantly scan the bush on either side. Their rifles are held across their saddles, ready to be jerked up and fired.

Strangely for them, the journey has been a lonely one with not even a glimpse of what they contemptuously refer to as 'bush niggers'. Little wonder, for the people know that the white men shoot at any black men or black women foolish enough to show themselves. Still as the invaders press on, they feel that eyes are noting their progress and this causes them to be even more jumpy. A movement in the scrub to one side of the road. Six rifles crack. That night they enjoy wallaby stew. Their uneasiness fades. Only a few more days and they'll be through.

But Sandawara receives reports of their progress. He is determined to attack them, perhaps too determined. He is over-anxious for the supplies. He needs weapons as a man needs a woman, and he'll always need guns. He must have them if there is to be a real campaign. This shapes all his thinking and causes him to take risks. Hidden beside the road, he and his men feel the dust settle on their skins as the waggons roll past. They smile grimly at the sudden firing and the instant death of an animal. They lope along after the vehicles and watch as the enemy makes camp. The plan is for a dawn attack. Half of his men will rush the camp; others will drive off the horses, and the rest will be held in reserve, ready to hasten up to support either group.

It is a good plan, but the thudding, bare feet of a small boy pounds towards them. He reaches the leader and falls, panting at his feet. Bad news: a police patrol is approaching.

'We'll fight them,' Sandawara growls, reaching for his rifle.

'But plenty, plenty white fellows come galloping here,' the boy gasps out.

Quickly Sandawara orders some of his men to disperse, to scatter far and wide. In this way he hopes to lure the patrol away, and then to regroup and smash the camp. He nods to Ellewara and Captain to withdraw with the main body of men into the nearby foothills. They are to wait there until midnight, then return. He shinnies up into the branches of a tree so that he can keep the enemy under close observation. His men fade away as the sound of galloping hooves tear into the silence of the countryside. The patrol jerks to a halt beneath the tree. Trackers point out the way the men have gone. Orders are shouted and the horsemen wheel their mounts and rush off.

In dismay, Sandawara sees that they are after the main band. Hoping to distract them, he slides down from the tree, drops to one knee, sights and fires. A rider lurches in the saddle, clutching one shoulder. The horsemen scatter. Sandawara ups and lopes away. Behind him the party rallies, one group gallop off while the rest turn and come charging back past the tree. Thudding hooves shake the ground behind the fleeing black man. He dashes through the scrub and brush. For three kilometres he holds the distance between them. Then a bullet springs off a tree trunk next to his head. Another thuds into the earth right at his feet. Two horsemen spur their mounts in a dead run at him. Sandawara flings up his Winchester and lets off a wild shot.

The men yell and keep on coming. Their revolvers bang out harmlessly. The freedom fighter races off, slowly and surely outrunning the tiring animals. The men curse and flog their mounts. It is a mistake. They should pull up for accurate fire. Sandawara charges through the bush, stops and takes a leap to one side. He rolls down into the steeply sloping mouth of a cave.

Meanwhile the hard riding members of the other part of the patrol overtake Ellewara and Captain's group just as they are hurrying up the incline leading to the hills. The police are almost on them when they drop to the ground and open fire. A rider falls and the others rein in. The band leap to their feet and retreat, not up towards the ridge top, but towards a rocky gorge. The horsemen thunder after them, revolvers popping like cap pistols. A few rein in and aim their rifles. A man, Lillewara, running next to Ellewara, gives a scream as a bullet rips into his back and tears its way out of his chest. Ellewara turns towards his stricken comrade. A great thud is followed by a flash of light. A slug has ripped across his skull. Captain reels and falls moaning with a smashed shoulder. He tries to aim his gun, but a slug has smashed his Schneider into uselessness. Stunned more by the loss of his beloved gun than by his wound, he fails to see the wildly galloping constable who, as he passes, swings his rifle butt down on to the wounded man's head.

He regains consciousness to find himself chained to Ellewara. Cold links circle their necks. No one has attended to their wounds. Burning with hate they direct their scornful eyes to the Queensland trackers who speedily wilt under the concentrated venom of the chilling gaze. They see their deaths reflected in the eyes of the freedom fighters and turn away. If Captain and Ellewara should

ever escape, the whole of Australia will not be able to hide or guard these traitors from justice.

