



Missionary Stew

Ross Thomas , Roger L. Simon (Introduction)

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Missionary Stew follows political fundraiser Draper Haere on a quest to uncover the secret behind a right-wing coup in an unnamed Central American country. Haere seeks the information in order to get dirt on his boss's opponent in the 1984 US Presidential election. Haere's pursuit of the truth repeatedly puts Haere's life in danger, as the powers-that-be stop at nothing to keep the episode buried. Along the way, Haere carries on an affair with the wife of his candidate and enlists the aid of Morgan Citron, an almost-Pulitzer winning journalist who has recently been released from an African prison where the prisoners where fed human flesh—the titular missionary stew. Together Citron and Haere face up against cocaine traffickers, Latin American generals, corrupt US officials, and Citron's estranged, tabloid-publisher mother.

Missionary Stew Details

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From Reader Review Missionary Stew for online ebook

Mal Warwick says

Start with a hapless French-American journalist imprisoned by the Emperor-President of a small African country. The Emperor is a cannibal, which is admittedly worrisome, but the journalist is rescued by Amnesty International and returned to the United States. He's penniless but makes his way to Los Angeles. Through a freak connection, which as it happens is no coincidence at all, he meets a movie star who offers him on the spot a job as superintendent of an apartment building she owns in Santa Monica. And all this merely sets up one of two major strands of the plot.

A private war in Central America over tons of cocaine

Meanwhile, a political "money man" — a direct mail specialist — has flown to Denver to meet with a rich old man for advice about the upcoming 1984 presidential elections. The money man's client, the Governor-elect of California (but not Ronald Reagan), has decided he's ready to be President and has sent him around the country to discourage other potential candidates. But the rich old man tells him a story that sets him off on a wholly different path. A notorious former CIA agent turned heroin-smuggler has been killed in Singapore, apparently by agents of the CIA and the FBI. The story has something to do with a private war in Central America between the two agencies involving tons of cocaine and tens of millions of dollars.

Enter The National Investigator

Oh, and by the way, the journalist I mentioned? His estranged mother is the editor of a scandal sheet that is *The National Inquirer* in disguise. We'll find out later that it's secretly owned by an aging drug-runner in Florida.

And all this is just the beginning! Somehow, all these improbable characters are mixed up in a Central American crisis that bears uneasy similarities to the Iran-Contra Affair. (The book was published in 1983.) *Missionary Stew* is another one of Ross Thomas' gorgeously convoluted tales. Call it a thriller, or satire — whatever you call it, it's fun from beginning to end.

A word about the author

In an introduction to the Kindle edition by the screenwriter and mystery novelist Roger L. Simon, some interesting speculation about Ross Thomas comes to the fore. As Simon writes, "I often speculated that Ross Thomas had been a spy, although it was hard to think of any government good enough for his deeply moral convictions. Still, his pre-crime writing career took him all over the world, including Africa and havens of the espionage game like Bonn. He worked for NGOs with odd-sounding names and did public relations for labor union officials in sore need of a sprucing up. Those are classical spook gigs, and I'll never know for sure if he was one. I never had the nerve to ask . . ." (Thomas died in 1995.)

After reading quite a number of Thomas' novels, I find Simon's speculation right on-target. The man had an extraordinary grasp of the workings of politics here and abroad and of the espionage business. But, as Simon says, we'll never know.

Mac says

This stew has all the requisite ingredients for an entertaining tale--political intrigue, nefarious dealings by both the CIA and the FBI, a Central American dictatorship, ambition, adultery, even cannibalism. Who could not look forward to reading about a wacky love interest named Velveeta Keats whose over-the-top father is named B.S. Keats? So initially the book's recipe for entertainment looks great.

But this story failed to capture my interest, perhaps because there are too many ingredients, perhaps because the various parts fail to blend together into a compelling story. It's too much to take in, some of this, some of that, but lacking a story line or characters I cared about. And missing too are some Ross Thomas signatures--clever dialogue, an easy going but fresh story telling style, and a gentle sense of irony. It's not a failed stew; it's just not a very tasty one when all is said and done.

