

**A
CONSPIRACY
OF RAVENS**

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ACCLAIM FOR
A Conspiracy of Ravens

“This is a thriller set on Nigeria’s contemporary challenges, against its old demons. It captures our Civil War history in an interesting way while also aligning same with the much more recent upheavals in the Niger Delta. It is of course a work of fiction but it is hard to deny this is as much the reality of yesterday and today’s Nigeria. Othuke has gifted us a gem, one that’d entertain and educate but most importantly, make us face the mirror. A super Nigerian thriller.”

— *JJ Omojuwa*

“Explosion, action and suspense – Ominiabohs has sprung a delightful surprise upon us. In *A Conspiracy of Ravens*, he positions his characters in significant events in Nigeria and dares to create a canvas on issues and struggles we tiptoe around . . . a thriller that’ll leave you immersed in its pages.”

— *Sunshine Book Club, Lagos*

“I have spent most of my reading life waiting for Robert Ludlum to write our story. He just did. With the pseudo name: Othuke Ominiabohs. Othuke is almost too temerarious and too audacious about his new found calling in this genre. I don’t wish him well; I wish us his readers well.”

— *Ojay Aito,*

Author, *Night of a Red Moon*

“*A Conspiracy of Ravens* presents a fast paced and insightful look at Nigeria’s political and socioeconomic quagmire from a fictional perspective. By linking the travails of the past with the complexities of the present, Othuke Ominiabohs carefully weaves a tale that leaves you thirsting for more, right from the very first page.”

— *The Book Club, Lagos*

“In his latest book, Othuke Ominiabohs exerts literary skill to delve into disturbing aspects of Nigeria’s political structure. The story is a “militancy” thriller that subtly draws us into issues of corruption, oil politics and national identity. But *A Conspiracy of Ravens* is more than just “a good read”. As his characters race against time and tidal politics, we realise that their emotions are a familiar reflection of Nigeria’s internal struggles: *A Conspiracy of Ravens* is a search for meaning and self-awareness.”

— **Ayo Sogunro,**

Author, *The Wonderful Life of Senator Boniface and other Sorry Tales*

“A collage of societal realities, skirting around history, flirting with the present while awakening our collective conscience.”

— **THIS DAY**

“Energetic, brilliant, stimulating; Othuke is easily one of Africa’s finest storytellers.”

— **Edify Yakusak,**

Author, *After They Left*

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MASOBE

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BISHOP EMU ERUOHI
FOR SECOND CHANCES

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PROLOGUE

OAU SECRETARIAT, ADDIS ABABA

FEBRUARY 28, 1982

6:42 PM

The bearded man blended with other waiters who scurried about the kitchen. He wove between chefs in soup-stained aprons and, when he tried to grab a tray from one of the shiny Formica countertops, he bumped into a heavy-set woman.

“Watch where you’re headed!” she bellowed. Her brows furrowed. “Are you new?”

A call for service in the banquet hall cut short the man’s mumbled reply. The sizzling fumes of over-spiced meals made the woman’s eyes water. She sneezed. Her outfit, in similar style as the waiters—black jacket, white shirt and red tie—and her stern look, singled her out as the head waiter.

“Never mind,” she said with a wave of hands, thrusting a tray with three champagne flutes and a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket into his arms. “Your tie isn’t properly done.” She sneezed again as he turned to leave.

He dropped the tray on a cluttered kitchen table, nodded his thanks and fixed his tie. He noticed the peculiar way the waiters carried their orders, deftly balancing the trays on their palms and placing them expertly on their right shoulders, and learned quickly. From the crowded kitchen, he walked through a small corridor that opened out to a vast hall with high cream-coloured walls, adorned with brick-red tapestries and a vaulted wooden ceiling.

He inhaled the blast of cold air and the intoxicating fragrance of expensive men's cologne. Johann Pachelbel's *Canon in D Major* flowed from unseen speakers, a soulful whisper below the mild but tense laughter and high-pitched voices. Picture windows, tucked into sculpted arches, lined the walls, giving the guests a wondrous night-time vista of Ethiopia as the city gradually filled up with pinpricks of light. A thick red rug that lined the aisles cushioned his steps as he wove between tables dressed in black and gold.

