

CHAPTER 9

The white dingo was hungry, and the smell of a putrefying carcass swiftly filled his scent nodes. Following the odour, he quickly came to the end of what had been a trail that left a long drag mark across the open ground. There in front of him, no more than five metres away, lay a dead Brahman cow. The carcass had not been there for long as the stomach of the beast was not fully bloated by the fermented gases that were trapped within. Taking a few steps forward, he suddenly paused, his feet coming to a complete stop in their tracks. To him deep within his animal mind this was not a natural thing. Although classed as a scavenger, this was not his way, as always he relied on the fresh kills he obtained to sustain himself. Something had killed this cow. With his nose keening the air, his senses started to detect the odd yet familiar trace of gunpowder on the dead beast. As he studied the gaping head wound made by a high velocity rifle, the sight of dead crows strewn around the carcass made him wary. The white dingo sensed that his most hated predator, man, had done this. Giving the dead cow a wide berth, and ignoring his hunger the white dingo travelled south over the peaks and ranges until he descended to a swampy grassed area between Travelers Lake and the Cudjee River. He had stayed within its confines of small palm and Mitchell grass while prey animals were plentiful. Earlier he had consumed an echidna, having to make several attempts of rolling the quilled anteater upon its back with his right front paw. Although he suffered a couple of puncture wounds to his foot pad, the effort was rewarded with the sweetness of fresh meat. After several weeks he left the small valley, intending to return to the river country. Travelling in a leisurely fashion, it took him 16 days to reach the Castle River a waterway that spilt over from Travelers Lake. Eventually he arrived in mid afternoon during the

second week of July, just as an unseasonal heat wave enveloped the region. Usually to the white dingo this would be a sign of the wet season to come, a warning that monsoonal rains were upon their way, however, it was far too early in the year for this phenomenon. Hot and pestered by the biting sandflies, the dingo swam the creek and then slowly made his way up the side of a small peak. Here at 1100 metres the air was a bit cooler and flies were absent. There he stopped, laying down to sleep in the shelter of a large patch of scrub. At nine in the evening he awakened to see the sun, a glowing orange ball, was rapidly descending over Three Sisters Peak, a series of triangular hills that lay some distance away to the west. Stretching into a prone position, he rolled on to his back, his legs out, and he scratched the annoying itching bites of sandflies on the rocky surface. Yawning, he swiftly leapt to his feet, tail outstretched, and slowly stretched out his body. Afterwards, standing relaxed, he gazed down the side of the range, waiting for the last remnants of the sun to hide its smoldering face behind the western peaks. As twilight cast shadows over the Kimberley, the dingo began to make his way back down. After entering the wattle crested tree line, he detected the faint smell of a mickey bull. Half an hour later in the pitch black, no moon, he brought down the bovine, near the junction of the Nitcha and Coongee Rivers.

David Fraser stood outside Paradise station host quarters, perspiring in the 35 degree heat. In his hands he held an expensive Sako .243 rifle with Pecar mounted telescopic sights. Once Forester and Garner brought up the horses and heelers, the party left the outstation. Three weeks after the dingo open season had been declared, no dingo had been located or seen by any of the ringers and host guides of Liveringa. Nor had any been seen by Professional Dingo Trappers, known as 'doggers' who had been quick to take advantage of the open cull and whose presence had become a thorn in Grey's side. Adding to the manager's

annoyance were the conservationists now moving freely in the region.

Mathew Robertson had flown in two young men and had helped them set up a camp beside Nialia Lake. Afterwards he had returned to Derby to pick up Josie Swales. Jamming as many supplies as they could into the fuselage of the aircraft, they headed for an area of open ground near a small runoff lake known as Barinne Billabong. This was to be their main base from which Swales could contact her office in Melbourne and communicate with other camps and, of course, a base from which she could travel through the area of the Kimberleys that were under Grey's company, Liveringa Holdings.

Leaving Swales to set up camp, Robertson had next landed two other volunteer conservationists eight kilometres south of Travelers Lake. Finally he brought a graduate biologist named Narielle Wells to Barinne Billabong to join Swales.

