

Going Viral

A Treatment for an Animation Film by

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Gatik, the Indian gibbon, who looks remarkably like Mahatma Gandhi, is the newest member of the savannah. He has escaped from captivity in Durban and has travelled hundreds of miles to be free. But he finds himself bullied and scorned by the native animals. He is a migrant with a funny accent, and feels completely out of place. His main adversaries are the carnivores, led by Cecil the lion.



All the herbivore animals are terrorized by the carnivores, who, not only hunt and kill them, but also abuse them and bully them.

Gatik decides that it's time for change – he tries to reason with the lions and to teach them the peace teachings of *satyagraha* (truth-force) as taught by Gandhi but they all just laugh in his face. Shamed, the gibbon is now shunned by the other monkeys and herbivores. Gatik manages to stay balanced and sane through his yoga and meditation practices.

Only Arnold, the lonely Pangolin, befriends him.



Arnold is a nihilist – he says it's the nature of things and you can't fight nature; besides life is pointless anyway so why bother trying. His thick skin protects him both physically and emotionally from the taunts of the lions. The strange couple spend long evenings together arguing about the meaning or the meaninglessness of life.

One such evening Gatik is preparing himself supper. He is a master chef skilled in the way of *shojin ryōri* - the Japanese art of vegetarian cooking. With rapid strokes of his knives and a keen eye for the available fruits, nuts, beans, roots and grasses he is able to produce, almost magically, the most amazing meals from the blandest of ingredients. Arnold can't stop pouring scorn on Gatik's culinary efforts as he licks up a meal of delicious ants and termites.

The gibbon suddenly has an idea. He scours around for particular ingredients: a twig of this, a pinch of that, a twist of this, a touch of that. He wraps the resulting dark paste into an Indian chapatti and hands it to Arnold to taste. Arnold backs off not even wanting to try but his long tongue accidentally sweeps across a cooking surface and he tastes a morsel of the paste. It tastes of termites, vegetarian termites. Arnold devours the meal and is instantly converted to vegetarianism.

So if it worked for Arnold the nihilist what about Cecil, the sadist? Gatik gets to work on his greatest creation. When finished, he leaves the dish, which resembles a huge Mac Burger, upwind from the lion pride. Cecil is sleeping but the delicious odors wafting on the breeze cause his nose to twitch and penetrate his dreams.



[Dream sequence as in computer game graphics] He sees a poor, emaciated rhebok standing alone on the prairie but it's too thin to even bother killing. As he watches the animal gets plumper and fleshier and more attractive. He takes up the chase but the rhebok is wearing reebok running shoes and, even though he is now as fat as a buffalo, he outruns him. As Cecil is about to give up the laces come undone, the shoes fall off, and the animal slows down. He licks his lips and pounces...



Cecil wakes up. He follows the smell until he finds Gatik's food. He sniffs around it not sure what it is but the smell is overwhelming. He takes a lick and then another and then a small nibble and is about to take a huge bite when he hears sniggering and suppressed laughter coming from the long grasses (alternatively: when his mobile phone beeps showing him a video clip of Gatik cooking the food). It's Arnold who can't control himself any longer. He's been filming Cecil while the other animals have been watching everything on a live stream feed. Cecil is incensed and threatens to torture him if he doesn't reveal who is behind this. Arnold rolls himself up into a ball and Cecil can't touch him. But it only takes him a few seconds to guess that it was Gatik. Cecil stamps on the camera and storms off to find Gatik. When he arrives at the encampment he finds the other lions laughing at him. His pride has been damaged, he's going to kill that gibbon for trying to con him to eat vegetarian.

Cecil chases him and Gatik uses every trick to avoid being caught. They are so focused on their chase that they don't notice big game poachers approaching. Cecil has Gatik trapped. Gatik sees the poachers and tries to warn Cecil but Cecil thinks he's bluffing. Just in time Cecil sees them too and suddenly the hunter becomes the hunted. With Gatik's help he manages to escape but only just. Meanwhile, Arnold finally unrolls himself, realizes what's happening and calls the safari rangers who come and arrest the poachers. Cecil thanks Gatik and agrees to taste the vegetarian dish. It's of course, delicious.

