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Amos Courage cares for a newborn gorilla in his family's Port Lympne Wild Animal Park in Kent.
Fashion Editor: Alvaro Salazar

tarzan complex

The English conservationist John Aspinall once walked his pet tiger on the streets of London. Now his stepson—raised among wild animals—has started a one-man war against the Chinese industrial invasion of the Congo. By Nicholas Griffin

Brazzaville is underwater again. Days of rain have resulted in our small taxi pushing through two feet of water, which is currently sloshing through the doors. Amos Courage sits beside me as we close in on the city's Poto-Poto district. Oddly—since we're in the Congo—many of the roadside shops are Chinese-owned and -operated and bursting with fake watches, plastic flowers, and transparent children's flip-flops. "The Chinese," Courage says, peering through the rain, "are everywhere."

He has his reasons for worry. He is the collection director of the John Aspinall Foundation, which has been in the Congo reintroducing gorillas into the wild for more than 15 years, and in the middle of its vast reserve

by the Lefini River a construction site staffed with Chinese workers has begun to rise without warning. The Congolese government has partnered with both Courage and the Chinese-government-backed developers, and lately such confusion has been the rule rather than the exception. The Konkouati forest, to our north, has been slated as a future national park; at the same time, concessions for timber, potash, and mining have already been granted. Courage's world is beginning to disappear—very quietly but just as surely.

Courage, 39, is a mixture of shyness and exuberance, cynicism and absolute determination. The word most often used to describe him by those who know him in the U.K. or the U.S. is "unassuming"; to those who've met him in Africa, it's "guts." He came to the Congo Basin in 1992 to work as an animal wrangler for a documentary filmmaker, heading out into the bush with pygmy guides to track down clawless otters, gray parrots, and gaboon vipers. After stints in Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda, Courage arrived in the Republic of the Congo in 1996. *black book* >40





POOL PARTY

John Aspinall takes a dip with Zemo, the "diving tiger," at Howletts, his country estate/zoo in Kent.

The London *Times* called Courage's stepfather "one of the most exotic and extravagant personalities of his age."

(There are, of course, two Congos. We are in what was once the French Congo, not the vast, chaotic neighboring Congo—formerly Belgian—that suffered for three decades under its homegrown despot, Mobutu Sese Seko. Still, today's sense of relative order here is new.)

As much as he came for the gorillas, Courage admits that he spent the next five years here for the excitement. During that time he was robbed, shot at, survived a mock execution and a civil war, broke a leg fleeing a wildfire, witnessed murders and rapes, and contracted river blindness and malaria and amoebic dysentery. He was a favorite back home in London's Hospital for Tropical Diseases. "They used to take my photograph," Courage says. "Not of my head—just whatever color my body had turned."

His stories tend to be comically self-deprecating. On surviving a plane crash in Gabon: "I dived out of the wreckage and leapt behind a bush in case the fuselage exploded." He pauses, sucks on his cigarette, and adds, "It took me a few minutes to go back and check on my guests." Or escaping from the ropes used to bind him during a

midnight robbery and then chasing the thieves through the jungle with a pistol: "I was dangerous," Courage says, "but mostly to the wildlife."

C

ourage's own connection to the gorillas he helps protect originated not in the jungles of the Congo or Gabon but in Howletts, a grand Palladian estate in