The thirty-eighth ordinary session of the OAU ended with a dinner organised by the chairman for the dignitaries who had come from all fifty-one sister nations to discuss the resolutions of several matters arising in the union. Of particular importance was the inclusion of SADR in the union.

"Geographically or institutionally, SADR is not a recognised state and should never have been admitted into the OAU in the first place." The bearded man heard the puffy-faced Liberian ambassador protesting to his comrades.

White light from crystal chandeliers cast a glossy sheen on their faces and sparkled off the edges of cutlery and chinaware. The bearded man moved briskly, scanning tables. He had heard all about the fallout in the OAU following the admission of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic into the organisation. It came as no surprise that the hall was half full, most of the diplomats having left in protest. He turned his attention to the last table on that row. The man he was looking for wasn't there.

A diplomat in a navy blue suit and gold tie huddled close to his colleagues. "If SADR has been recognised as a sovereign state by Spain and more than half of the member nations, then it follows that the secretary general is right. The minority has no right to demand their ejection." He spread manicured hands on the table.

"The Sahrawis aren't even independent yet," said another in a loud whisper.

"They don't have a distinct landmark. They are scattered all over Morocco, Mauritania. Most of them live in refugee camps in south-

western Algeria or in exile to the West,” added the third man on the table, a moon-faced diplomat with a bushy moustache. “No, they can never be one of us. The admission is not only procedurally illegal; it is also in direct contradiction of the 1981 summit guidelines.” He threw disapproving glances at the table where the unbothered representatives from the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic sat.

The bearded man recognised most of the people in the room. He had read about them in newspapers, seen them on TV and even knew a few of them personally. None of them seemed interested in the steamy food bowls. They drank in large gulps and argued in harsh whispers. The bearded man moved down another aisle crammed on both sides by gaudily-dressed, beer-bellied generals and ambassadors. He scanned the tables. *He should be here.*

“Waiter!” Someone from a table nearby gestured for champagne. He feigned ignorance and hurried on—he was running out of time. The stiletto concealed beneath his sleeve made his skin to itch. If everything went well, he won’t be needing it for this job.

There!

At the far end of the hall on the third aisle, he found his target—General Ifeanyi Nwogazi, dressed in the ceremonial attire of the Nigerian Army, and in the company of two other generals, and beer-bellied elder statesmen. He was thickset, dark-skinned, had a nonsense gaze and a deep rumbling voice.

The bearded man headed straight for him. He placed the tray on the table, and then he grabbed the bottle of champagne from the ice bucket and took a step back to unscrew the cork.

“Now, Morocco has pulled out of the union,” said a man with greying hair, seated at General Nwogazi’s side. “At this rate, Morocco’s allies might do same. Is the inclusion of SADR into the OAU worth this trouble, really?”

General Nwogazi’s powerful gaze bore down on the grey-haired elder. “Haven’t the Sahrawis suffered enough? They’ve been attacked, slain and driven from their lands. Now they live in camps in the desert, exiled because of Morocco’s pride. The minute SADR gets recognition

from the UN, even Morocco will be powerless to stop them from joining the organisation and that day will come!” He said with a note of finality, emptying his glass of wine.

The bearded man discreetly but carefully turned the ring he wore on his middle finger so its pointed tip faced his open palm. He flipped back the ring’s hidden covering and moved to refill the glasses. He pretended to stumble, spilling champagne on the general’s hands. A few heads turned his way for an instant then continued their heated talks as if nothing had happened.

“Are you drunk?” General Nwogazi bristled.

“Sorry sah, I’m very sorry sah.” The waiter clumsily grabbed the napkin on his tray and wiped the general’s hands.

“Get away from m—ouch!” General Nwogazi snatched his hand away. “What was that?”

“I’m so sorry sah.”

“Get out! Get out!” The general said with an impatient wave of hands.

As the bearded man turned to leave, he started his stopwatch.

