

Zaire's Golden Babies

Charles Leister

Lulu (August 2012)

Softcover \$14.95 (396pp)

978-1-300-53607-9

In suspense fiction, a protagonist's soul is rarely visible on the surface, and minor figures typically lurk in the depths of the story as potential foes. Both of these conventions are evident in *Zaire's Golden Babies*, a well-written, four-hundred-page tome that digs into the rough, downtrodden environment of a developing nation.

Gabriel McMillan is a San Francisco commercial banker who finds himself embroiled in a police investigation and forced to leave the United States. He ends up on an undercover consulting mission in Zaire involving black market gold and government abuse of natives. Illegal gold mines are difficult to locate, making the situation not only dangerous but defeating.

Several supporting characters add considerable interest to the novel, especially Monique, an astute friend of Gabriel's who plays a significant role in the outcome of this unpredictable situation. Meticulous copy editing along with vivid, articulate descriptions of the locale give Charles Leister's organized, professional work a sophisticated edge over other well-plotted books in a popular genre overloaded with bright ideas.

In one scene, Monique takes note of her surroundings at a hotel only moments before a bomb blast knocks her unconscious. Disregard for animal comfort is the norm, followed by lack of concern for human life. This mood permeates the novel: "Motionless birds in an enormous freestanding aviary were barely visible in the shadows, others were huddled close together, shivering in the cold, on the higher perches near the warmth of a single bulb mounted inside the peaked roof. One was watching her. She turned. There was the main building, just a hundred meters in front of her, kept toasty warm for humans while the poor birds were freezing."

The book's sole weakness is Leister's inclination to overwrite the scenes rather than allow the action to guide the reader. Like some established writers, Leister takes charge of his characters to the point of occasionally interrupting a natural cascade of narrative and dialogue, presumably to maintain control of the storyline. This tendency does not detract from the quality of the work, however.

Zaire's Golden Babies offers educational as well as entertainment value to aficionados of action thrillers.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 26, 2012)

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