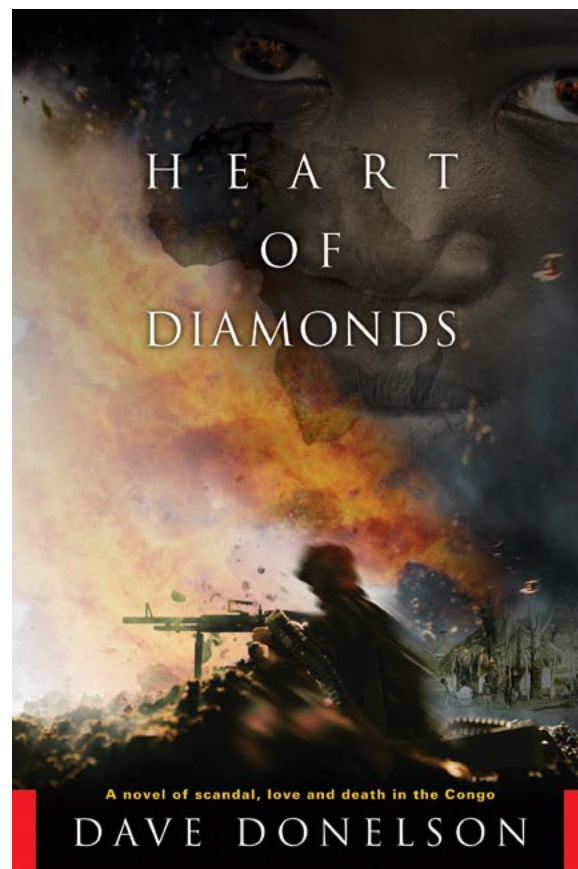


## READER'S GROUP GUIDE



ISBN 9781601641571

[www.heartofdiamonds.com](http://www.heartofdiamonds.com)

published by Kunati Books

## Why Read *Heart of Diamonds*?

**In short** - In *Heart of Diamonds*, star TV reporter Valerie Grey risks her life—and her love—to expose a diamond smuggling scheme involving a celebrity televangelist, an African dictator, and possibly the White House. It happens while she's on assignment in the Congo, where life itself is brutal and the censoring eyes of civilization have long been blind.

**Valerie Grey** – The protagonist is an appealing, successful woman with inner insecurities—making her someone with whom many readers can identify. She's unsure what to do about her career, undecided about her love life, and is plagued by guilt about her relationships with her parents. At the same time, Valerie is very good at what she does—maybe the best in the cut-throat but glamorous television news business—and she's near the pinnacle of a fabulous career.

**The Congo** – It's exotic, dangerous, and beautiful, the very heart of the wildest and most exotic continent on earth. You don't go to the zoo to see the cows and the chickens, you go to see the lions, elephants, giraffes, and monkeys. Africa may not be a convenient vacation destination, but it has enchanted armchair travelers ever since Henry Morton Stanley sent his dispatches to the *New York Herald*. One of the author's strengths is a sense of place, and he draws on his own travels to bring Africa alive for the reader.

**Suspense** – There are plenty of questions to keep you reading to find the answers. How will Dr. Jaime Talon keep the struggling clinic going? Will the unknown assassin reach Valerie? Will she escape to tell the world about the secret reason the White House sent U.S. troops to the Congo?

**Romance** – Valerie's love life is as complicated as her career. She's torn between long-time mentor and lover David Powell and the intriguing Dr. Jaime Talon. The love story doesn't end until the last page—if then.

**Real Adventure** – Few places on the planet have seen such human drama and bloody conflict. The action on the front page of your daily newspaper is echoed in the plot of *Heart of Diamonds*. The Democratic Republic of Congo, where most of the action takes place, will be in the news for years to come with stories driven by the same thing that drives the evil characters in the book—greed.

## The Basics

**Author:** Dave Donelson

**Publisher:** Kunati Books, September, 2008

**Edition:** Trade paperback, 352 pages

**Setting:** The Democratic Republic of the Congo, New York, and other locales

**Point of View:** Mostly told from the viewpoint of Valerie Grey, the protagonist, although the narrator is omniscient.

**Genre:** Thriller/Suspense/High-Concept Adventure

**Theme:** The struggle to survive tragic personal loss against a backdrop of massive human tragedy.

### Synopsis:

Covering the endless civil war in the Congo seems like the perfect way for television journalist Valerie Grey to escape the tangles of her personal life. But complications arise—most of them red-hot dangerous—when she stumbles onto a diamond smuggling scheme that begins in the Congo and leads to the White House.