Ellewara recovers from the scalp wound and his rage is a shield around him. He stands tall and proud, unbowed by the iron around his neck. Has he not been captured before and escaped? No one can steal his freedom from him. His breath is one long hiss of flame and lust for revenge. Without traitors, the invaders would never have captured him. He looks at Captain. Ready, as he is, for the first opportunity to escape.

The horsemen turn and canter off. The chain tightens. The wounded prisoners are forced to lope along behind the animals.

Captain's chill rage turns over the escape methods of the prisoners he has guarded when a slave of the white men. What they have done, he can do better. His hard eyes bore into the uneasy backs of the trackers riding ahead, then he twists his head towards his comrade.

Ellewara rages at his plight. They will never hold him, but they do—until he gains eternal freedom dangling at the end of a rope in Derby Town.

Captain is not from the Kimberleys. Originally, the white men have taken him from South Australia to do their dirty work for them far from his own land, but he has grown to love the crags and fastnesses of the Leopold Ranges, a land very different from his flat dry desert. Now he is leaving it for ever and moving closer to home, but not near enough for his spirit to return there. He is to be exiled on Rottne Island off the port of Fremantle. There he will suffer with others of his people. Penned like an animal in a concentration camp designed to break men, especially a free man, for a year he will build roads and mine salt under the lash. Shackles will turn his ankles into running sores as he slaves to secure the land for the invaders. Then in a desperate attempt to regain his freedom, he will try to escape by swimming the fifteen kilometres of rough sea separating the island from the mainland. Dragged down by his chains and almost drowned, he will be pulled out and then flogged by his captors. It will take just over a year to break his spirit. He is a tough one, this Captain. Most men break within months.

III

Sandawara scrambles back to the cave mouth and aims his rifle at a

rider. He fires. Blam! He frowns. The man's hat zips off his head. He lowers his aim. Blam! Again the shot goes wild. A horse goes down and threshes about. Sandawara examines the sights of his Winchester, while the party gallop out of the line of fire. He pumps a bullet into the breech. Blam! A hundred metres off, a leaf rips off a twig. He smiles and waits.

Bitter despair at the upsetting of his plan hits his heart, then his mood lightens. The main body of his men have made it to the hills and are now resting before marching back to attack the camp. Night falls as he waits to escape. With the police so near who will believe that the freedom fighters would be foolhardy enough to strike out?

Under the sheltering rock, he listens while staring up at the darkening sky. A few grass blades outlined at the cave mouth vanish in the gloom. He takes a quick nap. Sounds jerk him alert. He fires a couple of shots, then relaxes. Time broods on in the cool, deep silence. He becomes detached from the mad outside world where men kill and are forced to kill. If only the strangers followed Wandjina, then they would know and follow the Law. Then no more trouble. But the invaders follow no law he can understand. Are they really human or other than human, he wonders about the invaders who have forced brother to fight brother, who kill each other and seem to hate the very earth.

He crouches unable to understand. He listens to the deeper drip-drip of subterranean water which is the heartbeat of the earth and thinks of himself as a child. The touch of his naked mother as she feeds him from her body, the gleam of the fire at night, the tall hardness of his father. All these have made the security of his life—then the strangers came to bribe him into becoming an enemy of his earth and an outlaw named Eaglehawk. He had forgotten Wandjina for a long time, now no more. He defends Wandjina's people and his Law, but the police rage against him. He forsook his ancestors and broke the Law to ride with the police, now he suffers the fate of all lawbreakers.

He is hunted and driven from place to place. He is tracked like an animal and if caught is to be killed without mercy. Death is his future, he knows it, by a bullet or a rope. He has broken the Law and can never be an elder of his people knowing all the sacred songs and rituals. He hopes the end will be a bullet. Eaglehawk, the tracker, has seen men hanged, their legs kicking at air, their eyes bulging from the sockets, a blackened tongue hanging from a drooling mouth, the neck snapping like the branch of a tree. He

grins without mirth, remembering the stiff penis and the last ejaculation. Is the spirit leaving the body to return to the source? The question is left to die. He is a warrior, still young and agile—not an elder—and his duty is to fight, to gain victories, to gather men and train them into an army to expel the aliens from the land. Spiritual matters should be left to those who understand them.

Sandawara stares up at the darkened cave mouth and it seems that a small, black figure stoops and enters. It is his old mother lugging a dilly bag stuffed with good chunks of roo meat, freshly seared in a fire. He is about to greet her when she vanishes. He blinks his eyes. It has been a spirit woman come to comfort him. Sandawara feels fresh and invigorated as if his strong white teeth have ripped into the juicy flesh.