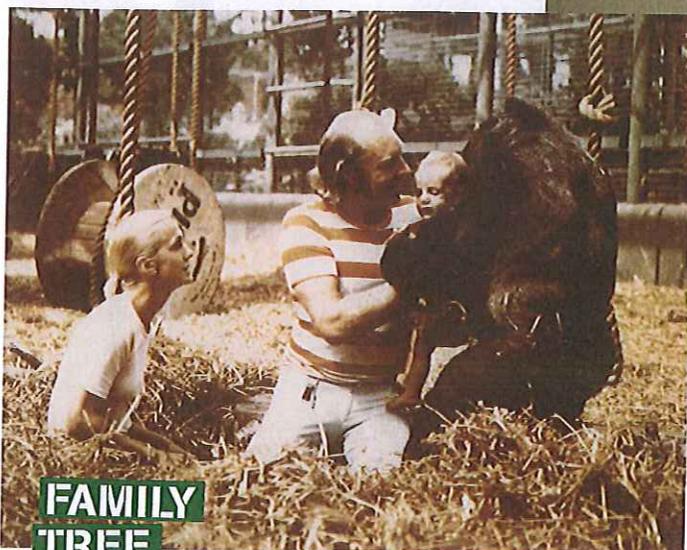
southern England. Courage is the stepson of the late John Aspinall, a man the London *Times* called "one of the most exotic and extravagant personalities of his age." Aspinall was renowned for opening, in 1962, London's most exclusive gambling club, the Clermont—a place, he was proud to boast, where "gentlemen could ruin themselves as elegantly and suicidally as did their ancestors 300 years ago." In England, Aspinall's name is forever entwined with those of his two best friends, Sir James Goldsmith and Lord Lucan, both members of his inner circle of midnight gamblers. While Goldsmith was merely famous as a billionaire and opinionated right-winger, Lord Lucan was rumored to have murdered

his children's nanny—he vanished the night she was found bludgeoned to death in his house. According to Aspinall, his friend had drowned himself out of shame, but rumors persisted that Aspinall spirited Lucan out of the country. In any case, Aspinall carried the truth to his grave.

Just a few years earlier, at home among the terraced houses of Belgravia, in central London, Aspinall was infamous for keeping two Himalayan bears and a tiger named Zara. One evening, while he was walking Zara along the street, a friendly German shepherd sprinted up to investigate. In a sweep of the tiger's paw, the dog lost its head; after Aspinall simply threw the carcass over a railing, his neighbors reported him. When the authorities asked him to remove his animals from London, he bought Howletts, a country estate in Kent, with his winnings from a horse race, and a dynasty was born.

Amos's mother, Sally Courage—born Lady Sarah Curzon, she was something akin to Twiggy's aristocratic counterpart in 1960s Swinging London—became John Aspinall's third wife two years after her first husband, brewing heir Piers Courage, died racing Formula One cars. From the age of three, Courage *black book* >42

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW HALL (MUSEUMS), 1970; ALAN TAYLOR/GALLERY STOCK



FAMILY TREE

ABOVE: John Aspinall and his wife introduce Courage's stepbrother, Bassa, to his ape handler. TOP RIGHT: Courage's mother during her modeling days.

lived at Howletts. At first glance, it seems very English—manicured lawns lined with trimmed bushes and a general sense of lost empire—yet for the last 40 years the roars of lions and trumpeting of elephants

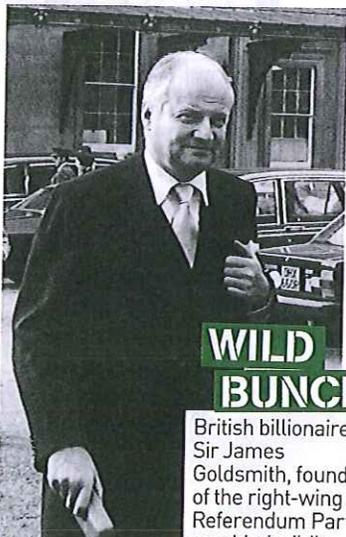
have echoed for miles. The mansion was also the site of some of the most memorable parties of the seventies and eighties. Courage remembers watching his stepfather position dwarves—painted gray and with instructions to imitate statues—on every step of the house's central staircase. Each dwarf was armed with small pom-poms to throw at the guests when they turned their backs. "It worked quite well," Courage says, "until the dwarves got drinking later in the night. I saw them going at it underneath the stairs." Not all house parties were so festive. The model Marilyn Lamb was mauled by a tiger, as was a twelve-year-old family friend. Even Aspinall's mother-in-law ended up in the hospital, having been hit on the head by a saucepan thrown "playfully" by a gorilla that had the run of the house.

Aspinall raised his children to believe that "the concept of the sanctity of human life is the most

damaging sophism that philosophy has ever propagated." Believing in *jus animalium*, or "the rights of beasts," he created a zoo at Howletts to protect the world's most endangered species. He had already decided that gorillas possessed the ideal family structure: The silverback, or patriarch, reigned absolute; if males wished to question dominance, it was time to leave and fight for their own families. Man, Aspinall believed, had long since overstepped his limits.

