



Chipman's African Adventure

Jim Anderson

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Chipman's African Adventure by Jim Anderson is a psycho adventure - a blackly comic tale set in the imagined country of Bomzawe in West Africa in 1972. It also contains a tender gay love story. Though essentially satirical, some people may find the ribald sexuality, both gay and straight, confronting.

Chipman Smith is still in the closet when he arrives at the Hornbill Palace Hotel at Tlula Leisure Beach in Bomzawe, but he is well and truly out of it by the time he leaves. Or is he? Mr. Smith will never be the same again, and neither will you, after reading Chipman's African Adventure. This blackly comic tale, set in an imagined West African country, balances throughout on the edge of laughter. Crescendos of absurdity and high camp drama supplant and transcend each other with accelerating speed.

Fledgling lawyer Chipman longs for true love. Will he find it with Zach Shaler, the Nebraskan cowboy with Peace Corps dreams, with Drift, the mamba snake catcher, even though Drift is seriously obsessed with Toffee, his intoxicatingly beautiful girlfriend, or with neither?

Chipman hopes he has nothing but a drinking problem when he arrives from Sydney. To his horror he finds himself dragged into the bizarre re-birthing rituals of Dr Starry Sanguini, a drug-crazed Australian psychotherapist with a shady past. These rituals rapidly metamorphose into psychedelic theatrical extravaganza. Chipman emerges in one piece, but is he more clear sighted than before or just a slave to Sanguini as guru and ringmaster?

Chipman is a benighted but endearing hero, confronted by many moral and ethical dilemmas. His naivety and goodwill are offset by a shrewdness of intellect and an ability not only to observe but to participate in the beauty, brutality and seething sexual shenanigans of his seedy post-colonial environment. The satire is savage and so is the civil war which inevitably comes, but there is an unexpected and underlying tenderness shown in Chipman's dealings with Sanguini's troupe of international outlaws and generational refugees. It would be easy for a psycho adventure like this to fall into caricature. Instead, the protagonists have a depth of characterisation which makes it all touchingly down to earth and real.

Not everyone escapes alive, sane or uncompromised from Tlula Leisure Beach.

You will never guess the end.

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Darren Perez:

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