The conservation group now had six members scattered throughout Grey's country. All were determined and passionate about interfering with doggers and tourist shooters as soon as possible. Robertson was to act as liaison between the groups and in his Cessna as spotter. Having become aware of the Cessna's repeated flyovers in his region, Grey had sent out a mustering chopper of his own. By the time Robertson returned to Barinne Billabong after resupplying the last camp, the manager knew exactly where each group was located. He was greatly annoyed, as he had come to think of Liveringa as his personal domain. One way or another he was determined to rid himself of those whom he deemed trespassers before the regular tourist trade season opened.

Before Forester and Garner had set out with Fraser, the manager had taken the two stockmen aside and promised them a bonus of a bit of extra cash if, as he phrased it, they could persuade that greenie and her libber mates to get off his property.

Forester just scowled angrily. “You really care how we take care of this problem, Bruce?”

“No, I don’t care, just don’t kill anyone, and whatever you do make sure there’s no witnesses!”

Fraser and the two poachers were only a few kilometres west of Nialia Lake when Robertson’s Cessna flew over the small group. The aircraft dipped abruptly, descending within 30 metres of the ground. Forester, quick as a flash, released his rifle from the saddle’s scabbard and started to take aim at the aircraft. Just as he was about to fire, the Cessna rose.

In the confines of the aircraft’s cockpit, Swales spoke excitedly into her intercom headset. “That big man had his rifle on us Mathew, I think I got a picture of him. If it comes out we can send it to the media, that was great.” Robertson, steering the aircraft, nodded and spoke softly into his own intercom. “I saw him move, he was fast, but I don’t think he got a shot away though, but I was not taking any chances. The higher we are at the moment, the safer we are!”

They were following Castle River on their first reconnaissance flight of the region. Robertson had been holding an altitude of 200 metres, descending when they detected animals so Swales could take photographs with a digital camera. Not long after they had passed the shooting party, Swales with powerful binoculars searched the valley floor. Suddenly she saw a flash of white against the dark grey volcanic rock in the distance.

Her voice was full of excitement as it crackled into Robertson’s headphones.

“Mathew, I think I just saw the white dingo against that large hill. It was heading into that clump of dark rocks and scrub. If we dip our nose a bit, you’ll see it.” Doing as his companion suggested, Robertson eased downwards where he saw a small runoff form a creek, winding its way west off the Castle River. In between the waterways the ranges rose in dark contrast to the vivid blue of the sunlit Kimberley sky. Robertson failed to

see the dingo. “I see the rocks and the bush, but I don’t see a white dingo.” Swales was scanning the ground eagerly through the binoculars before she replied. “No, it moved like lightning. I think it headed back south. We’ll have to turn. In any case it may have disappeared in the scrub.” Looking at her topographic map that lay spread over her knees in the cockpit, she spoke again as she marked with a blue pencil where they were. “Mathew, see that mountain to the left, the map says its called Crooked Peak. I’m pretty sure the dingo was heading in that direction. Maybe we should circle and see if we can get another look at it?” Robertson obeyed. He banked the Cessna east and then turning south the aircraft approached the mountain known as Crooked Peak. Swales noticed a small open area of loose scree and stunted eucalypts at the foot of the dark grey ridge. Focusing her binoculars she saw movement.

Seconds later the white dingo appeared, and she had another fleeting glimpse of the milky white-agile animal. It flashed through the scrub and disappeared within the patch of scrubby trees. This time Robertson also saw the dingo. Even after the animal had disappeared, the pilot kept his eyes fixed upon the eucalypts hoping for another glimpse of this rare, magnificent, Australian dingo. Swales scanned the terrain below.

When it became obvious that the white dingo had found deep shelter she turned to Robertson, her voice high with excitement.

“What a rare and unique animal, Mathew, absolutely fantastic.” Robertson smiled and nodded, then he spoke, his voice somewhat awed by the exceptional specimen. “I think we better send that mob of shooters below us on a wild goose chase. What do you say we fly back towards those three hills and do some circling between there and the Castle River. Staring at her map momentarily, Swales marked the site with her pencil before replying, “Yes. I agree. The map calls those hills Three Sisters Peak. Lets do that, they’ll think we have spotted the white dingo

there, or any other dingo for that matter.” Robertson hastily agreed and he manoeuvred the Cessna in a tight turn and flew due east until reaching their destination. In a lazy circling route he flew over the waterway and back around the three triangular shaped hills.

