



Sentient – Africa

**Pilot summary
by Selina Kucks**

Set in the depths of Northern Nigeria, 2015, screenwriters **Ebuka Okparauzuma and Neeq Nonso** scribe an intriguing plot for the African franchise of 'Sentient' – a Sci-fi TV series developed by *Presence Global Entertainment*.

Dan Fodio – the protagonist of the series is a sleek, gazelle-like figure first seen clutching a spear as he swiftly leaps through thick brush with his dangerously ugly, black, scared dog – Kura. Following close behind are his men – a Volunteer Vigilante Force, better known as the VVF – who feel it is their job to protect the people from inter-tribal war and insurgent activity.

Okongwu is Dan's superior – a giant, sharp-shooting military general of 32 years. Although, he presents more the sparing, big brother than superior, which becomes evident almost immediately; Okongwu alerts him to the fact, he has been instructed to coach Dan and his merry men, on the practicalities of target-shooting.

Of course, Dan takes immediate offence and rebuts, "That won't be necessary". However, 'big brother' Okongwu has already devised a tongue-in-cheek safety net, "I will give you a private session".

As expected from any, well-written script, comic relief is established early in the plot and appears to balance the harsh military environment, looming on the horizon.

Ali – Dan’s uncle contributes well to this. He is an odd, dirty dread-locked, middle-aged mong of intensely diminished intellect – “obviously insane”. He lumbers about the Borneo Municipal strangely reciting the Holy Quran – placing fear in the eyes of women and ridicule at the hands of children, who keenly annoy and throw projectiles at him, and accuse him of thievery.

After the establishment of these major plot players and a few minor ones: Amina – Dan’s pretty 24 years old lover; Aisha 22 years and her sister Murna 15 years - both equally pretty - Aisha seen weaving her sister’s hair on the house veranda in Alhaji Othman’s compound...the plot begins to take shape.

The Authors make known Aisha is betrothed to Okongwu. However, she tries to avoid him at all costs. Murna is somewhat jealous of the arrangement – complaining – 15 years is more than old enough for such adult activities.

Shortly after this, Kura – Dan’s dog is seen barking and charging at something unknown on the edge of the woods – the outskirts of the Borneo municipal. He strangely disappears into the thicket.

Morning comes and Dan and his men are seen target-shooting in the training grounds with their newly acquired rifles. However, the distant sounds of bombing and gun shots halt their morning activity and they speed off to investigate.

Here is where the plot detours. The Authors introduce Mr Black – a 45 years old Nimet official who is seen driving his truck into the Abuja, capital road – police checkpoint barricade. He causes appropriate commotion – disturbs the officers on duty and the superintendent, who is busy playing draughts and then he speeds off. They follow in hot pursuit – leaving the lone transistor radio to sound out Sunday morning Christian hymns, which are abruptly paused for a breaking news alert. “Unidentified objects are coming down to earth”. It warns for the public to stay indoors, at all costs.

The Authors then divulge the whereabouts of the distant bombing and gunshots, heard by Dan and his men, earlier that morning.

Okongwu has arrived at the Alhaji Othman’s compound with his battalion the *Joint Task Forces*. It is devastated – huts on fire; people’s lives destroyed. Aisha is seen wailing for the loss of her father. Okongwu and Aisha share a tender, intimate moment and Okongwu vows to revenge the perpetrators and leaves aggressively.

Meanwhile, back at Capital road police checkpoint, the superintendent, although busy attending to a carload of passengers in a Toyota, is seemingly concerned by the converging clouds and the orange colourisation of the sky. The passengers too, are in fear: "Please sir...we don't have much time."

Adding drama to this emerging suspense, The Authors return the plot to a police Hilux that has steered off track, off Capital road. Coming to a dead end, they reverse the Hilux - hit a sharp object, causing them to puncture a tyre. This is a clever bit of unsuspected drama as it gives Solo – a newly introduced police character, the opportunity to converse with his superiors via radio. They warn him to, "Disengage from all activity...to seek shelter" immediately as "the air might be toxic." At this stage, our minds are placed in immediate questioning mode – Why? Who? How? What if...?