Scuffling noises! Quickly he fires two shots. Briefly he thinks of his men. From a distance, sporadic gunfire is heard. Are they in contact with the enemy? The firing peters out. No, he is sure his men are safe in the hills and regrouping for the dawn attack. More sounds at the cave mouth. He empties his rifle and slowly reloads. He knows his cave. It extends back a hundred metres and tapers to a dead end. Another tunnel branches to the right, but this ends in a pool of water. Only the one entrance, but the warrior is untroubled. In the dead of the night he can slip by them.

Suddenly, without warning, a rock glances off the floor at his feet. He leaps up and races to the back of the cave. A shower of rocks clatter down, bouncing and leaping off the stone walls. The sounds echo and re-echo. Sandawara grins. They'll never drive him out with such tactics. The stones cease and he returns to his old position. The night creeps on, and he prepares to escape.

Just as he is about to make his attempt, the cave mouth glares with light. Sandawara curses. A watchfire has been kindled almost directly in front of the entrance. Now there is no chance of a stealthy upward crawl, the sudden silent leap into the open and into the darkness, then the race away before the police are even aware of his escape. No chance of that now with the fire flinging its light right down to him. Guns are sure to be trained on the cave mouth, ready for the break. Up above, death stands armed and waiting for him while below in the earth, what? Slow, starving death or surrender! Never surrender—only death!

Sandawara creeps perilously close to the open air. So close that the fire glares on his fierce face and on the cicatrised weals and scars on his chest which are the marks of a warrior. A shot. He

tumbles down on to the cave floor. Instantly on his feet, he scrambles back to return the fire. Hopelessly trapped, but at least he has a supply of water. He goes to the underground pool and kneels down. His mouth sucks up the water without disturbing the surface, then he returns to his old position. How to escape? His eyes turn blank, unseeing—or seeing? An old man, grey haired and bearded but still sturdy, enters the cave as his mother has before. The elder brushes past Sandawara who watches him disappear into the darkness, then gets up to follow him to the dead end. The ancient one points at the rock face, turns and gazes at the warrior, then vanishes.

Startled, Sandawara stands staring at the stone wall. At last he takes out his knife and jabs it into the rock. It crumbles. The warrior gives thanks to the guardians of his tribe as he hacks into the yielding rock.

Throughout the night he digs and rests, digs and rests. His rest periods are spent sending a bullet or two up at the police—those fools who think him trapped! He laughs as his knife sinks into clay-like stone. It is only a matter of clearing out a wedge-shaped fault in the solid rock. The cleft almost seems to grow of its own accord.

Just before dawn Sandawara thrusts in his knife and it passes through into the open. Swiftly he works until the hole is wide enough for him to crawl through, then rushes back to the cave mouth where the fire still blazes. He listens. Not a sound except for the crackling of burning logs. He fires a shot, then runs back to squeeze through the hole and out to freedom.

Sandawara finds himself at the bottom of a cliff right on the edge of a river. Without a splash he slides into the water and floats away as dawn greys the sky. Behind him, the weary watchmen try to stay awake and alert. At last they have trapped the demon, Eaglehawk, like a snake in its hole. But they cannot help thinking of his previous, uncanny escapes. This time they are sure that they have him; but how long will it take to starve him out? They want to end it quickly. They desperately need the glory of catching or killing the most notorious killer in the Kimberleys. Promotion and a transfer south to Perth will take them away from this hated land for ever. The white policemen gloat over their future rewards while the trackers watch the cave mouth. Their reward will be an extra plug of tobacco and a pat on the head. Meanwhile as the policemen's thoughts drift over such subjects, their quarry trots through the growing day, free on his beloved land.

ELEVEN

THE NUNGAR VOTE

DETECTIVE Collins, impersonating his favourite T.V. cop, lumbers towards the police car. Unfortunately without the proper camera shots, he makes little impression. Kelly heaves his body after him, like some out of condition rhino. The race is neither won nor lost. The two fall puffing into the back seat of the car, get their breaths and yell to the driver: 'Let's get moving to the Commonwealth Bank! Step on the gas! Just got a hot tip that it's going to be hit by a gang of armed men!'