As he was about to leave the area and head back towards Barinne Billabong he saw the poachers. Even from a distance of more than a quarter of a kilometre, it was clear to him that they were convinced the circling Cessna had spotted something. Robertson noticed that the big man who rode in the lead was spurring his mount, while the others were also hurrying their horses along behind him. As Robertson opened up the Cessna’s throttle, it was clear to him that the three men below were certain that the plane had spotted something in the vicinity of the Castle River area. Pretending to be surprised, Robertson gunned the Cessna and disappeared over the ranges.

On the ground, Forester again raised his rifle and shook it at the aircraft. Watching this through her side window, Swales could see through the binoculars the magnified laughter on the big man’s face. Reining in his horse to a stop, Forester was yelling with excitement to his companions. “Those greenies just showed us a dog.” Garner rode up next to him, leading the heelers. “I don’t know, John, the dogs are not acting like there’s anything around here. You would reckon they would have picked up some trace of a scent if a dingo was here!”

“No, Forester agreed. “But the place was further over.” he said, waving his rifle in the general direction of where the Cessna had circled. “Maybe near the Castle River towards Three Sisters Peak, a couple kilometres or so ahead, I reckon,” continued the big man.

They rode on heading towards where the Cessna had disappeared, the horses going slowly at first, due to the terrain having sloped steeply and the path they made was littered with boulders and huge ironstone rocks as they made their way

towards the waterway. Twenty minutes later the men neared the place where the dingo had made his kill the previous night. The heelers yapped excitedly. Pulling on their leather leads, barking loudly, they had the dingo's scent. "Here we go, let them loose, Jack", ordered Forester. Fraser, riding just behind the maimed man, pulled out his Sako and holding his reins with his left hand desperately tried to keep up with the stockman. As soon as Garner released the heelers they raced away. Within minutes they had found the remains of the mickey bull. Forester and Garner dismounted quickly and squatted in front of the picked carcass studying it intently. Finally Garner spoke. "Wonder if it's that white dingo, Maybe that old cow we shot and poisoned with strychnine, didn't get him. After all he's a cunning bastard as we know." Forester was looking at a pad print left in the loose grey earth, however, it had been partially obliterated by the many crows that had almost picked the carcass clean. "Don't know, too hard to tell, tracks are all marked up," replied Forester. Suddenly the urgent yapping of Bindi broke both men's concentration as she had picked up fresher scent of the dingo's trail. Remounting, both men, with Fraser trailing behind, followed the heelers' constant barking. Approaching the heeler the three men on their horses came to a sudden stop. Ahead of them where now all three heelers were barking rose an almost vertical dark volcanic cliff. The dingo had known a way up the cliff, but the excited heelers kept sliding down the incline each time they tried to scabble up the side. Forester began to curse, but Garner dismounted and tied up the dogs. Quietly he spoke. "The way I see it, John, the dingo went up there, turned north and kept going past Three Sisters Peak. Why else would the greenies have been circling?" "Damn!" cursed Forester. "I reckon you're right. Ok, we'll keep moving." They rode off, with Forester in the lead setting a cracking pace, but after 12 kilometres the heelers failed to pick up a scent. Dense stands of miniature palm and eucalyptus rose up the peaks, hindering their visibility. Pulling up their horses,

Garner was first to speak. “Well, either that plane fooled us or the dingo was higher up. What we do now?” he mumbled beneath his Akubra. Forester who, like Fraser, was totally exhausted, replied, slightly exasperated. “I guess we better roll out our swags and camp the night, sun’s dropping. Tomorrow we’ll start early and try again”. This news was a blessing to the very tired Fraser.

As the sun faded away, casting a red hue to the Kimberley, Swales, Robertson and Narielle Wells sat beside a small fire near the bank of Barinne Billabong. Having put the poachers off track, the three conservationists were now plotting how to locate the white dingo.