Two minutes fifty-nine seconds.

He hurried back to the kitchen, grabbed two expensive bottles of wine and tucked them under his jacket. He headed for the *Exit*.

One minute forty-six seconds.

“Where are you off to?” One of the guards stationed at the kitchen exit stopped him. “And what do you have there?”

“Let me see.” A second guard stepped forward.

“You caught me,” said the bearded man, holding up the two bottles with an uneasy smile. He swallowed and blinked.

Fifty-nine seconds!

The guard yanked the bottles from him. “Do you know what we do to thieves?”

“We should call it in,” said the second guard, reaching for the radio hooked to his belt.

The bearded man clenched his teeth, and felt for the blade in his sleeve.

The first guard nudged his colleague, nodded at the bottles and they both exchanged knowing looks.

“Get out of here before we lock you up.”

Shoulders hunched and head bowed, the waiter ran down the steps.

“Stop!” The second guard’s voice cracked through the air like a whip.

The bearded man felt the hair on his nape stand erect as he turned around. With a slight tap on his arm, the blade slid into his hand.

“Thank you for the drink,” said the guard, and together with his companion, they burst into laughter.

He stitched an idiotic smile on his face and continued down the steps, exiting the building. Once outside, he broke into a run.

Thirty-one seconds!

The new born night drowsed, barely awake and utterly silent. Street lamps lit the road, cones of light beneath each lamp. Trees, well-manicured and leafy, dappled the sidewalk in inky shade. The air was soft and cool, innocent of the biting cold that he knew would come any moment now. Less than twenty yards from the entrance of the OAU building, in a side street, a black van idled by the kerb. He approached it and jumped into the driver’s seat.

Five seconds!

From the van, he could see the general and several other diplomats framed against the glass windows.

Now!

His wristwatch let out a low beep at about the same time General Ifeanyi Nwogazi slumped in his seat. The men at his table rushed to his side. The fear on their faces as they mouthed calls for help confirmed the kill. There would be no trace of the poison in his blood.

Reaching into his eyes, the assassin removed the contact lenses that had softened his looks and put them on the passenger seat. Next, he took off the red tie. The ring, he carefully pulled and placed in a small black box which he slipped into his pocket.

He engaged gears and the van lurched forward. It climbed on a

tarred road and picked up speed. The road was devoid of traffic at this time. There was no moon, only the eclipsing darkness of night; thick, suffocating and foreboding.

Bole International Airport was a few minutes away. His plane ticket for the nine o'clock flight to Lagos had been purchased a week ago. He pulled out the pads that stuffed his cheeks, which, only moments ago, gave him a semblance of youth, and flung them out the window, down the perilous slope that bordered the highway. He yanked off the beard too, sending it down the slope.

Wind tugged at the collar of his shirt, roared in his ears. All week, he had sensed a persistent shadow lurking, stubbornly like a toothache. But he could neither fish it out of his consciousness, nor ignore it, no matter how hard he tried. He had single-handedly carried out *Blackrose*, a mission that would make him a traitor among his own people.

He peered ahead, lost for a moment in the glare of his headlights. Then his eyes softened. Everything he had done was for *him*. No price was too high to pay for his neglect. The thought of meeting his grandson filled him with emotion. Overwhelmed by melancholy he hadn't had the luxury of feeling in recent years, he broke into violent sobs that made him bounce up and down in his seat. And then, quite abruptly, he burst into laughter. Tears streaked down his cheeks. He sobbed, wiped his face and then he let the air out of his lungs with a whoosh: at last, redemption.

Soon, I'll be with you, and I will make everything right again.

Anxious to get to the airport in time so he could be in General Adebayo's presence by dawn, he gripped the steering wheel and floored the gas, needling his speedometer till it climbed over 160 miles per hour.

Up ahead, the road curved into a jarring bend. He slammed on his brakes, but nothing happened. The van continued to hurtle forward at terrifying speed, careening towards the vast blackness beyond the road. He grappled with the steering wheel and veered it sharply left then right along the winding road. But at that speed, there was no way he