Gatik and Cecil are now best friends and under his influence all the animals became vegetarians with Gatik as their master chef. He makes amazing gourmet meals, each styled for the tastes of the particular animal. And somehow there's always enough for everybody. Gatik teaches them yoga, meditation and acroyoga. Only Arnold isn't happy – as much as he finds veggie termites delicious he misses the sensation of their wiggling in his throat as he swallows them alive.

Then a new problem arises – National Conservation, the international TV station, are losing viewers. Nobody wants to watch animals just lying around not doing anything – they want to see action! Their shows are famous for their amazing chases between predators and prey. They try to think of ways of encouraging

the animals to start eating each other: they drop chunks of raw meat from airplanes; they spike the water holes with testosterone; anything to make them violent again. But the *satyagraha* teachings are too effective – the animals refuse to give up the peace and harmony that they have found.

Together with the park management, that are also suffering from lower numbers of safari tourists, the NC starts kidnapping animals and holding them to ransom. A message from the kidnappers is posted on the Park's page – END THE MEAT STRIKE OR YOUR FRIENDS WILL BE EATEN! The resistance starts to crumble. Representatives of the kidnapped species demand capitulation. Representatives of the herbivores demand resilience. Gatik is accused of meddling in the natural order, of ruining the eco-balance, of interfering in things he doesn't understand.

Gatik is stumped... he thought he could create a new paradigm and make everybody happy! He begins to doubt himself and doubt the way of *satyagraha*. Perhaps they are right. Perhaps one cannot change the nature of the inner beast. He sits in his little hut and meditates and prays. The other animals surround his hut and wait.

Cecil is becoming concerned for his friend's health. He hasn't eaten in days. He prepares a large plate of delicious fruits and, with great reverence; places it in front of him and tries to encourage him to eat something. But Gatik doesn't even open an eye. Cecil tells him to take a look; that it is real fruits not any of that fake meat stuff.

Cecil's words penetrate Gatik's mind and gives him a genius idea – they'll *fake* it. All of it – the chase, the kill, the action. They will fake it so well that the humans will not disturb them just in order to let it happen *naturally* again. Arnold is told to send a message to National Conservation letting them know that they capitulate. The animals are in shock until Cecil explains the plan.

Over the next few days the animals are very busy. The monkeys are especially active stealing high tech equipment from tourists and from the villages in the area (smartphones, selfi-sticks, CCTVs, computers, computer screens, radio monitors, WiFi hot spots...). Under Gatik's direction, and with the help of some nerdy young animals, a command center is setup. Rows of computers and a large screen allow direct contact with events on the ground. A kettle (group) of vultures hovering in the sky above beam aerial views via CCTV cameras slung from their bodies. Tactical information is supplied in real-time via a link to high altitude balloons - part of Google's Project Loon for Africa.

In a flat open area nearby Cecil is taking a group of animals through strategies (like a football coach). Hippos, zebras, lions and crocodiles practice different maneuvers. Other animals are sitting on the bench waiting their call. Cecil himself will play the equivalent of the quarter back position.

Gatik lets it be known that F-hour (Fake-it hour) will at 11 hundred hours the next day. Everyone is excited.

The next morning the animals gather to check their equipment, adjust their camouflage, and receive their final instructions. Gatik gives them a Gandhi-like speech about the importance of maintaining inner peace and compassion and the great web of life and love. Cecil gives a Churchillian-like oration about the importance of this moment in the history of the animals (“we will fight on the beaches...”).