"We were all passed to the gorillas as children," Courage says, showing me a picture of his stepbrother being held by a female gorilla at the age of six months. He brushes aside safety concerns and insists that, above all things, his stepfather wanted the animals to be content. Primatologists scoffed at his ideas, but Aspinall always claimed that "the happiness of an animal can be judged by his willingness to reproduce." Within ten years, according to Courage, Howletts led the world's zoos in gorilla, tiger, rhinoceros, and elephant births. Such success, though, came with a cost:

Over the years, five keepers have been killed, all by elephants or tigers.



WILD BUNCH

British billionaire Sir James Goldsmith, founder of the right-wing Referendum Party, gambled wildly with Aspinall.

"We were all passed to the gorillas as children," Courage says of his childhood at Howletts.

W

hen he came close to losing both his gambling club and his house in the stock market crash of 1974, Aspinall realized that to

continue buying swaths of England to house his zoo's growing population was unrealistic (this despite the purchase of a second elegant estate, Port Lympne). Instead, he struck deals with the governments of the Congo and Gabon, negotiating the management of protected areas that cover the 420,000 acres that Courage would eventually come to run. The terrain would be used for the reintroduction of orphaned Congolese and Gabonese great apes, with the hope that gorillas born in Kent would soon be able to join them in the wild. To this day, one-third of the world's captive gorillas reside in Kent. "His goal—our goal," Courage says, "is to empty the zoo."

In Courage, Aspinall had come to recognize a man who had grown to share his dreams. Courage's mother says that "his stepfather found many men amusing, but he respected very few. Amos was one of the few." Aspinall, in the late stages of terminal cancer, rose at a party for Courage's thirtieth birthday in 1999 and compared his stepson to the toughest of British explorers, Burton and Stanley. "The rest of you," he added soberly, scanning the room, "are human filth." *black book* >44

Last winter in the Congo, we hiked through the jungle to visit a silverback named after John Aspinall. John is a very protective leader, prone to threatening displays and charges. The last time Courage came to see him, he was chased for more than a mile back to the safety of his boat. The huge reserve is a mixture of rain forest and



It's not always so peaceful. One afternoon in 2000, out in the forest alone and presuming that the teenage males were a few miles away, Courage risked a visit to a female in estrus. He had just sat beside her when, as he recalls it, "something grabbed me by the neck." It was Kola, a 450-pound silverback, whose first bite exposed part of Courage's skull. He was thrown to the ground and immediately attacked again. This time Kola bit deeply into his shoulder. Even worse, Kola's primary female, Djembo, showed up to help in the attack. "They kept trying to force my legs apart," says Courage. "I had the distinct feeling they were try-

In 2000, the first bite from Kola, a 450-pound silverback, exposed part of Courage's skull.

Courage says. "Entirely my fault."

Kola is what is known as a bush meat orphan, a term used to describe infants saved by poachers to sell to expats in Brazzaville or in the petro-city of Pointe-Noire. The rest of Kola's group was slaughtered for food—common enough in a country where meat is a luxury. The few gorilla orphans that survive such attacks are either dropped off with or confiscated by the Aspinall Foundation; usually they die quickly. "It's melancholy," Courage says. "You can call it malnutrition or whatever you want, but they're incredibly sensitive." The orphans keep coming.

It would be naive to think that China alone is responsible for the incursion on gorilla habitats, but China—like England in its day—is powering its own industrial revolution in Africa and is

thirsty for natural resources to sustain progress. The difference is that English in the nineteenth century numbered 20 million compared with China's current 1.3 billion. Until recently, gorillas were protected mostly because their habitats were unattractive for human habitation, but changing habitats is something the Chinese excel at. Upriver from Courage's project within the Lefini Reserve, a \$280 million dam being built by CMEC, a Chinese government-owned company, is scheduled to begin operating in the summer of 2009. The equation

is simple: A vast project inside a national park creates thousands of workers eager to supplement their meals with bush meat, and slowly the forests begin to empty. One of Courage's orphans, Ivindo, lost thirteen family members in a single attack. "Gorilla evolution," Courage says, "didn't take into account automatic weapons."

