



## Assegai

*Wilbur Smith*

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## Assegai Wilbur Smith

Wilbur Smith has won acclaim worldwide as the master of the historical novel. Now, in "Assegai" he takes readers on an unforgettable African adventure set against the gathering clouds of war.

It is 1913 and Leon Courtney, an ex-soldier turned professional hunter in British East Africa, guides the rich and powerful from America and Europe on big-game safaris. Leon had never sought fame, but an expedition alongside U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt has made him one of the most sought-after hunters on the continent. Soon, he finds that with celebrity comes not just wealth--but also danger.

Leon is recruited by his uncle Penrod Ballantyne, commander of the British forces in East Africa, to gather information on one of his clients: Count Otto von Meerbach, a German industrialist whose company builds aircraft and vehicles for the Kaiser's burgeoning army. While spying, Leon falls desperately in love with von Meerbach's beautiful and enigmatic mistress, Eva von Wellberg.

On the eve of the World War, Leon stumbles on a plot by Count von Meerbach that could wipe out the British forces in Africa. He finds himself left alone to frustrate von Meerbach's plan, and in grave peril as he learns more about the enigmatic Eva.

Set amidst the tensions that will spark a war across continents, "Assegai" delivers the fast-paced action and vivid history that has made Wilbur Smith an internationally bestselling author.

## Assegai Details

Date : Published May 12th 2009 by Thomas Dunne Books (first published January 1st 2009)

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Author : Wilbur Smith

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# From Reader Review Assegai for online ebook

## Faith Mortimer says

I have read every single book of Wilbur Smith (to my knowledge) and I am sorry to say that he must be feeling his age as this is not one of his best by a long shot.

The period setting and idea is good (WW1 and devious goings on in darkest Africa between the Germans and some renegade south Africans).

Smith's detail on game drives is paramount, and exciting stuff (even for an ecologist) but romance and characterisation in this novel were just plain yucky.

Leon Courtney - the perfect specimen over 6 foot, hunk, fantastic lover and amazing with his gun (no pun intended honest).

Count Otto - the very worst of baddies, filthy rich, a bully and a misogynist (although he loves to bed them)

Eva - the oh so beautiful mistress of the count, too good to be true.

I love stories about Africa and I was so looking forward to reading this. I did enjoy it in parts, but...it was not a patch on the old Courtney stories.

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## Erin says

Another Wilbur Smith classic, love the ability to be transported off into a different world in a different era.

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## Matt says

Smith ups the ante in this Courtney novel, lucky number thirteen, which has very fluid ties to its predecessor. Set in British East Africa (subsequently Kenya), the story centres around the life of Leon Courtney, son of Ryder Courtney. After a court-martial finds Leon removed from the British military, he becomes a professional hunter, taking many important men on big game safaris through the tribal lands. Approached by his uncle, Penrod Ballantyne, Leon agrees to help keep his eyes and ears open as it relates to news regarding German East Africa, after rumblings in the European theatre indicate that military build-ups have commenced. After leading former US President Teddy Roosevelt and his son on a large safari, Leon's reputation grows and he is visited by two distinct visitors, Otto von Meerbach and his beautiful mistress, Eva von Wellberg. Meerbach is a businessman, whose company builds aircraft and vehicles for the Kaiser's ever-expanding military. Tasked with learning all about Meerbach's plans, Leon finds himself distracted by von Wellberg, who tries to keep her distance, but is equally enthralled. When von Wellberg admits a dark secret to Leon, he must process the news as he continues 'befriending' von Meerbach. A rash decision finds Leon chastised by his uncle and von Wellberg sent back to Europe with an injured von Meerbach. As the Great War begins, Leon learns an important piece of information that could save British territories in Africa, but when Eva Von Wellberg returns to Africa, all bets are off. With his typical highly-detailed narrative of the African way of life, Smith does not disappoint while placing everything in context of historical goings-on within the region and around the world.

Smith has created another wonderful piece of fiction, which works well as a continuation of the Courtney saga or as a standalone novel. Smith provides the reader with some excellent storytelling as the Courtney saga returns to its roots, at least where the second series began. With the intricacies of the Courtney backstory, Smith has a great deal on which to build and does so effectively, which still injects a newness to the story and unique angles to build on the rich foundation. This tale moves effortlessly between history, geography, and character development, while staying true to the formula for literary success. The series reader will enjoy the dusting of returning characters who make their own cameos throughout the story while new readers are sure to be sucked in and scramble to read as much of Smith's work as they can, which one can hope includes the entire Courtney/Ballantyne sagas, as I have done.