We are not given any further information. The scene swiftly cuts to Okongwu in the Sambisa forest – we are left wanting more.

At the forest entrance, Okongwu and his battalion have stumbled across the motorbikes of Dan and his vigilante forces. He shows warrant concern for these men and for the pending unknown occurrence developing in the day sky. Here we listen to a broken, walkie-talkie transmission, delivered to Okongwu, ordering him to retreat. Meanwhile, Dan and his men have followed the insurgents' trail northward, into the forest. They come across an open space surrounded by a few ill-built huts; within one, Dan discovers two women and an adolescent, profusely crying. We learn they have been raped. At this, Dan orders Dogo – a frail, but dangerous-looking 40 years old to stay behind to lead the women back to the village, while they - move on.

After an exceptionally brief scene, where Murna is viewed running, then tripping on a tree root (perhaps a wasted scene) – the plot retraces its steps back to Mr. Black and his truck, who has entered the St. Mulumba church compound, in roaring style. At this stage, the wind is blowing a gale, which only adds to the drama. He curses and then proceeds to call out, in a mad panic for his wife-Sarah. Of course there is no answer, so he enters the church, having seen frightened worshipers at the window. Shortly after his arrival, the police Hilux arrives on the scene, hoping to investigate Mr. Black's truck. As they do, a bright, speckle meteor shower, rains on them. Of course, officers are cremated, while others lie injured and whimpering.

The plot then skirts back to: the Murna scene of brevity. It is morning. Murna awakes to find herself sharing a cave with Mary – a helpful 17 years old girl of fair complexion, who is seemingly concerned for her welfare. There is a calming dialogue between the new friends and the anticlimax slows.

We then cross to Dan and his men in the woods, who are trying to recover from the effects of a stun-bomb explosion.

There is pain, death and dying and the insurgents surround them.

The plot draws away from the impending, loom-doom skies and focuses on an insurgent battle. Again, an interesting distraction to draw out and suspend the plot until the unusual, orange-red haze further develops. Not surprising, Dan is taken hostage and finds himself in a cellar the next morning. However, this is short-lived. As no one is about, he escapes - by whacking down the door.

Outside, there are no signs of life – the horizon glows red and a haunting wind, howls. Dan staggers about, a littering of dead bodies. Only he has survived. We observe a tearful, pain-stricken Dan... and the act ends.

A brisk, but vivid, opening dream sequence brings the next act of *Sentient - Africa* to life and it is the first real evidence of a sentient occurrence / activity.

Mr Black and his family are readying themselves for breakfast when strangely, his beautiful middle-aged wife – Sarah breaks out in a hoarse, demon-like voice and begins oddly chanting of sacrificial lambs. Blood copiously pours from his daughter's every facial orifice and at this point, Mr. Black falls to the ground screaming, holding his ears; his family move in to inhumanely hover over him.

In continuity from the opening dream sequence, this scene moves to underground at the St. Mulumba's church. Black is lying down and is surrounded by survivors of the unusual occurrence. He comes to, asking for his wife. The priest warns him to rest; alerts him to the fact he's had a two day blackout and that his wife – Sarah, has not visited the church recently. Black questions this, tries to get up, but is too weak. He demands to be told everything.

The scene progresses to a short, but powerful shot of the blood-red day sky; the wind blowing a gale and the priest fear mongering – “Brethren, we are at the end time.”

The plot then returns to the church underground. We see survivors huddled together; Black demonstrating his frustration as he tries to use his mobile; a Reverend Sister comforting a woman and her son; and a priest carrying a bible and crucifix warns Black that it is unsafe to venture outside. To that, Black staggers to the church front door and opens it, to reveal the pending apocalypse. The scene pans to the blood-red fog-scape and Black struggles to see 10ft in front of him. While looking for his truck, he falls over two moaning police officers – blood exiting their facial orifices – just as we saw in Black's dream with his daughter. Here, The Authors insert a flashback, mash-cut to remind the audience of this.