In a plot-driving twist, the diamonds come from a mine owned by American televangelist Gary Peterson, who smuggles them inside *nkisi*, traditional figures like voodoo dolls, in a scheme to cheat his partner in the mine, Congolese President Moshe Messime. Valerie Gray learns that an aide to US President Billy Baker is involved, news that casts an ugly, profit-driven light on an impending US military action in the war-ravaged country. As Valerie closes in on the truth, each of these powerful men—the preacher, the politician, and the dictator—unleash their personal dogs of war to keep her from revealing their bloody secrets.

Valerie relies on her own wits, courage, and grit to survive their savage pursuit through the horrific war-torn landscape of the Congo. Caught between her pursuers and brutal warring factions fighting for control of the diamond-rich region, Valerie canoes down crocodile-infested rivers, dodges attacking helicopters, and races over teeth-rattling roads to bring her story to the outside world.

A love triangle both enriches the adventure and lays the groundwork for tragedy as Valerie struggles to understand her conflicting feelings for companion David Powell, the über journalist who helped shape her fabulous career, and Dr. Jaime Talon, who selflessly runs a struggling clinic near the mine. The chaos of civil war forms the perfect backdrop for Valerie's despair in the soul-shattering climax.

## Author Biography

Dave Donelson's career as a broadcaster, entrepreneur, and writer has taken him from the jungles of Australia's Cape York Peninsula to the minarets of Riyadh. He's climbed the spire of the Empire State Building, floated the Usumacinta River to the Mayan ruins at Piedras Negras in Guatemala, and photographed the tree-climbing lions and mountain gorillas of Uganda.

Dave grew up in St. Joseph, Missouri, where he began his broadcasting career in radio news at the age of 18. He went to Missouri Western State College (BA in Rhetoric and Public Address) on a debate scholarship, which he says is "just like a football scholarship only without cheerleaders."

He worked in television after college, did very well in Chicago and New York, and started a consulting company at the age of 37. As an entrepreneur, he started three successful companies in related fields, then essentially retired to write full time in 1999.

Dave's inquisitive, active lifestyle finds its way into freelance writing and photographic assignments for magazines as diverse as *Disney's FamilyFun*, *Woodworker's Journal*, and *Las Vegas Magazine*. Closer to home, he writes features for *Westchester Magazine* and is a member of the prestigious Metropolitan Golf Writers Association.

Dave's first book was *Creative Selling* (Entrepreneur Press, 2000), a non-fiction prescriptive described by Brian Tracy as "...a terrific book on selling." As a business journalist, he writes for *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Family Business Magazine*, and dozens of trade publications serving industries from the automotive aftermarket to sporting goods retailing.

His first novel, *Hunting Elf*, began as an audio book at [www.huntingelf.com](http://www.huntingelf.com) and was self-published in 2006. K9 Perspective called it "...a delicious romp through the suburbs of New York."

Dave serves as a Trustee for the Westchester (NY) Library System, a consortium of 38 public libraries serving Westchester County. He lives in West Harrison, NY, with his wife, Nora, and an ever-changing roster of dogs and cats. He has two children, Jeremy, 34, a graphic illustrator whose first comic book was published in 2007, and Leigh Anna, 30, who lives independently with Down Syndrome.

## Some Background Reading

*The Green Hills of Africa* – Ernest Hemingway, Scribner, 1935

*West with the Night* – Beryl Markham, Houghton-Mifflin, 1942

*The Tree Where Man Was Born* – Peter Matthiessen, E.P. Dutton, 1983

*African Silences* – Peter Matthiessen, Random House, 1991

*Africa: A Biography of the Continent* – John Reader, Knopf, 1997

*King Leopold's Ghost* – Adam Hochschild, Houghton-Mifflin, 1998

*The Troubled Heart of Africa: A History of the Congo* – Robert Edgerton, St. Martin's Press, 2002

*Into Africa: The Epic Adventures of Stanley and Livingston* – Martin Dugard, Doubleday, 2003