The over-excited driver screams out of the garage on shrieking wheels. He rockets around a corner and, with his siren ripping into the heat, pelts along for a good two hundred metres. He slams on the brakes, lurching Collins and Kelly suddenly forwards, then abruptly backwards. Apologetically he looks back at them. Behind the car a police van bulging with cops bangs to a halt with a clang of metal on metal. The sedan leaps forward on locked wheels.

'Fuck it, why'd you stop like that?' Kelly shouts out.

'Beg pardon, sir, but which branch of the bank do you want?'

Two large meaty faces exchange glances. Steely eyes turn shifty.

'What bank was it, Collins?' Kelly grinds out.

'Thought you caught it,' Collins grinds back, seeing his promotion flying out of the window.

'Get that loony, he can't have got far,' Kelly shouts out, desperately wishing for the services of a good script writer.

The sedan surges off to the end of the street and again slams to a halt. The van bashes into the back.

'Watch it, mate,' the car driver calls over the radio, 'that's the second time you've smacked my arse.'

'Well give some bloody hand signals or something,' the radio squawks back. 'I can't read your bloody mind and your brake lights are on the blink.'

'They bloody well should be after you've smashed them,' the

driver snarls as he U-turns and tears back up the street. The van, after a good deal of backing and forwarding, manages to make the turn. It lumbers along with a clashing of gears and a fumbling of clutch.

Meanwhile a good distance ahead in the police car, Kelly and Collins perspire and curse the nut who's causing all the fuss. If the bank is done and they miss it, they'll be up the creek for sure. Things are not too good for the police in the golden west.

Twin cars reflect in Ron's sunglasses as he glances sideways to the kerb. They hurtle past and out of his eyes with a scream of tortured siren—which suddenly falters, gurgles and dies in long drawn out wails. The sedan skids to a halt with a spray of rubber, then reverses with a high pitched whine of protest. Ron pretends to ignore the manoeuvre. The black van cruises to a stop beside him. The man bends over a litter bin and begins to pull out the contents, carefully piling them at his feet.

The crash of the reversing car carooming off the front of the heavy van causes his body to stiffen. He slowly looks up and finds surprise and amazement. The crash ejects a dozen armed cops from the back of the van. They've just been about to leap out in the best possible style when disaster struck. Now they tumble out in a heap of 'fucks', 'hells' and 'it just ain't our day'. Ron looking on has a sudden flash of sanity. There isn't any place for a loony in this world anymore. The competition is too much. He begins carefully replacing the litter. If he doesn't watch out the cops'll be fighting him for food scraps.

The blue heap manages to sort itself out, untangling pistols and batons and handcuffs. They get into some sort of order trying not to show signs of aches and pains from scrapes and bruises. They straighten their uniforms and caps while the wanted man looks down. His shades reflect heavy pig boots that can maim and break bones. His extended flash of sanity becomes terrifying.

'Right, no nonsense, that bank, where is it?' Collins and Kelly shout. Their words mix into gibberish. The frightened nut seeks refuge in his loony act. He even begins to drool. Inwardly he quakes: 'this game ain't worth a cracker, mate.' Still, he goes into his 'got a twenty cent piece?' routine until the two burly detectives almost throw a fit.

They shake him backwards and forwards and promise him all sorts of hell if he doesn't answer their questions quick-smart. Their hard eyes of steel fuddle his brain.

'You tell us where that bank is or we'll lock you up and throw away the key,' they scream out. 'Where is it? Where is it? Where is it?' they shout over and over again.

The Beaufort Street nut finally recovers enough to begin deciphering the gibberish of their code. He listens, keeping the armour of his lunacy up as a shield. Under it, he is almost in a panic. His heart tears at his throat and breaks the numbness of his life. The flash of sanity has become almost unendurable. 'This game ain't worth a cracker, mate,' he whispers to no one as a coin is thrust into his hand. The detectives have decided to try bribery.

'You know that one in Oxford Street,' he manages to stumble out and is amazed at the result.

The police exit flings him on to the pavement. He sits up in the midst of petrol fumes as motors rev. With a roar first the sedan and then the van charge off with a scream of sirens.

'Dirty pigs,' the man mutters in a shaking voice, slowly getting off the ground. 'Dirty cop bastards, I'll get you for this,' he quakes in a voice which isn't the voice of the Ron of old. He pulls a pair of large, woollen, female underpants from his shirt front and half heartedly flaps them after the vehicles. 'Oh, what's the use?' he almost sobs. His body jack knifes and he heaves up a pound or so of Spam and lumps of bread.