“I’m convinced the dingo was heading south,” Swales said as she poured herself a mug of hot water from a battered billy to make instant coffee. “It seems,” she continued,” as she stirred sugar into her cup “that a likely place would be somewhere southeast of Three Sisters Peak, in a little valley where these small billabongs are. Here, look.” Spreading a map, she showed Robertson and Wells an area where they would be able to reach by foot. “I have calculated that the billabongs are roughly 20 odd kilometres from here, it should take no more than five or six hours to hike in!” Robertson interrupted. “That’s quite a walk, Josie. There is nowhere for the plane to land, so whoever goes will have to carry supplies, a tent and a radio.” Swales looked at him. Frowning in puzzlement, she spoke matter of factly. “I’m going in there. Narielle can stay here and coordinate and if I need supplies, you can drop them!”. Robertson looked resigned. Knowing he was beaten, he replied gently. “Ok, Josie, but I’m walking in with you. I’ll carry extra supplies, help you establish a camp and scout around for somewhere to put the plane down, then I’ll head back here!” Swales answered her friend mischievously, “Look who’s talking about a long walk now,” she laughed. “Alright, if you want to walk 40 kilometres in one day.” Robertson laughed and shook his head. “No, I’m not. If we leave at first light tomorrow we should reach the first of the billabongs by early afternoon.

I'll camp for the night, halfway back along the track, and return here early the next day. OK?" Swales nodded in agreement.

Wells spoke up, her face illuminated by the shimmering light cast by the fire, "Just one thing" she said her voice expressing concern. "According to reports, that dingo is dangerous. Maybe the media exaggerated, but there seems no doubt it or a pack of dingoes attacked Grey's men, what if it or they attacked you, Josie, and what about crocodiles?" Swales seriously contemplated what Narielle had just said. Turning to look into the younger woman's eyes, she spoke softly, her voice positive and full of reassurance. "I'm not fully convinced that what those men reported was true. In any case, we have enough flares and firecrackers to frighten most things, plus I'll take the .357 pistol, just in case of crocodiles. If need be I'll sleep up a tree if crocs are about, but I'm sure the dingo or dingoes won't attack us if we don't look familiar to them". Swales and Robertson left at dawn the next morning Robertson carried a large rucksack stuffed with supplies. Swales also carried a pack, and she carried a portable UHF radio and a .357 Desert Eagle Magnum pistol, the plastic grip was almost obscure from the matching colour of her cotton drilled pants. Both of them were fit and used to physical activity, but it had been some time since they had hiked a long distance while carrying heavy packs. As they plodded along in the early Kimberley sun, sweat formed quickly beneath their wide brimmed Akubra hats, the perspiration soaking their clothing and dripping from their foreheads, stinging their eyes.

They stopped to rest among a clump of reddish termite mounds. During the next hour, while they sat in the slight shade cast by the mass of nests, they watched intrigued as a king brown snake almost three metres in length glided through the tufts of dry Mitchell grass and with infinite slowness the reptile wound its way across the mounded clay flat, its tongue forever flicking, tasting the air in search of prey. Slowly the large snake disappeared down a huge hole at the base of a rotten tree stump and gradually the

big brown faded as the last of his tail slid into the inky blackness of the hole. By 10-30, they resumed their hike, and after the rest they made good progress, despite the loads they bore and the rough ground they had to travel over. The heat and the hostile terrain forced them to climb several hundred metres on occasions before they were able to descend to the smaller valleys that led to the first of the large billabongs.

Upon their arrival, Robertson helped Swales set up a camp, just inland a couple of kilometres short of the first billabong. During mid- afternoon he gathered a large pile of firewood and tossed a rope over a large boab tree, hanging her food pack up, so dingoes and goannas would not raid the conservationist's food resources. Having completed these menial tasks, he left her.

Alone, but confident, Swales explored her immediate surroundings. Walking to the first of the large billabongs, and later she climbed a small part of the range that reached a 1000 metres. From this vantage point she was able to scan the country through binoculars. She returned to her camp as the sun was setting. During her meagre evening meal, consisting of tinned stew and dry biscuits, Swales, boiling the billy, had no concentrated thought of danger. However, when full darkness developed, enveloping its black curtain around her and small noises of the Australian bush echoed within the scrub, she began to feel nervous. Deep within her consciousness, she could not help wondering what she would do if a crocodile or a pack of dingoes arrived at her camp in the night. Or worse, a mob of stampeding donkeys or cattle or even wild brumbies that her and Robertson had encountered early in the day would flatten her tent and she could be killed or trampled to death. Thinking about things, she reached for the .357 handgun to protect herself. Then she realised panic was setting its anxious hand over her, clutching her in the infinite grip of fear. Determined to conquer these thoughts and feelings, she made sure the safety was locked on the pistol and she gently placed it next to where she sat. She

then stood and added more wood to the fire until it was blazing. Looking directly upwards and turning her back on the security of the flowery orange flames she stared at the sky. Blue and black filled with eons of stars. It gave her then a strange sense of majesty and security, a feeling of inner peace, wrapping her within its safe confines as the fire exploded into full life, its flames illuminating a vast light to end in one of a sinister mass before her. Turning back to face the engulfing warmth of the fire she smiled to herself, and bending down she replaced the handgun back in its holster clipped to her belt at her waist. With infinite patience she kicked dirt on to the fire until it was nearly extinguished, and with the aid of a small torch she made her way to the single man tent she and Robertson had erected and 15 minutes later all thoughts abated and she was sound asleep, the handgun tucked safely under her blow up pillow.