Kudos, Mr. Smith on another successful novel. I can only hope the last (to date) novel in the Courtney series, which awaits me, is as detailed and enjoyable as this.

Like/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:  
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

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### **Anastasia Perrou says**

Στην Ελλάδα εκδόθηκε απ' τις εκδόσεις Bell

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Τον Smith τον "γνώρισα" απ' το συγκεκριμένο βιβλίο, που ενθουσίαστηκα τόσο εφόσον με ταξίδεψε στη μακρινή Αφρική στην πρώτη δεκαετία του 1900 και μου σ'στήσε τον ήρωα του.

Ο ανθυπολοχαγός Κόρνεϊ είχε εγκαταλείψει το βρετανικό στρατό κι έχει γ'νει κυνηγός μεγάλων ζώων και οδηγεί πλοΐσιους Ευρωπαίους και Αμερικανούς σε σαφ'ρι στις περιοχές των Μασάι.

Ένας απ' τους πελάτες του είναι ο γερμανός κ'μης στο φόν Μέρμπαχ και η ερωμένη του, Ελν.

Όμως ο Κόρνεϊ έχει μια κρυφή ιδιότητα, ο θεός του που είναι διοικητής των βρετανικών δυνάμεων της Ανατολικής Αφρικής, τον έχει στρατολογήσει ως κατ'σκοπό για να αποσπεί απ' τον κ'μη πληροφορίες που σ'ως αποδειχθούν σημαντικές στη μεγάλη σύγκρουση που πλησιάζει...και έτσι αρχίζει μια περιπέτεια στην Αφρική με ένα απαγορευμένο αλλά και επικυνδύνο ήρωα !

Αυτό που μου έρεσε στον Smith είναι ότι δεν προσπάθησε να εντυπωσιάσει τον αναγνώστη με επαναλαμβανόμενες καταστάσεις. Γιατί σας ομολογώ πως όταν έδα ότι είναι 500 και β'λε σελ'δες, σκόφτηκα πως σ'ως με κουράσει.

Είλικριν?, δεν αντιλήφθηκα τη λεγόμενη "κοίλι;" που παρουσιάζουν τα πολυσελίδα μυθιστορήματα αλλά η εναλλαγή και εξέλιξη της ιστορίας είναι τόσο φυσική, λες και συμβαίνουν εκείνη τη στιγμή μπροστ' μας.

Δεν θέλω να το αφήσω απ' τα χ'ρια μου!

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### **S.K. Levy says**

Leon Courtney is the protagonist in this *Assegai*, number thirteen in the Courtney family series. It is a love story, but not a mushy one. It's also about so much more and sheds a fascinating light on Tribal Culture in Africa. The only major drawback is that there is a lot of animal killing, which I am not a fan of reading at all. I pushed through all of this though, as I knew there was a wonderful story within. I couldn't quite lose myself in this book, but I know it was only due to the description of so many animals being killed. It was well written, the story line was original and the history entwined throughout it was very interesting.

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## **Eric says**

*Assegai* is a consummate feast of a story that is rich in vivid description. The author takes the reader into British East Africa of a 100 years ago. The wildlife, the people, and landscapes all come to life as we follow Leon Courtney's adventures leading up to World War I. I listened to the audio book and Simon Vance does an outstanding job with this story.

*Assegai* references the spear used by the Maasai tribesmen of Nairobi. It has 3 foot long razor sharp metal blade attached to a hardwood shaft to form a deadly spear. It is not only a weapon but a symbol of bravery. In order for a Maasai warrior to become a man, he must face and kill an African lion with his spear.

The story starts out with Lieutenant Leon Courtney on patrol with Sergeant Manyoro, a Maasai warrior, when they find an British couple brutally tortured and murdered by another nearby tribe. They are attacked by the tribal warriors and Manyoro is shot in the thigh. Courtney carries Manyoro for 3 days to a mountain fortress where Manyoro's mother lives. Manyoro's mother is a rather "unique" person among the Maasai. After this incident, Leon is not a regular part of the KAR (Kings African Rifles). Leon learns to become a big game hunter. He also becomes a spy of sorts.

There is a larger story of intrigue that involves a German industrialist who hires Leon to take him on safari. The larger story is interesting. It's the details of the hunt and wildlife that is truly entrancing about the book. The author writes in great detail about various animals and then describes the vast landscapes of Africa itself. The relationship between Leon and Manyoro is both humorous at times and deeply moving at others. The other characters in the story are also well crafted to keep things interesting. The story itself is well crafted as it lays down each layer to bring the main plot to the forefront. In short, the story, plot, characters and Africa itself is reader's delight.