'This game ain't worth a cracker, mate.' He voices the sentence which has been tumbling around and around in his head like clothes in a washing machine. His body is racked by a spasm and jerks green bile down on to the street. He mops his face with the pants, then tosses them into the bin. Instantly his hand leaps out to retrieve them. It stops in mid flight. All at once, the female underpants have turned into just another piece of nondescript cloth. Visions of figures in the mental hospital tumble into his now too sane mind. Frightened, he pushes them down with his newly discovered mantra: 'This game ain't worth a cracker, mate.' The police flock into his head followed by Alan and his mob. He pushes them away. Ron takes the pledge to reform himself—but old habits die hard.

II

'This is it,' Sandawara says with a grin to Kangawara as they wheel along the street. The girl squeezes his hand and prays that every-

thing will go without a hitch. Captain with the bouncing teenybopper on his knee, scowls. Fearing the worst as he does of any situation, he longs only for a drink, and the girl jiggling about means nothing. It's all too crazy for him to make head or tail of. The slogan daubed vehicle stands out a mile, and as for their army fatigues, and as for their stupid masks . . . he shudders and shudders again as sirens scream toward them. Ellewara doesn't turn a hair. He keeps on driving steadily, purposely forward. Already he can see his new set of drums. He beats out a rhythmic series of beeps on the horn that makes Captain quake. If only the pigs stop them, if only . . . The sirens scream ever nearer.

'What in hell's that?' the driver yells over his radio to the van.

'Looks like some sort of political rally,' Kelly says to Collins.

'Probably university students,' Collins replies to Kelly.

'Want me to pull them over, sir?' the driver enquires helpfully.

'We're on our way to foil a bank holdup and you want to stop a carload of hippy students,' Kelly sneers. 'Man, use that lump you call a head!'

The driver scowls and mutters under his breath.

Ellewara pilots the car sedately along. The police sedan and van scream past. 'Wonder where they're off to in such a rush?' he says to Sandawara.

'They aren't going in our direction, anyway,' the leader replies.

'Maybe they're going to arrest a drunk,' Captain says in an attempt at a joke at which Kangawara smiles.

Next to him Wawollu has her hand down Lillewara's pants and is gently pulling on his pubic hair. This, she knows, quickly turns him on. She wriggles around on his hard penis. Captain doesn't notice just as he doesn't feel the teenybopper wriggling on his lap. Wandara and Terawara are all eyes and pounding hearts and happy to be along for the show. 'Gee, just think, going on a real bank bust just like on telly,' whispers Terawara to her friend. Their cup of happiness overflows. Sandawara and Ellewara will look after them.

Ellewara deftly parks the car outside the bank. He knows that the tyres will be exactly an inch away from the curb edge.

'All right this is it,' growls Sandawara in his deepest voice. His eyes reach out to each person. Everyone is ready for action. His mob get out the rifles and quietly leave the car. In the near-deserted street no one spares a glance for the guerrilla outfit—

except the pizza man who stares, then shrugs his shoulders. It's too crazy for him to understand and he's having problems of his own. His wife is just about to have a *bambino*, that is, he wants a son. Fatalistically he bites into a piece of pizza knowing that the baby'll be a girl. In the distance sirens howl.

The police car hurtles along and at last the driver decides to speak. He's fed up to the gills with his so-called bloody superiors. 'Bloody oafs,' he mutters, then he smirks maliciously, savouring the dropping of his bomb. If only his application to the Commonwealth Police has been accepted, then goodbye to these hicks. He clears his throat.

'Sir,' he begins carefully masking the triumph he is feeling. He hopes they'll be on the mat for this blunder. 'Sir,' he begins again, a joyful edge to his tone. This'll show these bastards up. It'll go down in history. He lets the words out slowly. 'This is a pretty long street and if I recollect rightly there are at least three branches of the bank along it. Which one do I make for?'

'The nearest one, you fool,' scream Kelly and Collins unable to mask their consternation. Their first big job and everyone and everything is letting them down.

'Get on the radio,' yells Collins.

'Get cars to the other branches,' shouts Kelly.

'We want to be at that branch in one minute,' scream the two detectives. 'You're on report,' they scream again when they notice his smirk. Hidden from sight by the front seat they wring their hands. What else could happen?