Early the next morning, attended by the cheery chuckering of a willy wagtail, Swales emerged out of her tent. She could hardly believe her emotional fright of the night before. Today she felt confident and more positive than ever, and exhilaration overflowed from her as she fully attuned to the Australian outback. She knew now how the Aboriginal nations of the vast landscape must have both felt and feel in knowing that this was their country and a part of some nation's dreaming. Now finally whole, she felt she belonged out here.

Although totally alone, she was not alone, she had now become a part of this perfect dreamtime world.

She had now crossed over and was one with the Australian bush and she could feel its life's pulse. Most of all, although she admitted even to herself that it was somewhat a preposterous thought, that she, Josie Swales, was starting to establish a belief and value system that coagulated with that of mother nature, the creator of all things. That everything was country and country was everything. Humming quietly to herself, she walked down to the billabong and splashed some water over herself. The .357

was close and handy, she was worried about crocodiles. Her conversation previously with Narielle had slightly unnerved her.

Back at her camp she quickly changed clothes, and built a new fire to cook her breakfast, and then she prepared herself for her reconnoitre into the bush. With handgun, binoculars, UHF, map, compass and some flares she was fairly weighed down with her equipment. Before setting out she radioed Barinne Billabong. She learnt that Robertson had called in and was expected to arrive within a couple of hours. Reattaching the handheld UHF to her belt, Swales left her campsite. Soon she began to climb up a steep pass that lay below the volcanic tops of the Kimberley, making her way towards Three Sisters Peak. Swales's initial plan was to pass well beneath the volcanic tops of the ranges and continue onwards towards the small runoff creek that lay west of Castle River. Her hunch was, that the white dingo had indeed gone further towards the south, where she and Robertson had spotted it from the Cessna.

Around 11 in the morning, tired, hot and thirsty, Swales sat down on a large flat rock. After taking a few cautious sips of water from her canteen, she gazed downwards. This vantage point provided her a full view of the well defined pass. She studied it intently and noted that it was rapidly becoming narrow and steeper. What lay further along was a tangled mass of Kimberley bush, wattles, miniature palms, and Mitchell grass all congregated together, virtually making the way impossible. Peering ahead, Swales made rough calculations that the banks of Castle River should lay no more than a few kilometres from the spiky scrub. Staring through binoculars, Swales could just make out the meandering Castle River and a small, open area appeared in her vision on the far side of its bank.

Stretching her legs, she slowly began to make her way down through the pass. After a kilometre or so, she found herself picking her way gently through a tumble of rocks and thick acacia, its thorny branches reaching out to claw her face. As she

negotiated a rough path, it was not uncommon for her heart to give a slight jump as the sight of a lizard or goanna would often be mistaken as that of a snake. Carefully she continued her way. After half an hour of being at the mercy of the spiky acacia thorns, Swales was relieved when the land sloped more gently and some of the larger rocks prevented the acacia from being overcrowded. At least now she thought her face would no longer be at the mercy of the clawing wattles. Diverting around a large ironstone boulder, she stumbled, and looking down she saw a large footprint on the sandy path just ahead of her. Then her heart gave a sudden jump as more pronounced paw prints appeared and then she recognised the scat of a dingo. Studying the faecal mound that was covered with flies, she tried to estimate when it had been deposited, and her assumption was swift. "Not long before last night," she surmised as she poked the still soft scat with a stick. Taking her camera, she took several photographs of the scat. She spoke aloud to herself, "Bugger me, have I found him already?"