Simon Vance is one of my favorite narrators. He seems to be able to breath life into all the characters of the story as to immerse the listener into this expansive story. I found myself visualizing this story as if I was sitting in an IMAX theater.

I found *Assegai* a sumptuous read and recommend to those who like to read epic stories. I will be definitely looking into the other books of this series by this author.

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## **Elizabeth says**

totally romanticizes colonialism and reeks of the white man's burden. most frequent descriptors of women are "mysterious," "motherly," and "tiny-waisted." for heaven's sake.

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## Powerock says

A selection of my book club to be discussed next week. I have loaned it to another member but when it is returned, I will quote here some of the romance lines. The word corny is not so sophisticated but it fits. More later.

Update:

Sorry I cannot quote the lines that appalled me. The book has been returned so I cannot provide you with a good laugh. My book club generally liked the book with agreement that the historical setting, pre world war I in East Africa, was interesting -- especially the author's insight into the Masai and their knowledge of the wildlife. We also agreed that he should stick with what he knows - Africa- and leave the romantic relationships out of the story.

Evidently there are many Smith fans out there who read everyone of his books. Not me.

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## Voldemort says

I should have stuck with my TO READ list. This book was a chore, a bothersome pain in the ass. So why keep on reading it?

Because I wanted to find out mamma Lucima's prophecies (which ended up lame so beloved readers don't expect much) and I wanna complete my 300 books challenge for this year (silly me).

The characters

Liked none of them. I felt there were chosen just for the benefit of the story (pointless might I say). No depth whatsoever and the way the two main characters fell in love ...

"She was so beautiful I felt my heart squeeze." (Shallow much! How can you love someone you never talked to?!)

Oh and that cheesy line

"Even her little footsteps were beautiful". (Oh Lord, how pathetic)

Half of this book was about hunting.

"Bang, they killed the boar, Bam Bam Bam, they killed the elephant and took his teeth, Bam Bam wait....Fap Fap Fap, they stabbed the lion with the Assegai arrow. (Reminding the reader here how dear Otto killed with ONE DUCKING ATHLETIC MOVE the most powerful twin lion in a blink of a paragraph. Cut the crap Wilbur, this is historical fiction not Marvel)

The prose was bland, no climax (I assume the author included the last two pages as its peak), and not much information narrated like Mr. Smith's other pieces. I was waiting for some incredible descriptions of Africa's wilderness, Massai's tribe cultures, assegai's true power but I got dull dialogues, dreary characters and neuron-killing plot.

People slaughtered animals so easily just for the heck of it and none of them had an itty bitsy remorse for what they had done, this way molding them into ugly disgusting heartless caricatures.

My mom says I'm very critical of books and I should simply enjoy what they write because authors at least are trying (not like me).

Well mom, you weren't reading this piece of crap.

I still love you.

Two stars because I learned what a safari is and what a badger looks like.

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### **Lynn says**

Back to Africa with the Courteney's, and safari treks and exciting action, Smith is back to his "old form" after his blip on the good writing radar screen with Quest! As always, Smith weaves much historical information into the novel, and the sections about Teddy Roosevelt and his safaris is an eyeopener about how the "big game" hunters traveled. Extremely captivating --- I've spent nights unable to get off the Sereghetti, chasing bull elephants, and dancing around the campfire, with the chant of "just one more chapter" in the background....

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### **James Brough says**

What can I say? Obviously well done by the master storyteller, however, this plays out too much like a Hollywood nazi-spy epic.

Evil German mastermind with a bloodthirsty appetite and (spoiler alert) a fake hand that is a mace, flying to cause havoc in a zeppelin.

I found it bizarre that Leon has no problem killing animals and committing adultery, but when given an opportunity to kill (or let the lion do the job) the main antagonist he suddenly has a conscience the size of Africa.

The period is caught nicely in the beginning, but as I say, from the middle to end it seems kitsch and Hollywood.

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### **Didi A says**

Read my full review.

Assegai sounded like a great adventure/spy drama with some romance thrown in, so I was very surprised to get 300+ pages about how the protagonist became a hunter, then hunted, then visited the Masai prophetess, then hunted some more, then visited the prophetess, then hunted...

Courtney is a cardboard cutout character – sexy, tall, hunky, blonde, brave, rebellious and strong-willed. At least we are told he is. In the beginning I almost believed it, because he seemed to have an arc. He wanted to be a hunter. He was drawn to the wilderness. He wanted to prove himself to his dad and the world. He had principles and scruples to breach them. Oh, and he was fun. Enter Eva. Leon gets a lobotomy.