The sedan rushes back on its tracks. The van carooms around and follows. Two innocent vehicles trying to avoid the police van career out of control and smash head on. No one is hurt, but the police image suffers. The police charge down on the bank and reach it just as Sandawara's mob is rushing out.

'They got guns,' screams Kelly.

'Take no chances,' bellows Collins.

The cops in the van take one long look at the masked and armed robbers and fear hurls them to the ground behind the van for cover. Immediately they sweep the area with concentrated fire.

Ellewara, the wolfman, sitting behind the wheel of the slogan daubed car gapes as the sedan and van screech to a halt and from across the street direct a withering fire at his friends rushing from the bank. Detective Kelly squeezes off three quick shots without

aiming and Ellewara stops thinking, for ever, about his drum set. Two of the rounds enter the side of his face ripping his mask, shattering his jaw bone and tearing off plastic and skin. The third 38 slug passes through his ear to pulp his brain.

Captain, a little ahead of the rest of the mob, tries to lift his rifle. Fatalistically he smiles knowing that he's been right all along. A cop fires twice. Two bullets sock into his belly. Captain falls, blood seeping, then rushing from the wounds below his navel. His lips feel dry and he needs a drink badly. His body is numb, but he knows that he is badly wounded and may be dying. Captain hopes he is. His eyes reach out to Sue, he forgets her new name. 'Hey, man,' he manages to groan. 'Man, I'm hurt bad. Please get me a bottle. Please!' Blackness sweeps Sue away from his sight for ever.

The girl looks for Alan. It's bad for them, but she wants her leader to make it, wants him to be free. She doesn't care about herself, only about the kid she has grown to love as a man. All about her the bullets fly and all she can do is picture Alan standing naked in front of her. Then Captain falls in reality and real fear hits her. It is not in the plan. Alan has been so confident. God, they're firing real bullets at just a bunch of kids. She suddenly feels the weight of her rifle, but can't make the attempt to lift it, let alone aim it at the police.

A cop with a newly issued riot gun lets fly. Sue has taken a step towards Tom. Now a series of hard burning impacts hit her abdomen and chest. The girl is flung up and backward. Blood gushes from the many holes in her body as she crashes to the pavement. A last thought of Alan, no Sandawara, turns her dying eyes in search of him. They can see only the sky. Then a bullet shatters against the side of her mask spraying plastic, bone and grey brain matter around. Her body convulses for a few seconds, then subsides except for random twitches of legs and arms.

The poor teenyboppers have trailed the last out of the bank. Dumbly they huddle against a wall and watch the others cut down. Directly in front of them Rob and Rita (the new names are forgotten) stand exposed to the full blast of the police guns. Cement dust puffs up as bullets skid across the pavement. Whining slugs whip past their ears and prang off the wall. Scared, they huddle together. Their weapons against their bodies and their eyes on Rita raising her rifle and pulling the trigger. Not even a click, the safety catch is still on.

The girl puts herself in front of her lover. A sharp stab of pain as a bullet rips between side and arm searing the skin. She turns to smile encouragement at her man. A slug thuds into her chest and lung. With a grunt of despair, the girl slumps to the footpath. Rob with a scream of agony sprawls over her body to protect it. Bullets rip into his back, between the shoulder blades, further down—at the waist, the hip and the buttocks. Two pass straight through him to wound the girl in the chest. A small trickle of blood from her mouth fills his eyes as his head falls to one side of it. A strange rattling noise comes from his woman. Desperately he tries to lift his head to give her one last kiss, but can't. Rita cannot see her Rob, but can feel for ever the weight of his body as she dies.

The two teenyboppers are the last to go. They are swept away from the wall contemptuously. Discarded, they lie lifelessly, huddled against each other.

The police fire tapers off. 'Got all the bastards,' a jubilant voice shouts.

'Cease fire, men,' Kelly calls getting to his feet from behind the sedan.

Five bodies lie scattered with five rifles in front of the bank. Each rifle's safety catch is firmly on. A cop vomits when he realises that they have shot down a few kids who didn't even know how to use their guns. The newspapers bring out a special edition, headlined: HOODLUMS BATTLE POLICE. Kelly and Collins are the heroes of the day. A few details are suppressed and a few more distorted, but, all in all, it has been a great day for the police.

The result is two new Detective Sergeants, a listless Commonwealth policeman soon to become strangely hooked on dope and six human bodies rotting away, just as their lives would possibly have done. Such is fate for some in the golden west.