

BOOKS

A Shattering page-turner

By Steven Whitton

Special to The Star

12-28-2008

Mixed Blood

By Roger Smith, Henry Holt and Co., 2009, 320 pp., \$25.

A very brutal, absolutely gripping walk on the wild side, Roger Smith's debut novel unfolds in a world devoid of any of the trappings human beings invent to convince themselves of life's purpose.

Mixed Blood is set in Cape Town, South Africa, an exotic world with a surface similar to the sophisticated beach resorts of Europe. But there is also a sordid underbelly to Cape Town, a place known as Cape Flats. It is an amoral world of gangs and ghettos, unchecked crime and rampant retribution, a world where the evils of apartheid very much remain.

Ex-marine Jack Burn has settled in an upscale section of Cape Town with his pregnant wife and young son. Jack is desperate to disappear after a botched robbery and a dead body back in the United States. All he wants is a new life for his family, and he is meticulous and methodical in achieving it.

But no one is immune to the arbitrariness of living. One night the Burn family falls victim to a random — and violent — break-in by a local gang. Unexpectedly there are bodies for Jack to dispose of.

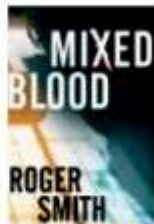
The entire incident is witnessed by Benny Mongrel, ex-con and ex-gang member, who is night watchmen for a building site next to the Burn home. Though he is convinced he knows what Jack has done with the bodies, Benny only wants to turn his back and walk away, comforted only by his loyal guard dog.

And where are the cops? Very much at odds with each other. Rudi Barnard is a grossly corpulent, corrupt Afrikaner (think Orson Welles in *Touch of Evil*). Nicknamed "Gatsby" after the overstuffed sandwiches he devours daily, Barnard loves Jesus almost as much as he loves his favorite meal. Years ago, he brutalized Disaster Zondi, now a finicky Zulu detective intent on bringing down his old nemesis.

Neither cop nor criminal can escape his past. In fact, they are pulled together tighter and tighter as Jack, with the help of Benny, searches for his kidnapped son, and "Gatsby," with Disaster hot on his trail, tries to extort the stolen \$3 million from Burn.

All ends in a devastating climax, for the shattering truth is that there can be no redemption in Smith's world. There is only violent randomness followed by unbridled reckoning, making *Mixed Blood* a shattering page-turner of the disenchanting and the disheartening.

Steven Whitton is a Professor of English at Jacksonville State University.



[Mixed Blood](#)

Roger Smith

Best Price \$2.89

or Buy New \$15.00

Buy from [amazon.com](#)

[Privacy Information](#)