*Stanley: The Impossible Life of Africa's Greatest Explorer* – Tim Jeal, Yale University Press, 2007

*The Unheard, A Memoir of Deafness and Africa* – Josh Swiller, Henry Holt, 2007

Useful books about natural life in Africa

*The Safari Companion, A Guide to Watching African Mammals* – Richard Estes, Chelsea Green Publishing, 1993

*Signs of the Wild* – Clive Walker, Struik, 1996

*Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* – Austin Roberts, John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, 1985

*Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa* – John Williams, Collins, 1980

*Valley of the Elephants* – Norman Carr, Collins, 1979

*Portraits in the Wild: Behavior Studies of East African Mammals* – Cynthia Moss, Houghton-Mifflin, 1975

**Characters** (in order of appearance)

Dr. Jaime Talon – Runs a struggling clinic in Mai-Munene

Christophe – A boy captured and turned into a soldier by the Lunda Libre, a rebel faction

Pieter Jakobsen – South African assistant to Jaime Talon

Joao de Santos – Portuguese manager of the diamond mine at Mai-Munene

Thomas Alben – Missionary sent to Mai-Munene to oversee the mine

Kafutshi – Old woman in village, grandmother of Celestine, Juvenal, and Kenda

Celestine – Older sister of Juvenal and Kenda

Valerie Grey – International correspondent for MBS-TV

Carter Wilson – President of MBS News

David Powell – Valerie's lover, head of MBS Washington, DC bureau

Nancy Justine – Valerie's producer and long-time friend

Preston Henry – MBS-TV Evening News anchor

Bobby Blaine – MBS-TV videographer

Moshe Messime – President of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Mr. Sami – Congolese village entrepreneur

Captain Yoweri – FIC Army officer in charge of forces at mine

Reverend Gary Peterson – Televangelist who owns the diamond mine

Billy Baker – President of the United States

Charles Hook – Aide to President Billy Baker

Kenda and Juvenal – Celestine's younger twin brothers

Steve Scavino – U.S. agent dispatched by Charles Hook

Mbaya – Congolese garage owner

Frannie Starnhart – Refugee camp director

Ngyke – Congolese fisherman

## Discussion Questions

### Starters

Which characters did you like the most? Dislike the most? Why?  
In one word, what was the book about?

### In Depth

How does the title “Heart of Diamonds” relate to the themes of the book?  
What did Jamie Talon mean when he told Valerie to “Be Strong”?  
Were the African characters stereotypes or fully developed?  
What was the weakness in the relationship between Valerie and David Powell?  
How much does President Baker really know about the diamond mine?  
Why is Nancy’s relationship to Valerie important to the story? Or is it?  
Do any of the villains (Peterson, Alben, Yoweri, Scavino) have any redeeming qualities?  
Should they?  
When Valerie discovers the diamonds in the *nkisi*, what options does she have?

### Literary Devices

Description - What elements did the author use to create a sense of place for these locales?  
Tshikapa market, Village of Mai-Munene, the diamond mine, Central Park, the restaurant in Gombe  
Backstory - What role did Valerie’s mother play in development of her character?  
Pacing – There are several “little stories” told by various characters. What do they contribute to the book?  
Voice – Why did the author choose an omniscient narrator?

### Opinion

Would Jaime Talon be a successful doctor in New York?  
Is Valerie Grey a good role model for young girls?  
Is any of the violence or sexual content gratuitous?

### Wrap-up

Which characters did you relate to most?  
What would you change in the book?  
Would this book be suitable for all audiences?  
Would you recommend this book to others?

## Just For Fun

Spice up your book group meeting with some of the dishes mentioned in *Heart of Diamonds*.

### Moambé

A traditional African stew from the Congo River area. The moambé sauce is made from the fruit and oil of the oil palm which is used in many African dishes. Moambé stew can be made with beef, chicken, fish, mutton, or any wild game meat such as crocodile or venison. If peanut butter is used, the dish is transformed into Muamba Nsusu.