Returning to the present, Black hurries past the cremated remains of bodies to arrive at his truck; he turns over the engine. As he races off into the distance, he notices all is deserted.

Black is depicted stressed and lighting up a cigarette conveys his worry and sense of hopelessness. This is an interesting take for a main character and hero of the adventure.

The Authors then reveal a few short scenes to add weight to the plot. This allows the audience time to imagine the gravity of such a possible, yet unforeseen calamity.

Our focus is then directed to Black's speeding truck, as it ploughs through the police checkpoint barricade, at Capital road. When Black reaches the GRA junction, he momentarily pauses at the sign marked, "Government Reserve Area." Black drives in and simultaneously notices the littering of dead bodies – this sends his heart racing. To increase plot momentum, the Authors re-insert the flashback to the dream sequence. This time, a shot of Sarah's haunting face is projected, which teases the audience into asking: Is the dream reality or is reality the dream?

Black is now home and drives straight into the garage. He enters the house and calls out to his wife. "I'm home, honey..." Silence pervades. Black is confronted with a cold, stark, empty house. At this point, the Authors rustle up yet another flashback – Sarah carrying food in from the kitchen. Mysteriously there is no sign of life. Visibly shaking, he leaves the un-kept, empty kitchen to check out the master bedroom. Briefly distracted by a pack of rats, Black opens the other side of the wardrobe. The mummified remains of his wife - holding a portrait picture, falls out. Black loses it – screams at the top of his lungs, "Sarah – no - not you too!" A powerful semi-climax exits the scene.

Sometime earlier, the Authors show us a glimpse of a scene – an open shed that sits below a large mango tree. Its brevity now becomes important, as he re-introduces that same idea of the unripe mango which has fallen earlier. It is picked up by an old woman, who again tosses it aside, due to its lack of ripeness - the mango cracks. The Authors use this and the old woman to firstly: introduce a gory accident scene involving a Hilux - the occupants being the same two police officers seen earlier and secondly: to reveal an incident of deception that occurs in the hidden underground chamber of the old woman's hut. Solo – an injured policeman, is discovered there and is asked, "You saw anything?" After retorting "No", he is swiftly shot by Dan Baba – a 6ft tall, muscular military man with a thick goatee; cleverly disguised as the old woman. We see him reveal all in the bathroom. Intended or not, this character holds the same first name, as our protagonist. Is this intentional and how will the plot twist?

Coming to the end of the Act, we see the police checkpoint on Capital Road littered with dead bodies, and the roads incoming and outgoing - deserted. A transistor radio continues to play, while a handful of dead and mummified bodies begin to rise from the military sandbag bunkers. Inside this pit, a lifeless, unnamed superintendent is revealed.

The Authors exit the act with another dream sequence: Dan Fodio walks a path around Lake Chad looking for his dog – Kura. The Authors then describe an unusual encounter with a green (or red) firefly that Dan tries hard to follow, but it disappears into the earth. Dan digs for it, but discovers an alien inscribed totem. As he lifts it skyward for inspection, the red fog disappears and is replaced by a golden sunset that reveals a lake filled with millions of dead floating bodies. As Dan approaches it, the sky turns red, lightning strikes and it begins to rain. Dan wakes up panting.

The next act opens under a day sky, in the woods of the Sambisa Forest. Okongwu empties water on Dan's face, while the men on watch surrounding the perimeter, take note – as do I - Dan is doing a lot of sleeping ~ comatose-ing. Okongwu delivers a very fitting comment, "sleeping like a son of a man, without a home." Maybe we are meant to read more into this statement. Either way, Okongwu instructs Dan that they should head home for re-orientation and before we know it, Dan Fodio is on the back of a military jeep with Okongwu.

The gentlemen strike up a pertinent conversation. "Okay boy, you can start asking your questions." To this Dan queries, "Where is everyone?" Personally, I would be asking, "Why do I sleep so much? But then, I'm not the main character. We are told, only he and Okongwu have made it (Oh...and Okongwu's men) and everyone else is dead.