Assegai is conflict-timid. A lot can turn rotten, but somehow it never quite does. More than a few times our Courtney boy gets so damn lucky one has to wonder why Smith even bothered to include the scene at all.

I had quite a problem with the hunting. I know the glorification is historically correct but I wish there had been a moment when the book agrees on what a cruel and awful thing it is in reality, instead of, well, completely forgetting about it at some point.

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### Thomas says

Αν μη τι άλλο, ο Smith είναι ένας πολύ ικανός αφηγητής. Αυτός ισχύει και για το "Ασεγκάι", που ξεκινάει δυναμικά την εξιστρήση της ζωής ενός ακάμχη Κόρτνεϊ στη Νότια Αφρική του 1900-κ.τι. Το βιβλίο είναι καλό, οι σελίδες γυρίζουν πολύ εύκολα ή μια μετά την άλλη, με τις παραστατικές σκηνές δράσης να κρατούν το ενδιαφέρον αμετάωτο μεταφέροντας τον αναγνώστη στις σαβάνες της Κένυας. Εδώ υπάρχουν επίσης ενδιαφέροντα λαογραφικά στοιχεία για τον τρόπο ζωής και την κουλτούρα των Μασάι, αναλυτικές περιγραφές επικίνδυνων κυνηγιών σάφρι που πραγματικά θυμίζουν ντοκιμαντέρ, ενώ ο Smith προς το τέλος το γυρίζει στην κατασκοπία υφάινοντας για ακάμχη μια φορά στο μυθιστόρημα του ιστορικού στοιχείου, που αφορούν το γεωπολιτικό σκηνικό στην Ευρώπη και την Αφρική λίγο πριν την έναρξη του 1ου παγκόσμιου πολέμου αυτό τη φορά.

Μια ευχάριστη ανήγνωση που ωστόσο λόγω της επαναληψιμότητας σε αρκετά σημεία και ενός περιττού σαπουνόπερικο love story δε με αφήνουν να δώσω 4 αστέρια.

★★★½

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### Magdelanye says

The only thing that kept me reading this disturbing book was the conviction that the hero would wake up and become aware of the travesty of safari hunting, which is outlined here in tedious and horrifying detail. Glimpses of African tribal life and African history were indeed of interest, but the paternalism and obvious glorification of Britain rather intruded. And of course the hunting details were devastating.

And instead of becoming an advocate for animal rights, the hero's focus shifts drastically when he agrees to a bit of espionage. By then I realized that the book was just a thriller, and laughed at myself for getting sucked in. But I finished it, and passed it on quickly, with a disclaimer.

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### Mal Warwick says

One of the best ways I've found to learn history is through historical fiction. Though I've studied African history and read a fair amount of nonfiction about the continent, I may have learned just as much from *Assegai*, a popular novel set in British East Africa (now Kenya) in the period 1906-1918. (The title means "sword" in the language of the Masai.)

As a novel, *Assegai* is far from perfect. It tells the adventurous tale of a young white African man, just 18 at the outset, who displays his seemingly superhuman prowess as a soldier, a wild game hunter, a fighter pilot, and a lover. To say the least, Leon Courtney is hard to believe, as is his love, the extraordinary young woman whom we first meet as Eva von Wellberg. She is, of course, a paragon of beauty, grace, intelligence, cunning, and athletic ability both in and out of bed. And the two aristocratic Germans who play large roles in the book as antagonists could easily fit nicely into the role of villains in early silent films, twisting moustaches and evil eyes included.



Hyperbolic characterizations aside, though, Assegai opens up a window on a time and place about which I know so little. The author's portrayal of the Masai people with whom Leon Courtney works, while idealized, projects the pride and dignity of an historically important ethnic community. As the action unfolds in the years before and during the First World War, Assegai throws light on the historical sideshow that was the struggle between German and British colonial forces in that theater so many thousands of miles from the Somme and the Argonne.

Assegai is one of the 13 novels in the saga of the Courtney family, which spans the five hundred years beginning in the 1600s.

Wilbur Smith, with more than 30 historical novels to his credit, is probably one of the world's best-selling writers. His books loom large on the shelves of bookshops in many parts of the world outside the U.S., but they are less extensively read here, because his subject matter is his beloved native Africa.

Smith's writing style is full of color and imagery. Hyperbole aside, it's a pleasure to read.

