

SOME NEWS WON'T WAIT TILL SUNDAY

Sunday Times

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Groom recounts how bar fight became a bloodbath

Argument at bachelor's party triggered fatal shooting spree that left four dead . AAC MAHLANGU

BEFORE Lion Kruger and Sandra Schutte could walk down the aisle yesterday, they had to attend three funerals.

Their nightmare start to married life came courtesy of a bloodbath at Kruger's bachelor's party after two strangers began shooting indiscriminately at guests of the Lion's Den pub in Roodepoort, west of Johannesburg, last Sunday.

Two of Kruger's friends, police inspector Julian Dry and former policeman Rikus Liebenberg, both 30, died during the rampage, together with the owner of the pub, Simon Pretorius, 43, and a security guard identified only as Roy.

The organiser of the party, Frik Schutte, 31, and Mark de Mata, 29, were also injured in the bloody rampage. De Mata, shot three times, is recovering in hospital.

Two suspects were arrested on Sunday evening close to Maraisburg train station, according to police



THE ACCUSED: Charmaine Knoetze, Glenard Davies and Ruben Pennells did not enter a plea at Roodepoort Magistrates' Court Picture: THEMBINKOSI DWAYISA



KILLED: Lion's Den pub owner Simon Pretorius

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spokesman Captain Tshikhawe Ndou. A girlfriend of one of the men was also arrested.

This week the stunned groom and guests described how the bachelor's party turned bloody.

Party organiser Frik Schutte said the party had been "good and nice" until two strangers entered the pub.

Eyewitness Natalie Beling, a bartender, said two men arrived at about 10pm and bought drinks.

But they were ordered to leave after getting into a fight with some of the men attending the party.

Schutte said an argument had broken out because the two men groped and fondled female guests.

Beling described how a scuffle ensued: "I couldn't make out how it [the fight] started, but there were a lot of emotions and they were hitting each other."

She said the two men were thrown into the swimming pool during the fight and ordered to leave the pub.

But shortly after midnight, the pair returned as the last of the guests were leaving.

Without saying a word, one opened fire on Dry and Liebenberg. He then sprayed bullets indiscriminately about the room as guests dived for cover.

Another eyewitness, Geraldine Beling, said: "He stood at the door and started shooting. It was like an explosion with glasses breaking and everyone trying to hide."

Natalie Beling recalled that it was "chaotic with everyone falling on the floor".

"It happened very fast. We ran to the kitchen," she said.

She said the men then left - without uttering a word. The remaining guests then called the police and tried to help the injured men, but found that both Dry and Liebenberg had died instantly.

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Pretorius was still alive, but died shortly afterwards. Roy's body was only discovered two days later, next to the fishpond where he is believed to have collapsed during a futile bid to escape.

Schutte - who was hit in the back and ear - said he could not believe he had survived.

"This was the first and last bachelor's party I will organise after what happened," he said. "I am just lucky to be alive."

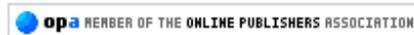
Kruger - who left the pub before the carnage - said he had been shocked at what he found when he returned to the scene after the shooting.

"I couldn't believe it. I couldn't even recognise my friends who were lying dead in a pool of blood near the door," he said.

But the groom vowed to go ahead with his wedding.

"It's bad, I can't explain it," he said. "I don't think my friends would have wanted me to postpone the wedding."

Glenard Davies, 30, Ruben Pennells, 28, and Charmaine Knoetze, 29, appeared in Roodepoort Magistrate's Court on Wednesday in connection with the killing of the four men. The case was postponed to March 31 for further investigations.



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