In reality Josie Swales had not found the white dingo. He had found Josie Swales. The white dingo had become aware of the human presence within his part of the range when Swales had begun her descent down the rough pass. He had been resting beneath an untidy pile of overgrown rocks among the various species of acacia when the woman's female scent was detected by his nose. The dog lifted his head, took in more scent and sniffed the air deeply. Immediately his ears pricked forward. He started to isolate each smell that initiated from this intruder. Quickly he identified her gender, from the minute amount of hormones upon her skin. The white dingo identified the strange scent of soap, woodsmoke and toothpaste, things she had used and been near back at her camp, earlier that morning. To the white dingo, Swales presented a scent picture that was as unique as a set of footprints. He recognised that in some respects her smell was similar to that of Forester and Garner. But he picked up only a faint trace of an odour of adrenalin. Swales was relaxed, at peace with herself and

with the environment, so she metabolised normally, and her scent telegraphed a neutrality. Curious, the white dingo had noticed this humans chemical change of one of hormonal breed of species, he rose from where he was resting and followed the scent spoor.

When he had shortened the distance between himself and Swales to less than a kilometre, his ears picked up the identifiable sounds she made, as she negotiated a path over the rock and bush strewn Kimberley floor. Detouring, the white dingo started to ascend the slope. By the time Josie had come across the scat, the white dingo was only 15 metres away. Remaining absolutely still, he watched her discover it, and when she began to follow his tracks, he once again began to follow her.

Josie walked along slowly, stopping every now and again to photograph the tracks. Half an hour later she lost them in a rough rocky area. "Damn it!" she cursed. "He must have come down through here, somewhere." She surveyed the sparse area, feeling somewhat useless and started to blame herself for her inadequate abilities as a tracker. On the verge of frustration, tears of exhaustion and failure started to form in her eyes. She wiped them and tried to decide on what to do next. The white dingo had stopped no more than seven metres, away. He just watched her, statuesque, every nerve and muscle seized as he stood, his dark eyes unblinking. Despite his white coat he almost managed to blend in naturally with his surroundings. Upon hearing Swales's muttered misgivings, he was further intrigued with this female human. Her voice lacked the harsh edge found in that of man. Swales remained standing almost as still as the dingo. She thought desperately as she tried to formulate her next plan of action, the frustration of losing the tracks adding to her disappointment. Once again she muttered a curse of hopelessness "Blast," she said silently. She took a step forward to a nearby rock in order to survey her surroundings. Sitting down on the large stone, she sat just brooding. Suddenly, without knowing why, she laughed out loud at her predicament. At, least she thought I'm not lost.

The sudden burst of gaiety, let loose from a deep chuckle, startled the white dingo, causing him to jump. The unexpected movement attracted Swales's attention. She saw the white dingo for just an instant, a white form partly shrouded by the colouring of the rock and wild acacia. His head turned towards her and he fixed her with his dark eyes. For an instant their eyes locked, then like a phenomenon, he was gone, a white ghost that vaporised into the depths of the Kimberley Range. Swales sat dumbfounded. Uttering a gasp of "Oh my god", she remained paralysed to the rock. She stared, her eyes wide with astonishment as she studied the spot where the white dingo had been standing. Then euphoric she rose and began to follow the route over which she had descended, her mind full of her miracle, seeing again and again the majesty of the mystical animal that had been studying her, his white coat emanating like sun off the water, as it cast a radiance that brought forth a brilliance of shining reflection.

Forester, Garner and Fraser had been searching for the dingo since the coming of dawn, exploring the area near Castle River. Then crossing the small runoff they made their way towards the valleys of Three Sisters Peak. The blue heeler dogs had shown little excitement all day, except when they spooked a small rock wallaby that was feeding sedately upon grasses that dotted the vast ranges floor that the three men were covering. Finally the three men pulled up their mounts.

"No use checking the banks of Castle River again." Garner said as he idly rolled a cigarette.

"Nah," relied Forester. "Seems like that bloody dingo just grew wings and flew away!" Garner smiled as he struck a match to light his smoke. "You know what, John, maybe that dingo did sort of fly away, as we cannot find it down here and we sure know it climbed that rock wall. I reckon it went up the range." Pointing a bony finger, Garner indicated towards Three Sisters Peak.

"Maybe you're right," Forester replied, as he frowned towards the triangular hills in the distance. "But that's a fair

climb and there looks like a lot of bush and scrub scattered through there.” Garner nodded. He too, was studying the area ahead of them.

“The pass looks narrow as well. What say we ride up as far as the horses will go, then in the morning, if need be, we’ll do the rest on foot?” Forester just nodded an affirmation. His Akubra tilted back and forth as he watched the rapidly fading Kimberley sun. He had no better ideas.