(From [www.malwarwickonbooks.com](http://www.malwarwickonbooks.com))

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### **S.R.R. Colvin says**

Assegai (as'-uh-guy) is by far my favorite Wilbur Smith book. Often times he includes graphic scenes of boy meets girl, which I personally don't care to read. I am a mother of three - so obviously I know how it all works. I just don't need to read about it smack in the middle of a great adventure. The skin scenes are kept to a minimum, but the action is hot!

I love Africa and adventures in the bush. This one is set pre-WWI in British East Africa. Smith beautifully describes the landscapes, the wildlife, and the Masai and their culture.

Excellent book!

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### **Karen says**

Oh, Wilbur. I love your action, descriptions of Africa, and attention to detail when it comes to describing machines and whatnot. But the romance aspect of this book was too much. I ended up wishing they'd all blow up in a giant zeppelin disaster by the last few chapters.

I liked the first two-thirds of the book, just not the last part wherein the Hero Falls In Love. Barf.

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### **Tom LA says**

I had forgotten how much fun a Wilbur Smith book can be. He truly is a grand master of adventure writing and historical novels. So what if his mind is stuck in the 19th century and he is prone to wild hyperboles? His fiction has a very peculiar, inimitable voice, made of strong, simple traits, a fast, always-exciting pace, a rich prose, and a good amount of poetry - especially about African nature and habitat.

The "Big Five game" animals - African lion, African elephant, rhino, Cape buffalo and African leopard - are all featured in this wonderful novel, based in 1913 British East Africa (Kenya), that offers very convincing descriptions of that world, and a lot of extremely realistic hunting scenes.

I listened to the audiobook. The narrator did a great job, coming up with at least 10 different voices and accents to help the story come to life.

The plot revolves around Leon Courtney, 19 y.o. British army boy who ends up working as a hunting-safari guide for rich white folks. As the novel moves closer and closer to the beginning of WWI, the hunting gives space to a historic spy-novel plot that is just as interesting and well crafted as the portion that focuses on the hunting.

In the first part of the book, together with the hunting scenes the reader is presented with many details of the Maasai people's life: their habits, language, traditions (the "Assegai" is their famous long spear). Clearly Wilbur Smith is fascinated by their culture as he portrays them with great accuracy. This sparked my curiosity about these people, and I found out a little diamond on Youtube: a russian documentary on a group of Maasai traveling to Moscow (if you are crazy enough, check it out here: <http://youtu.be/0EFioK2Rmgg>).

As for the hunting... On one hand, I was disgusted by the cruelty and stupidity of Western colonists hunting animals for pure fun (maybe that's my 2016 sensitivity. In 1913 lions and buffaloes were considered "vermin" by the local government). On the other hand, I can't deny that more than once my heartbeat actually increased while listening to these scenes, as narrated in the audiobook. Yes, hunting with big rifles was kind of cowardly even back then, but a big lion running at you is still a big lion running at you, whether you're armed with a rifle or not, and after you miss a couple of shots, my guess is your adrenaline kicks in (have you seen the movie "The revenant"? The bear scene is like a gentle pat on your cheek compared to the man-to-animal scenes in Assegai).

I also loved to hear about the techniques used by local people like the Maasai to hunt lions and elephants for centuries, simply using their spears, with respect for the animals. Until of course white people with big rifles arrived.

All in all, a genuine, stylish, well written historic novel with lots of adventure, incredibly well-researched details, and an exciting plot to hold on to until the end.

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## **Melanie Fraser says**

This exciting adventure set in Africa is thrilling to the last word. There is danger lurking from humans and animals throughout which kept my attention rapt. Although I found the approach to hunting animals by the foreigners visiting to join safari trips reckless and cruel, this was offset by those running the safaris shaming the foreigners about their behaviour.

Wilbur Smith has once again presented a masterpiece of drama with magnificent descriptions of the splendour of African scenery juxtaposed with the German and Boer war plans against the British and the spies within. The Masai customs and rituals added extra colour to this story as did their support of Leon Courtney, the main character and his love, Eva.

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## **Mrsku says**

WHAT is happening to Wilbur Smith?! Did he die and is someone, possibly his grandmother, writing on his behalf? Because this book was such a let down. Where are the complicated and heart wrenching story lines of his River God series, where's the excitement of Africa that was in his early Courtney books (i.e. Sean Courtney)?

As far as a recount of hunting wild animals in Africa go this book was ok but even then it wasn't so great. The characters were weak and unloveable, unhateable as well but then I couldn't muster up any emotions at all. I found myself for the first time ever hoping that the 'baddies' would kill everyone just so I could finish the book.

Sorry Wilbur, if your out there somewhere, I think you can do better.

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