This is wasted dialogue for Okongwu and requires the supporting character to divulge better skills of military observation than delivered here. We are told Dan is dumbfounded by the news, but honestly, Dan has woken from three sleeps and each time confronted by dead or cremated bodies, under a blood red sky. Surely $2 + 2$ cannot be, this hard.

Obviously it can, because that's all we are given and the plot jumps to morning at Mr. Black's home. As you can guess, he is sleeping.

The Authors could improve the work by ensuring each character possess their own uniqueness. For example; start with Mr. Black sitting on the back steps or standing in a doorway - sipping down the hot beverage – waiting for the sun to rise then, Mr Black can get disturbed by the noise and leave his coffee sitting on the back steps – steam rising and all... (Which is a great out shot for the camera).

However, Black makes himself a much-needed cup of coffee, he is disturbed during consumption and therefore moves to start the unpleasant task of disposing of his late wife's remains. The burial is make-shift but tear jerking.

The Authors stick with this character and we are given a teary revenge shot, whereby Black loads a double barrel shotgun with bullets, in an attempt to ready himself for his daughter – Mary's retrieval. Black's character maintains purpose, composure, strength and determination with the line: "Crying won't yield results."

Black then leaves the house via a jeep, puts a picture of his daughter under the sun visor and revs off along a road lined with nothing, but mortal ash.

The plot detours back to Mary, who is in the cave cooking up a daytime meal. Fifteen years old Murna – Aisha’s sister is behind her sleeping (...more sleeping). Although Mary is not paying attention, somehow she knows Murna has woken. “How did you do that?” Murna asks. Murna is immediately on edge as Mary appears to possess extra-sensory perceptive skills. The girls work this line of conversation and Murna eventually discovers Mary is chained to a rock. The scene cuts to the shack cellar.

Ibrahim is a young, handsome, 27 years old male body who was struck down by some wayward planks. He awakes from a coma ([Sleeping...](#)) after hearing the sounds of an unclear walkie-talkie. He resurrects himself, searches for his gun and places the walkie-talkie in his pocket. He looks for Dan Fodio; swears because Dan has escaped and makes his way outside. After viewing the reddened sky, he removes his mask.

Here, the viewer sees Ibrahim’s tribal facial marks, which denotes he is a northerner from the Fulani tribe. He faces Mecca, prays and moves on with one word, “Marian”.

The Authors briefly return the plot to Murna and Mary sharing an evening meal in the cave. Mary divulges how they arrived there – “We were in class...” This sets up the following flashback morning classroom scene.

Thirty, teenaged female students are being taught by Ngozi – a pretty, slender 25 years old female teacher. They are revising for a biology exam, covering evolution. Suddenly shots are heard – students cautiously take cover and a male teacher – Martins enters the room to assist. An affectionate look of concern passes between the teachers.

Presently we hear Mary’s voice from the cave interject the scene, “Then, came these hooded men”. The flashback scene continues...hooded insurgents blast down the door killing Martins. Ngazi runs to him, but is knocked out of the way. All female students are taken captive. When night falls in the Samisa Forest – Ibrahim, Shaka and his men celebrate the successful raid. Ibrahim is rewarded; he takes Mary as his prize.

The Authors now bring us back to the present, to the cave where the Mary and Murna are captive. The girls discuss the abduction and their ability to remove Mary’s ankle chain.

The following morning at St Mulumba’s church, harsh red light streams in through broken windows. A silhouette of a tired man enters – it is the police superintendent, worn and covered in blood.

He enters the pulpit for confession; the priest forgives his sins and instructs him to follow him to the underground. Here, he is given food and the Reverend Sister assists him to freshen up. Survivors show their disapproval. After a hearty meal, the priest insists to be told what he saw. The superintendent states he was on duty at the checkpoint and does not know where the blood came from.