When it is over the animals spread out and take up their positions. The vultures take off. Gatik wishes Cecil good luck and happy hunting. Gatik rides on the back of a black panther surrounded by four others each with an earpiece connected to a two-way communication device. In the command center, under the watchful eye of Arnold, the animals working the terminals scan the screens showing aerial images transmitted from the vulture drones. The go-ahead is transmitted to the panthers and they move Gatik forwards into view of the battle zone. He follows the entire scene on his Google Glasses. 3-D images from Google Earth are layered onto airborne images beamed to him from the overhead drone cameras. Tactical information is supplied in real-time via the Loon-link. He checks in with Cecil who hears him loud and clear. The animals not participating in the operation breathlessly follow the events on giant screens.

At noon precisely, Gatik receives word that a number of safari vehicles are approaching the river. He follows their movement on his G-glasses. He can see three buses and a jeep all packed with tourists wanting a good time. He communicates the information to Cecil and to the other animals that are lying in their various jump-off locations. He tells them to wait, not to move too soon, to keep their powder dry. At the right moment he gives the green light and the operation starts. The zebras bound into action, followed by wave after wave of antelope of all kinds. Downstream crocodiles slide into the river. Upstream a couple of enormous hippos submerge. Cecil, with a pride of lions, sneaks forwards through the tall grasses. At Gatik’s order chaos ensues: chasing, grabbing, pulling, bouncing, roaring, escaping, biting... Blood (artificial of course) turns the river red. Cecil the lion is at the center of the action. The tourists respond with pleasure, disgust, enthusiasm, excitement. They cheer and boo and curse and cry. Within minutes scenes from the ‘battle’ appear on YouTube, Instagram and FaceBook. After the safari vehicles leave the animals return to base – exhausted, hungry but satisfied.

The operation works perfectly and is a huge success. The official video goes viral. Within days it registers millions of viewers.

Gatik and Cecil continue making newer, bigger and better acts making sure that everything stays *natural* and *authentic*. Tourist flood in. The park management is happy, National Conservation is happy, and the animals are happy.

Cecil becomes an international star. His picture is on the front cover of National Conservation, Time Magazine and, more worryingly, Hunters Magazine, the publication of the Hunters Club International the sworn enemies of the savannah animals.

But as time passes, Cecil becomes obsessed with his popularity and public image, and creates crazier and more dangerous spectacles. He struts around the camp with a retinue of followers who attend his every need. And he has taken to wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses. He now has a team of stunt-lions that perform the more dangerous tricks and stunts. It is clear that he is not doing it to keep the animals safe anymore – it's for his own ego.

Gatik tries to show him the error of his ways, that he has been caught by *Maya* - the attachment of the ego - which will inevitably lead to destruction and suffering. Cecil gets angry and accuses him of being jealous of his popularity and success while he, Gatik, remains and will always remain just his side-kick. Arnold tries to intercede to stop the row from escalating but Cecil can't stop. The way Cecil sees it, it was *all his idea from the beginning*. Cecil tells him that he'll do the operations himself, without his help. Cecil says he doesn't need a gibbon anymore; that *nobody* needs him anymore and he should go back to India where he came from. Gatik is deeply hurt, and, in spite of Arnold's attempts to quote *satyagraha* teachings back at him, he runs away.

Now on his own Cecil rallies the troops for another operation this time under his sole command. When Gatik's absence is noted he calms the animals by reassuring them that he is now in full control and that he will be doing the stunts himself. The operation gets underway without input from the command center – Cecil is going in blind! Arnold follows from a distance watching through binoculars. As the stunts unfold to the awe of the tourists Arnold's nose begins to twitch. He spots a jeep parked by some trees with the letters HCI printed on its side. He searches and sees, in the long grass, a couple of hunters lying in wait to intercept Cecil. Arnold bounds off to find Gatik. His nose soon picks up the scent and it doesn't take long to catch up with him. The poor, depressed gibbon is walking very slowly. Breathlessly Arnold tells him that Cecil is about to fall into a trap and that only he can save him. Gatik listens but cannot move. Arnold becomes hysterical. Gatik is of two minds, one voice tells him to continue walking the other, the voice of Gandhi tells him to have compassion and return. But it is only when Arnold accuses him of being a fake does he make up his mind. Swiftly he runs back towards the closing trap. He shouts into the earpiece that Arnold gave him but no one replies. As he mounts the hill overlooking the scene he sees Cecil and he sees the hunters. He screams out a warning but as Cecil

turns, one of the hunters reveals himself and shoots an arrow that pierces Cecil's flank. Cecil roars with pain and bounds away followed by the hunters in swift pursuit. Gatik wants to follow but Arnold restrains him with all his strength. Inevitably, after a few minutes, two shots ring out. A flock of birds rises up into the air. Gatik sobs.