Early one morning, I drove north on roads thick with construction trucks. The road signs approaching the dam are in both French and Chinese, and I was only allowed to continue because lax checkpoint guards mistook me for a French journalist. *black book* >48



GOING APE

Amos Courage, ABOVE LEFT, with one of the residents of Port Lympne Wild Animal Park in 1974. ABOVE: The Kent estate was also home to elephants, rhinos, and tigers.

rolling savanna marked by sudden escarpments—a bright green version of Monument Valley. Once we enter the rain forest, Courage calls out to the gorillas—he's reintroduced 32 to the area—again and again for over an hour until the first female appears through the thick trees, a baby balanced on her shoulders; after her, the rest of the group advances. John hangs back for a moment, examining his visitors, while Courage sits down to greet him. A bluffed charge or two brings a smile from Courage, while I keep forgetting to breathe.

ing to castrate me." Help arrived in an even more startling form: Mabinda, a blackback, the younger male of the group, drove off Kola. Courage had by now received another deep bite on the thigh and could stand on only one leg. He broke off a branch from a tree and tried to hobble away, but Kola slapped him back to the ground again. It took him a long time to make it the almost two miles back to camp, but Mabinda shadowed and protected him from Kola the entire way. "Stupid, really,"

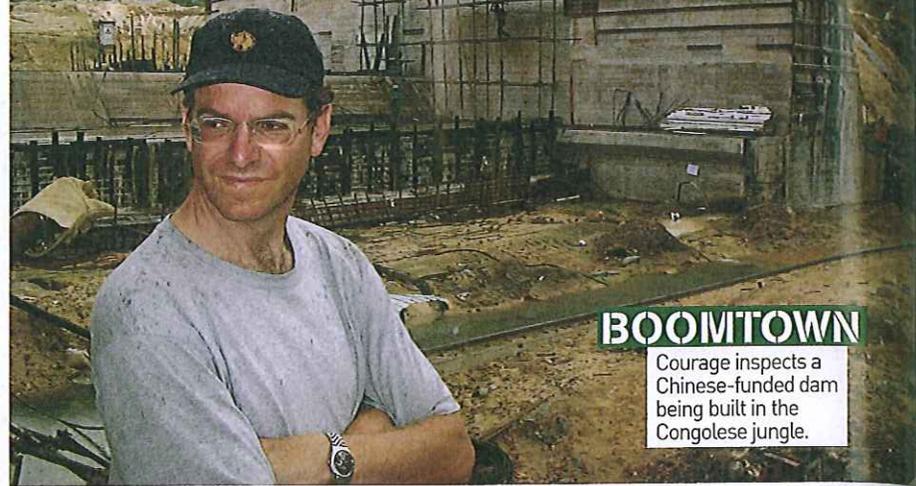
China's trade with Africa grew from \$2 billion in 1999 to \$70 billion in 2007—second only to U.S. trade to the continent.

Concrete walls over 100 feet high hold a crew of hard-hatted Congolese, and a turbine the size of a four-story house is surrounded by a handful of the 400 Chinese contractors on-site. The scaffolding surrounding the turbine is tied together with wire and string.

Several questions about the dam remain unanswered. How much concrete will be needed to counter such sandy terrain? How far will the waters flood upriver? "Thirty kilometers, more or less," the Congolese foreman explains to me. How much of Courage's low-lying lands will they cover? Nobody knows, but the Chinese have a poor reputation when it comes to dams. CMEC has never built a dam before, and the project's chief engineer has never stepped foot in Africa before now. Back home, their own massive Three Gorges Dam, scheduled for completion in 2011, not only required the relocation of 1.25 million people and led to rapid soil erosion; it also led to the extinction of the Chinese river dolphin. Were the stakes not so high, the idea of Chinese businesses in Africa imposing harsher standards on themselves than those that exist at home would be laughable.