Stuart says

Not one of Mr. Thomas' finest works, but the characters were inventive and the dialog amusing.

Pat says

An entertaining political thriller with a cynical and satirical viewpoint. It is a great shame that most of his works are now out of print but worth finding.

Al says

Ross Thomas, nearly forgotten today, wrote a string of successful high energy, somewhat over the top crime novels with strong political overtones for a thirty year period until his death in 1995. Think Carl Hiassen, but less kinky and generally involving international intrigue. This one involves the efforts of the two main characters to unearth the secret behind a murky, scurrilous event involving both the CIA and FBI in an unnamed anarchic Latin American country. It's a little confusing, but as always in Thomas's novels, involves shady, colorful characters, a good deal of danger and violence, and a few beautiful women. By today's literary standards (or lack thereof), it qualifies as good clean fun. Better than average airplane reading.

Patrick says

Ross Thomas is so enjoyable to read with characters like velveeta keats and Morgan Citron. Missionary Stew is a mixture of politics, corruption, coups, and a touch of canibalism. The dialogue is one of the books best parts.If you haven't read one of Ross' books, pick up Briarpatch or this book for a great read.

David says

can't believe this guy was out of print or as long as he was. it makes no sense. if you want to read the flowery prose of an MFA don't read this book. if you love wonderfully rounded characters, smart tight narratives, and a wink then read all of his books. boom.

Nooilforpacifists says

The late Ross Thomas was a political money man (Dem) who worked in Washington and California. About half his books follow the same characters and take place in DC, at a fictional bar located where Mackey's Pub is. The other half are unconnected, and can flit from Singapore to the Deep South to California. Missionary Stew probably is Ross's best--it flits from Africa to Southern California to France to South-East Asia, and finally to the jungles of Central-South America. Although Ross's books are political "thrillers", he does not take himself too seriously. Dive in, and prepare to ignore some absurd plot but enjoy the ride!

Tom says

Thomas is great, and I can't believe I went so long without reading any of his books. He's now supplanted Richard Condon as my favorite writer of "satirical thrillers", although none of his books seem to have achieved the popular status of *The Manchurian Candidate* or *Prizzi's Honor*.

Lyn says

Any book with a character named Velveeta Keats cannot be all that bad.

This was a very entertaining book, like Elmore Leonard hopped up on government cheese, washed down with a drink of John Barth and served with a chilled dessert of Dostoevsky.

I have not read Thomas before, but I will look for more of his works. At one point I wondered how in the world he would tie up all the loose ends, but he did nicely.

Witty, well written and fun.

Francis says

I don't normally like political satire, the targets are too easy and the clubs used to beat them are too big and used too frequently, ultimately killing the humour and leaving nothing but a sticky sarcastic mess.

That is until I read this book. At the end of the first chapter I had the beginnings of a slight smirk, but, by the

end of the last chapter, the problem was getting the smirk off of my face.

It might have been the strange, off-balance, totally twisted, often sinister characters, that somehow remained well mannered, and charmingly sympathetic. Or it could have been the whole, slightly twisted, often humorous but sadly too close to the truth, overly convoluted story line? ..did I mention twisted?

A strange and funny tale told with eyes twinkling and lips smirked.

Mitchell says

The core of any Ross Thomas plot is the merry interplay between two unlikely, often dissolute buddies, left to navigate their way through the Washington military-industrial complex. This offering throws in an appearance by an Idi Amin-like African dictator who dabbles in cannibalism, and various rootless drifters who pass through Malibu and points south. One of the author's best, a great unmade film project meant as a gift for director Frank Perry. <http://ow.ly/gNZNz>

Bobby Mathews says

Such an oddball, fun book, with a satisfying ending. Compelling reading, all the way through.

Sharon says

Well worth the read. Very different topic.

Jake says

I've slept on Ross Thomas for too long. The "Elmore Leonard of espionage" comparison is accurate. This book is wild and fun. It has the kind of "America F Yeah!" cynicism that I appreciate mixed with the idea of trying to do the right thing in desperate circumstances, even if its done for selfish reasons. Funny, fast, and to the point, it's my kind of read.