Cecil's dead body is all over the Internet. The world is horrified. People gather in silent vigils holding his picture. Religious leaders pray for his soul. Psychologists and social workers are overwhelmed by the resulting rise in post-traumatic stress syndrome. Questions are asked in parliaments. The President and both sides of the House hold a special session of Congress.

And back in the savannah morale plummets. Everyone is depressed. Gatik can't make good food anymore. The animals start complaining again; some even blame the gibbon for Cecil's death but not to his face. On one occasion, Gatik sees some vultures eating fish. He is horrified but the vultures tell him to relax – it was just a dead fish from one of the safari's restaurant.

Slowly more and more carnivores go astray, and an overpopulation of hyenas go wild – hunting and killing with no remorse. The old ways are returning. Even Gatik is not immune – to being eaten. Without Cecil's protection he is almost killed by some dissatisfied lions.

The park management sees the growing hyena population as a serious problem – so they decide to reintroduce controlled culling, in other words: it's open season for anyone with a gun and recognizable license. The hunters don't care for conservation or animal rights – they shoot at anything they see. The animals panic and go amok. Traps are set everywhere, and parts of the beautiful savannah are set alight to scare the animals towards their doom.

In one terrible incident, a herd of eland antelopes, recently reintroduced by humans into the wild, decide to seek asylum. With white flags visible to all, they approached a group of hunters who escorted them into the courtyard of a large building and then opened fire killing all of them.

In desperation the animals turn to Gatik for help, but he refuses – he sees how fragile and impossible his vision was. Arnold was right, things should go back to their natural way: carnivores hunt herbivores; humans hunt everything. Perhaps if he hadn't interfered Cecil would still be alive. But then one of the remaining loyal lions – Cecil's daughter, Uhuru - tells him that, on the contrary, he *was* right all along, because keeping the way of compassion and love was the only thing that made him and Cecil feel *truly* alive. All this hunting and killing is antithetical to love. It *only* leads to death and more death.

These words hit home. Gatik realizes that if he doesn't do anything he will betray everything he ever believed in and, worst of all, he will have betrayed Cecil. But chaos reigns on the savannah. How can he unite the animals and defeat the humans? For only if they are united can they hope to win against the policy of divide and conquer. He decides, with an eland antler as a staff in one hand and Cecil's favourite vegetarian food in the other, to walk and keep on walking until... He leaves the camp and begins the trek. Uhuru asks him where he is going but he only shows him the symbols and keeps walking. Uhuru walks next to him. An oryx family joins and follows them. And an Impala. Some baboon are shown the symbols. They follow. And so it is that as Gatik walks his solo, silent walk he is joined by the animals, and above by the birds; carnivores and herbivores, big and small, put down their differences and simply walk (or fly) in unity for their beloved dead friend and for their most respected teacher. And it seems that as he walks, he is so mindful of every step and so focused on the horizon in front, that he is unaware of what is happening behind him and above him. And all in silence.

Only Arnold seems to be missing.

Uhuru stays next to him offering him water and occasional food, which he rejects. At sunset he simply sits and at first light he rises and continues walking. And so do the entourage of beasts which now number in their hundreds. And then suddenly he stops. He has reached the boundary of the reservation. He turns around as if to start the trek back when he looks around and sees what has been behind him and above him. He bows to them all and acknowledges their trust in him. He holds up the bowl of vegetarian food and they respond with cheers and clapping and roaring and all the sounds of the living savannah.