The plot then crosses to evening at the Borneo Camp - Guerrilla Hospital. Dan is on a camp bed recovering; a nurse attends to wounded soldiers; Okongwu enters. He talks to Dan about his ability to follow orders; Dan states he was not saved, merely woken up. He feels guilty for letting his team down and Okongwu instructs they will “disinfect the forest and bury (the) dead” in the morning.

That night the female attendant delivers Dan a bottle of water and some native food. He washes and then eats slowly. Dan drifts off to sleep and the Lake Chad dream sequence begins. He is on the bank; the lake’s centre illuminates a beautiful red glow. Fireflies flit-about. Dan unhooks a canoe and follows their guidance to the centre of the lake, where they disappear. Dan attempts to dive in after them, but upon testing the water, it begins to vibrate. Sentient eyes crystallize everything; they swim around him. The vibration is so severe it tips over the canoe. Dan falls into the light. The sentient closes in on him; the red glow diminishes to pitch black. [\(The last part of this is a little confusing, so I have refrained from interpretation.\)](#)

The Authors now cross back to morning at the Borneo Camp – Guerrilla Hospital. Dan Fodio awakes (yet again) to two soldiers looking down on him. One instructs Dan that the General wants to see him - so he dresses and accompanies them out.

At the hut - the same morning, Okongwu is seen comforting Aisha, while his men stand nearby waiting for their orders. Upon seeing Dan, he smartly dismisses her.

The two men make small talk - then it’s back in the jeep and they drive away. Ali is seen scavenging in a heap of debris; he sees Aisha, follows her to an open kitchen and watches her from a respectful distance. She and some women are preparing cheese. One of them sights Ali and screams, “The mad man is still alive. How can he not die?” Aisha is then given some food to take to Ali. Unfortunately, Ali’s presence scares one of the women off.

Later the same day – Dan, Okongwu and his men arrive at Lake Chad where they see piles of floating bodies on the lake. One of the corpses has a striking resemblance to Murna - Aisha’s sister – Okongwu races to get her out of the water, but Dan instructs him not to touch as “it might be infected”. Dan sees it to be similar to Amina. Okongwu asks if he loved her, but Dan only insists they bury the dead according to the Holy Book of Quran. However, no one is particularly keen to do that and there is a quick exit of men as if they have seen a ghost.

Back at the cave, Murna whacks at the shackles, in hope of freeing Mary. However, their attempts are cut short when they hear heavy footsteps – it is Ibrahim. Mary greets him, but he ignores her; seeks out water from an earthenware pot and attempts to eat a chunk of food. As he does not believe the food is wholesome, he offers it first to Mary. All appears well. He scoffs it down. Then, he flings off his garments and looks lustfully at Mary, who then pretends to be sick.

This does not work for long, as Ibrahim wanders off to fetch what seems to be birth control pills and gives them to Mary to consume. Mary then prepares herself and they have sex, while Murna listens on under a cloak.

Outside, at the Camp – C.S.O office – Okongwu and Dan have entered. A 45 year old, pot-bellied C.S.O – Adekunle, stands smoking; the Cuban cigar smoke offends Dan. Adekunle puts it out and offers Dan a drink. They talk about finding the missing bodies in the lake and buying them. Adekunle states he'll be “raising a para-military group” to assist.

That evening, back at the cave, Mary and Ibrahim are seen lying together – he asleep on top of her. Murna shivering and feeling somewhat afraid under the cloak, gently calls out to Mary. Murna hears a rock thrown at her and assumes it is Mary, but it is Ibrahim who warns, “If you don't sleep now, I will slit your throat with my dagger!”

The camera then crosses to outside the cave - we view the silhouette of a stranger among the trees.

Come daylight, Okongwu and his men are seen driving on convoy to the lake; Dan on a motorcycle beside them; five heavy duty Mercedes-Benz trucks follow behind.

On arrival, they park and exit their vehicles - including Aisha. However, they find no corpses lying in the lake, only a live animal swimming toward them. Surprised, Okongwu cocks his pistol and retreats. The animal exits the water, shakes and looks up with red hazel eyes.

Dan questions, “Kura?”

The pilot ends.