

KIRKUS

REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

ZIMBABWE

Parker, John

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BOOK REVIEW

When a Scottish family hears that a relative's homestead in Africa is being threatened by Robert Mugabe's regime, they try to overthrow the dictator in Parker's (*Escape Route*, 2012) novel.

Festooned with gleefully grotesque political, racial and gender stereotyping in the satirical vein of Terry Southern, this book centers on the lowlife Scottish farm clan known as the Flecks. Its three whiskey-swilling brothers pragmatically bought a trio of Navajo mail-order brides from the United States years ago, strictly for procreating. Their resulting three sons, now Iraq War vets, are the most bloodthirsty torturers and murderers ever to be drummed out of Her Majesty's armed forces. An opportunity arises to indulge the Flecks' manias for lethal violence, rape and animal cruelty when word comes that their rich uncle in Zimbabwe is under siege by marauding native "Kaffirs," the result of dictator Mugabe trying to run white settlers off their land. The Flecks decide to go destroy the corrupt regime, picking up a Russian arms dealer and a sex-crazed upper-class British stewardess along the way. Parker makes occasional attempts to insinuate real-world Zimbabwean history and dirty dealings in the country's capital into the plot. (He even uses the infamous word "disestablishmentarianism" in a sentence, which is pretty fab.) However, these clash with a cartoonish narrative that feels like a cross between a John Waters movie and Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* comic strip, featuring bizarre people doing foul things, often for robust shock value. Mugabe himself, when he makes his belated appearance, is a foppish, fey cross-dresser with a bondage fetish and a fantasy that he's actually of white descent. Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and Moammar Gadhafi also have cameos, sending the message that as bad as the Flecks are, there are real-world tyrants who are worse—although some readers may disagree. All that's missing is a cameo by Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi.

An unrestrained haggis of Rabelaisian raunch, stereotypes, satire and ultraviolence.