China declared 2006 their "Year of Africa," and the country's official *Xinhua* news agency estimates that there are up to 750,000 Chinese working or living on the continent. The country's trade to Africa has grown from \$2 billion in 1999 to an estimated \$70 billion in 2007—second only to U.S. trade to Africa. In the Congo, Chinese workers have already built a new Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a TV-and-radio station, and a new airport in Pointe-Noire, with another slated for the capital.

There is little that's ideological about these incursions



BOOMTOWN

Courage inspects a Chinese-funded dam being built in the Congolese jungle.

into Africa. It's business under the Chinese policy of *zou ququ*, or "go out": China's engagement with countries such as the Congo is encouraged to range from vast state-owned enterprises on down to the small businessman hawking Christmas tinsel in districts like Poto-Poto. But owing to the behavior of private entrepreneurs and Chinese corporations, Beijing's attempts to project a positive image in the country are showing signs of strain. Poor decisions made locally are beginning to cause international reverberations: Near the Aspinall Foundation's other reserve, in Gabon, the Chinese energy firm Sinopec was embarrassed by the Gabonese order to halt their oil exploration in Loango National Park after setting off hundreds of explosions in a lagoon considered one of the most important manatee-breeding sites in the world.

he ever-increasing Chinese footprint frightens Courage. In securing contracts for the dam, the government promised around-the-clock free electricity to every village around the Lefini Reserve. Even in Brazzaville, however, power is still infrequent. "Lefini," Courage says, "would be the only place in the country where factories could reliably operate. The population movement could be huge." All he could do, he says, would be to increase the number of rangers keeping an eye on things, but just one or two new roads would increase the likelihood of poaching, of an outbreak of Ebola, of deforestation. Alone, each one of these is dangerous enough for great ape populations. Together, they would prove devastating. It may take a few years to lose the trees, but with the fauna in retreat, the Lefini Reserve could soon have all the wildlife variety of a strip mall. I ask Courage about the possibility of moving the gorillas across the border to Gabon. "They might not have passports," Courage says, "but they're Congolese." Still, the fact remains: The government that takes pride in their existence can't ensure their continued survival.

Back in Brazzaville two days later, Courage drives me up and down a central road. On the right, the United States is building a new embassy compound. On the

(continued on page 136)

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Known as bush meat orphans, young, parentless gorillas are increasingly common in the Congo.



TARZAN COMPLEX

(continued from page 48)

left, a Soviet-style block constructed during the Congo's Marxist-Leninist phase sports a fading hammer and sickle. Just down the road is the gleaming new Chinese-built Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It's plentiful evidence of the flexibility of politics in the Congo. President Hu Jintao has said that both China and Africa are "burdened with arduous tasks of development," and there is a silent consensus between China and much of Africa that the Western focus on conservation is either a luxury or a hindrance. As one Washington diplomat told me, "We can't be seen to be supporting trees ahead of people."

Walking through the rain forest a day earlier, I suggested to Courage that perhaps one day the Chinese in the area might become as interested in gorillas as he is. "Funny you should say that," Courage says, launching into a story. Two months earlier, he'd led a Chinese delegation of zoo directors on a tour of his family's animal parks in Kent. Courage was hoping the experience would provoke a greater understanding of endangered species. It was a crystal-clear day and, standing by the Siberian tiger enclosure, the leader of the delegation became distracted by a bleak industrial outline eight miles down the coast. Courage explained that what they were looking at was a nuclear-power station known as Dungeness. The entire group began removing the lens caps from their cameras as they wandered off to get a better view.

After his latest return from the Congo, Courage's family gathers for lunch at Howletts on a rain-soaked winter afternoon. Albert and Silvia, aged six and four, rush around their mother, Serena, while Courage's youngest son, Piers, stares down from a high chair. Courage's mother sits at the head of the table, near Aspinall's 83-year-old brother, known as Chips.

Serena gave up her interior-stylist job in London to base herself close to her husband's zoo in Kent. "I didn't mean to become an Aspinall breeder," she says, laughing. She misses traveling with her husband now that she spends most of her time at Howletts with the children. "Then again," she says, "there can't be many places in the world where at two in the morning you can breast-feed to the sounds of howler monkeys and lion roars."