#### What you need

two to three pounds stew meat, cut into large bite-sized pieces  
juice of one lemon, or juice of one-half grapefruit  
salt to taste  
minced chili pepper, or ground cayenne pepper or red pepper (to taste)  
two tablespoons palm oil, peanut oil, or vegetable oil  
two onions, chopped  
six to eight ripe tomatoes, chopped (or canned tomatoes)  
greens (spinach, collards, or kale) washed and cut into pieces (optional)  
one cup of moambé sauce, palm butter, canned palm soup base, or peanut butter

#### What you do

Mix together the meat, juice, salt, and hot pepper. Allow to marinate for a half hour or more.  
Heat the oil in a dutch oven or large pot. Add the onions, and cook for a few minutes.  
Brown the meat with the onions.  
Add the tomatoes and a few cups of water. Reduce heat.  
Add the moambé sauce and greens (if desired). Cover and simmer on low heat until meat is tender, about an hour.  
Serve with fou-fou or rice.



## **Fou-Fou**

Fou-Fou is to Africa what mashed potatoes are to traditional European-American cooking, a starchy accompaniment for stews or other dishes. In Central Africa, fou-fou is often made from cassava tubers, as mentioned in *Heart of Diamonds*. Making fou-fou involves boiling, pounding, and vigorous stirring until the fou-fou is thick and smooth.

Instant Fou-fou (an out-of-Africa variation.)

### What you need

two cups instant mashed potatoes  
two cups baking mix like Bisquick  
two cups cassava flour or tapioca (tapioca is made from cassava tubers)

### What you do

Bring six cups of water to a boil in a large pot. Combine at least two of the three ingredients and add to the boiling water. Use a strong wooden spoon to stir constantly for 10-15 minutes. You may need two people: one to hold the pot and one to stir. If the fou-fou seems thinner than mashed potatoes, add more of the dry ingredients. The fou-fou should be very thick but must be stirred constantly to avoid lumping and burning.

To eat fou-fou: use your hand to tear off a bite-sized piece, shape it into a ball, make an indentation, and use it to scoop up the stew or whatever you're eating.

## **Pili-Pili Sauce**

An easy-to-make hot sauce.

### What you need

several chili peppers (Wear gloves while cleaning and keep your hands away from your eyes!),  
cleaned and finely chopped  
juice of one lemon  
a few cloves of garlic, minced  
several pieces of parsley, minced (optional)  
a few tablespoons of cooking oil  
a pinch of salt

### What you do

Mix all ingredients by hand or with a food processor. Cook in a hot skillet for a few minutes. Store in a glass jar in the refrigerator. Serve with everything.

Instant pili-pili: Mix cayenne pepper or red pepper powder, garlic powder, and onion powder with a few spoonfuls of tomato sauce.

## **Plantains in Palm Oil**

This dish makes use of two of the most common ingredients in Central African cookery: plantains and palm oil. Other oil can be substituted, but palm oil (or at least a mix of palm oil and some other cooking oil) gives the most authentic taste and color.

### What you need

one cup of palm oil, or any cooking oil, or a mix of the two  
four or more plantains  
hot chili pepper, cleaned and chopped  
one onion, chopped  
salt to taste

### What you do

Heat most of the oil in a large skillet. Peel plantains and cut into disks of equal thickness. Fry the plantains in the hot oil for several minutes, until they are golden brown. Remove them from the oil and place on absorbent paper.

Heat the rest of the oil in a deep pot. Fry the peppers and onion over high heat for a few minutes, stirring often.

Add the fried plantains to the peppers and onion. Add a spoonful of water, cover and simmer for a few minutes. Salt to taste.

Serve hot, alone or as a side dish.

## **Sugar Peanuts**

Vendors in the Tshikapa market sold fried grasshoppers, grubs, and other tasty snacks. You might prefer sugar peanuts, another popular treat.

### What you need

one cup water  
two cups sugar  
four cups raw peanuts, shells removed; skins can be removed or left on as desired

### What you do

Preheat oven to 300 degrees F.

Combine water and sugar in a saucepan. Bring to a boil and stir until sugar is dissolved to make a syrup.

Add peanuts. Continue to cook over medium heat, stirring regularly, until peanuts are evenly coated and no syrup is left in pan.

Spread nuts out on baking sheets. Bake at 300 degrees F for thirty minutes to one hour or until sugar is completely dried. Gently stir the peanuts a few times while baking. Remove from oven and place on paper towels, let cool, and store in airtight containers.