Back at her small camp, Josie had radioed Barinne Billabong base. She wanted to tell Robertson and Wells about her brief encounter with the white dingo. She was adamant, as she spoke sternly to Robertson on the UHF radio. “I’ve got to stay out here, Mathew, I’m positive I’ll see him again.” Releasing the transceiver button, she waited for Robertson’s argumentative voice to reply as he had insisted that she return to Barinne Billabong.

“You’re going to need more supplies, plus it’s not safe out there on your own. I saw our friends today!” Josie read the statement, Robertson must have flown over the poachers again during the day.

“I am well aware what you’re saying, Mathew”, she replied stubbornly, “But I am still staying here, copy that!”

Robertson rolled his eyes at Wells as Josie’s voice crackled from the handheld UHF’s speaker. Finally he answered. His voice sounded exasperated. “Alright Josie, if you look on your map, you’ll see the second billabong, that one’s flooded, but next to the flood plain is a large clay pan. I’ll fly in and drop a food cache for you at the north end, but you will have to walk in and carry the supplies back as you need them. OK”. “OK, Mathew, I’m looking at my map now and have the place marked. I’ll head that way at first light in the morning. Thanks Mathew”. Robertson then concluded that he would do a flyby and if he spotted the shooters he would buzz them, just to let her know. However he emphasised the point that she was to keep the radio on her at all times. “I

know it's extra weight, Josie but it would be safer to keep it with you, we have to stay in touch. Copy that?" Swales started to protest, she was carrying enough stuff around as she searched for the white dingo, but Robertson was firm. "Listen, Narielle and myself are worried about you out there on your own. The dingo did not attack you this time, but who knows what it may do next, and what if those shooters find you out there alone, who knows what may happen. Keep the radio with you and on and keep that .357 handy, understand!" Reluctantly Swales agreed. Later that night she turned in early, intending to leave for the drop zone near the second billabong at first light. Her last thoughts before she fell asleep were focused on the white dingo.

Unknowingly to the conservationists, Forester had been scanning through the channels of his 40 channel UHF radio. Garner and Fraser listened alongside the big man as he turned up the volume to hear the conversation. When he was positive Swales and Robertson had signed off, he shifted his bulk on his rolled, up swag. Climbing to his feet, he stirred the coals of the small fire they had lit to boil their quartpots on. "Well," he grinned wolfishly, "looks like we have a Miss Greenie out here on her own and hopelessly out of her league." Fraser was not smiling as he noticed the serious look on Garner's face, who also sat on his rolled up swag. The lean man lifted his head and spoke quietly, "I don't know about hopeless, John, sounded like she has a big barker with her". Forester, still grinning, moved his quartpot closer to the fire, trying to get it to boil faster.

"Yeah, but does Miss Greenie, know how to use it. Anyway who cares, those idiots have just led us to the white dingo." Fraser, who was listening to the two men, thought to himself for a moment before asking what he considered was a dumb question. "What do you mean by a big barker?" he queried. Garner just stared at him, before the quiet man answered his client. "Big Barker would be a .357 magnum handgun, serious shit!". Fraser just sat back, bewildered and quiet.

Back at camp, Josie had been asleep for several hours when the white dingo thrust his head out of the thick acacia and miniature palm scrub. He stood stock still, staring at her small one man tent. While his eyes studied what he could see in the darkness, his nose was busy analysing all the various smells of the campsite. A few of them reminded him of the poachers, especially the acrid smell of the campfire and the leather of the woman's hiking boots. But her feminine bouquet continued to excite his curiosity. The white dingo did not feel aggressive towards her. To the contrary, he was immensely interested in her, this strange being that entered his part of the range was quite intriguing. As he walked towards her tent, her deep, regular breathing told him that she was sleeping. He advanced until his nose was within 30 centimetres of the doorway, then he began to quietly whine. Swales awakened. Not knowing what had disturbed her, she sat up, her hand reaching for the pistol under her pillow. As she did so her nylon sleeping bag rustled, and the faint noises frightened the white dingo. Turning on his hind legs he bolted into cover of the bush. The disturbance he created was so slight that Swales mistook it for one of the many native animals that inhabited the Kimberley. Unafraid she lay back down and went to sleep.