Over coffee, Courage talks about his stepfather. "John made me very aware that I had my own ancestry, apart from

the Aspinalls," he says. "He'd tell a whole dinner table about sea battles that men on my mother's side of the family had fought in. He wanted me to be proud of who I was." He goes on to say that his stepfather thought of animals as individuals and believed that ancestry, not social status, determined one's nature, whether human or beast.

Shared genes or not, Courage is proud of the Aspinall legacy. "The zoos, the breeding program, the projects in Africa—they all came from one man rolling around on the grass right here with gorillas and tigers," he says. "It's extraordinary." He stands up from the table. "The truth is, I wouldn't have been in this situation if I hadn't been born into it." When Courage leaves the room, his children begin to shout with abandon and run around their mother again. Chips leans over conspiratorially. "Fascinating watching the young," he whispers. "They always remind me of how primitive we are." □

THE SILENT KILLER

(continued from page 93)

else there." Schreiber, who had interrupted our phone conversation earlier to accept a soft-serve ice cream with rainbow sprinkles from his girlfriend, chuckled. "Still, I hope everyone understands that it is, after all, Hollywood, and Daniel Craig wouldn't stand a chance with me."

With the role of Bond, Craig now has a solid day job: He's constantly on the phone encouraging people to spend money, monkeying with the script, trying to land the right cast and crew, or helping to dream up a blockbuster stunt. Having his hands on the wheel has changed his expectations, his sense of commitment. "Now, when I go and get involved with a movie, I have to apply this experience. I have to do those same things. I can't just sort of turn up anymore."

Craig's widely reported hesitations about taking on the title role in the largest British film franchise could be seen as a tribute to his deep roots in the "serious" European film world. Endearingly enough, the success of his Bond hasn't ended these bouts of self-torture. He pointed, with extreme suspicion, to how Bond's "money-wise success" had made him "bankable": *Casino Royale* hauled in \$600 million worldwide, and Craig will apparently make around \$9 million for the second Bond film, not to mention \$14 million more for a third. (*Quantum's* budget is reported to be a staggering \$230 million.) It's a situation that could easily tempt him to push for other film ventures as big

as Bond. "Then my energy steers me to making something tiny and weird," he said, "because that sort of thing gives me huge satisfaction." (By "tiny and weird," Craig might have been referring to *Flashbacks of a Fool*, directed by his friend Baillie Walsh.)

In *Quantum of Solace*, the filmmakers have incorporated Craig's self-questioning impulses into Bond's ongoing character development. The story picks up moments after the close of *Casino Royale*; Bond is still dealing with his feelings for Vesper Lynd (Eva Green) and her death and betrayal. Forster, the director, elaborated: "It's fascinating territory because on the one hand he is an assassin. But he just lost someone he loves. How does that affect him psychologically? Definitely, the ghosts are there." We've come a long way from *Octopussy*.

Still, Bond films have always served as time capsules for a certain bachelor high style. And even Craig admits that with this second outing he has begun to relax and enjoy the 007 brand of sophistication. Throughout *Quantum of Solace*, Bond and his stunt doubles wear Tom Ford, more than 300 garments' worth. The close fit of Ford's look beautifully emphasizes Craig's slimmed-down alter ego. "Daniel knows exactly what works on him," Ford says. "Really, the simpler the clothes, the more handsome he looks."

Ford is the first American designer to make a significant contribution to Bond style. Even so, he points out, "I have never really thought of myself as an American designer. We have increasingly become a global culture, and I think of what I do as an international style. James Bond is also, for me, an international character. One of the things that make Daniel's Bond fresh and relevant is that he does not play up the clichés or mannerisms of English style." Ford describes his era-of-globalism Bond suit as preserving the classic English cut, but turned out with Italian flair and finish.

Quantum of Solace also offers much more of Bond's instinctual wit in the face of danger, and more of his long-standing bedroom aplomb. But even in this most traditional arena, Craig has had an effect. "Look, you're going to hold people's attention—plenty of men's attention—with naked girls," he admitted. (Olga Kurylenko and Gemma Arterton are the latest Bond bombshells.) "But the sexiness of a Bond movie has to come from... convincing adults. The fact is, the stronger you make those characters, the more