## **Fruit Salad**

A wide variety of tropical fruits, both native and non-native, are cultivated in Africa. It is likely that any of the fruits listed in this recipe would be eaten as a snack rather than made into an elaborate fruit salad, but a fine fruit salad can be made from just three or four of these ingredients (fresh or canned):

### What you need

avocado  
banana  
grapefruit  
guava  
mango  
melon  
orange  
papaya  
peach  
pear  
pineapple  
tangerine  
juice of one lemon -- or -- chopped, crushed mint leaves  
grated coconut or chopped roasted peanuts  
sugar (optional) (honey can also be used)

### What you do

If using canned fruits, drain and save the liquid. Peel and remove seeds from the fresh fruit as necessary, cut fruit into bite-sized pieces.

Combine all fruit in a glass bowl. Add the lemon juice (or mint leaves), some sugar water (water that has been boiled with sugar and allowed to cool--or use some of the liquid from the canned fruits). Stir gently. There should only be enough liquid to coat the fruit.

Cover the fruit salad and allow it to stand for a half hour before serving. The fruit salad may be refrigerated after it has stood for an hour. It should be eaten the same day it is made. It does not keep well overnight.

Top with grated coconut or chopped peanuts immediately before serving.

## **Cast The Movie**

For a fun, spirited discussion, ask the group which actor (or celebrity, politician, or other public figure) should play each character in *Heart of Diamonds*.

Who should portray:

Valerie Grey  
Jaime Talon  
Nancy Justine  
David Powell  
Thomas Alben  
Moshe Messime  
Captain Yoweri  
Gary Peterson  
Christophe  
Kafutshi  
Celestine  
The twins, Kenda and Juvenal

## **Trace Their Steps**

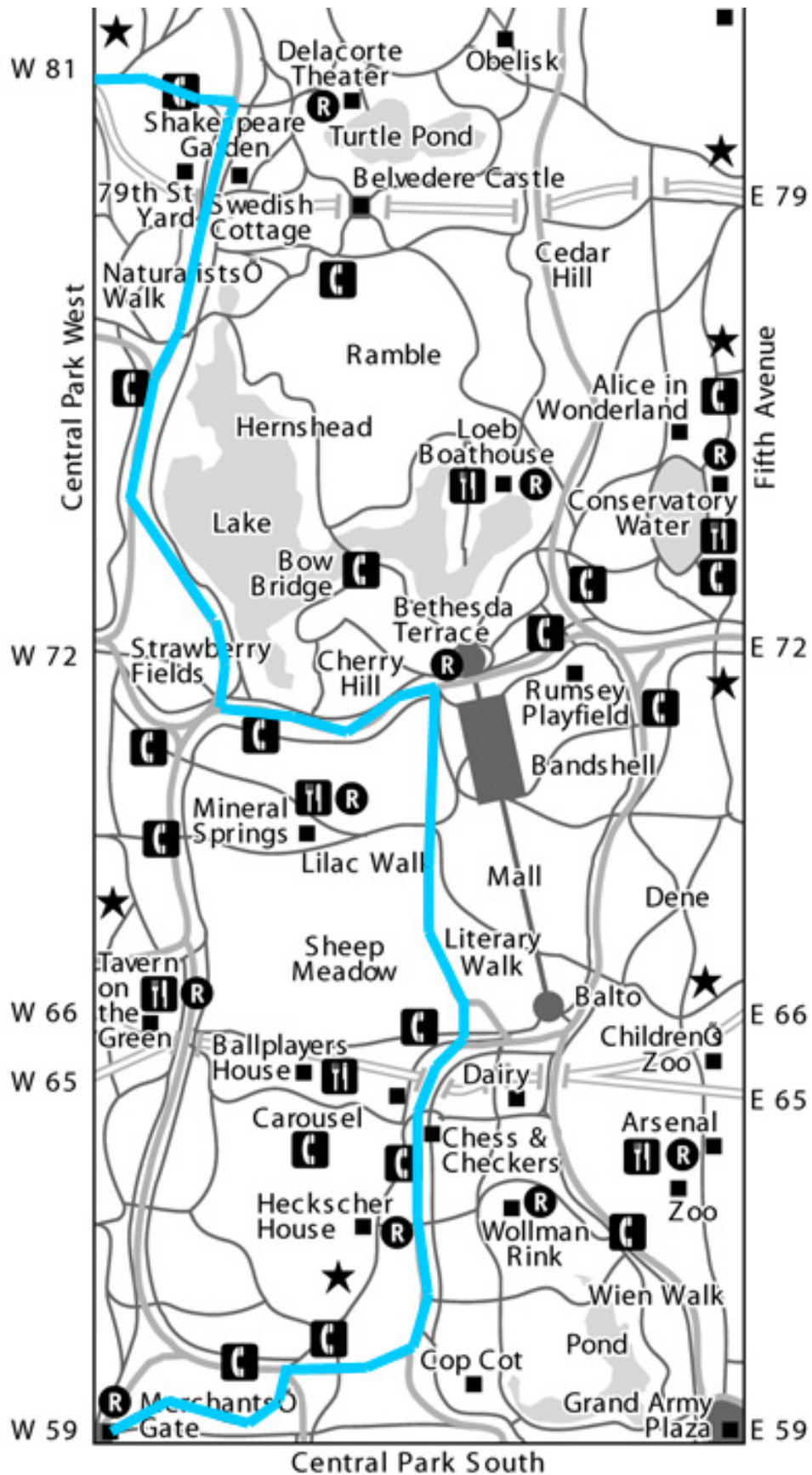
Mid-town New York is the location for several scenes in *Heart of Diamonds*. For something different, hold your meeting in or near one of these locales:

Rock Center Café, 20 W 50th Street (Fifth Avenue between 49th & 50th Streets)  
Waldorf Astoria Hotel, 301 Park Avenue (49th Street & Park Avenue)  
Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship, 314 E. 19th Street (19th Street & Second Avenue)

Or even take a run in Central Park!

They struck off at a moderate pace on the walkway leading diagonally into the park and away from the traffic already building around Columbus Circle. It was a fresh April day, slightly cool for the season, but perfect for a good run. They ran up Center Drive past the Carousel, silent and still in the morning, then skirted the dewy Sheep Meadow. When they got to the Olmstead Flower Bed, they turned onto the Literary Walk, where dozens of other early morning runners celebrated the fresh quiet of New York before rush hour by jogging under the towering elms that were just coming into bud. They turned west at the Bethesda Fountain to loop around the Lake to the Shakespeare Garden where they slowed to a walk to cool down. Traffic was picking up on Central Park West and the Seventy-Ninth Street Transverse.

(See map on following page)

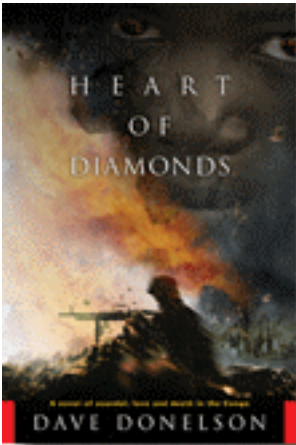


## Bookmarks

### Heart of Diamonds

**a novel of love, scandal,  
and death in the Congo  
by Dave Donelson**

**ISBN 978-1601641571**



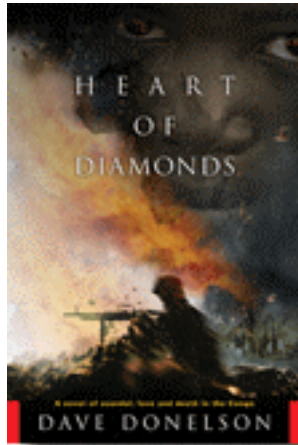
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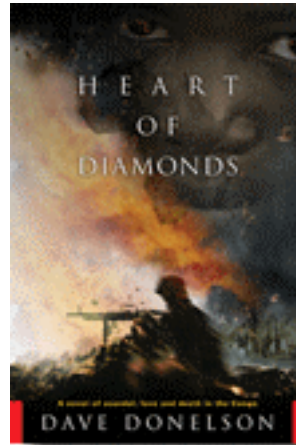
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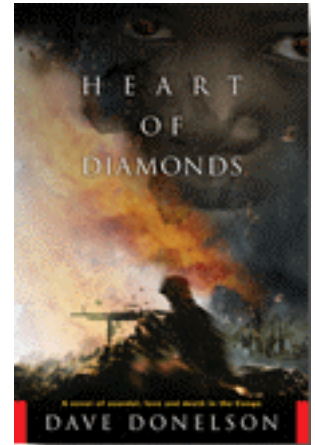
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