Back at command center Gatik and his close circle devise a plan to defeat the hunters. They plan to scare them off without killing them, using all the high-tech equipment and techniques they used previously when creating their fake chases. He gathers all the animals together and explains what must be done. He admits that the plan has holes in it but nevertheless they must try together to make it succeed. He emphasizes that on no account must a human be harmed; there must be no revenge killings; that all life is sacred.

The operation gets underway. The animals move in position, the vultures fly overhead, the crocodiles and hippos are in the water. The hunters are taken completely by surprise. As before, Gatik is in the field commanding his troops using his G-Glasses while receiving up-to-date reports from the command center. Around him are his panther guards back in their protective role. Everything is going well until Arnold's panicked voice reports that they have been outflanked by an incursion of hunters and there are no animals in the vicinity to block them. Gatik asks for air support but for some reason the communication fails. He

instructs the panthers to leave him and block the hole in their defense. They hesitate but eventually bound off in the direction of the attack.

Gatik is alone. He hears a noise behind him and turns to find Arnold standing there with a gun pointing at him. He is surprised. Arnold tells him to call off the attack and let the hunters regroup. Gatik points out that doing that at this stage will result in the death of his friends as the hunters will mow them down mercilessly. Arnold threatens to shoot Gatik if he refuses he himself will give the commands. Gatik looks at him in askance. Arnold can't help himself and reveals that it was he who directed Cecil into the HCI trap making sure that Gatik would witness his death. He killed Cecil and now he was going to stop Gatik. The natural order must be restored. There is no higher order, there is no morality beyond the law of the jungle. He admits that he couldn't stand it from the start and he has been devising a plan all along to sabotage these misguided notions that come from a foreign land.

Gatik tries to reason with him, tries to show him that violence isn't the way. But Arnold just laughs at his "saintliness" and accuses him of doing everything just for himself and his personal ego. That actually Gatik is just like everybody else, trying to get all the attention in the fast-moving modern age, and is just cloaking it behind this lovey-dovey pluralistic philosophy. Gatik admits that there is some truth in this accusation, that he's been preaching about selflessness when all the time he was the most selfish of them all by not accepting any other opinion other than his own. Gatik accepts his final failure – being untrue to himself. Arnold is a bit taken aback by this confession and hesitates. Suddenly a hunter appears. Gatik recognizes him as the same one that murdered Cecil. Arnold too recognizes him and becomes confused. The hunter is a little shocked seeing an Pangolin pointing a gun at a gibbon. But then he sees the Google Glasses and realizes that this is not an ordinary gibbon. He raises his gun and shoots but at that moment Arnold leaps forwards and takes the bullet. Gatik and the hunter look at the unmoving body of the Pangolin. Before the hunter can fire again Gatik is off as fast as he can. He heads for the trees and leaps into the branches where he can swing faster than ran on the ground. Shots ricochet of the tree trunks. An epic chase ensues, and eventually Gatik is caught with his back to a cliff. He climbs an overhanging tree but there is no escape.

Arnold stirs and sits up. His natural armor plating blocked the bullet it was just the impact that knocked him out. He realizes he's done a terrible mistake. Nihilism be damned. He runs after Gatik and the hunter and catches up with them just in time to see the hunter climbing the tree to get as close as possible to Gatik before shooting him. Arnold notices a termite hill next to the tree. He asks the termites to eat the tree as fast as possible. They look at him as if he is crazy but then they recognize Gatik in the tree. Within seconds they ravage the roots of the tree and it starts tumbling into the ravine, taking both the hunter and Gatik

with it. Arnold sees something on the ground, grabs it and jumps. He saves Gatik with a stick, a selfi-stick.

In the last scene we see a crazy fight between lions and crocodiles and a baby bull with is eventually saved by the herd. The head of National Conservation looks at the video, pleased with its success. 77 million views. But then, he sees something strange in the last few frames – could it be? He doesn't believe it. Is that the baby bull high-fiving the lion...?

The end.