



## Wake Up Dead

*Roger Smith*

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**Wake Up Dead** Roger Smith

**An amphetamine-fueled thriller about a bombshell American widow on the run in Cape Town's violent badlands—from a writer being compared to George Pelecanos and Richard Price**

A split-second decision with no second chance: get it wrong and you wake up dead.

On a blowtorch-hot night in Cape Town, American ex-model Roxy Palmer and her gunrunner husband, Joe, are carjacked, leaving Joe lying in a pool of blood. As the carjackers make their getaway, Roxy makes a fateful choice that changes her life forever.

Disco and Godwynn, the ghetto gangbangers who sped away in Joe's convertible, will stop at nothing to track her down. Billy Afrika, a mixed-race ex-cop turned mercenary, won't let her out of his sight because Joe owed him a chunk of money. And remorselessly hunting them all is Piper, a love-crazed psychopath determined to renew his vows with his jailhouse "wife," Disco.

As these desperate lives collide and old debts are settled in blood, Roxy is caught in a wave of escalating violence in the beautiful and brutal African seaport. With savage plotting and breakneck suspense that ends in a shattering cataclysm of violence, *Wake Up Dead* confirms Roger Smith as one of the world's best new thriller writers.

## Wake Up Dead Details

Date : Published February 2nd 2010 by Henry Holt and Co. (first published March 2009)

ISBN : 9780805088762

Author : Roger Smith

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Thriller, Cape Town

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# From Reader Review Wake Up Dead for online ebook

## Lukasz Pruski says

Roger Smith's second novel "Wake Up Dead" is definitely not in the same category as his great debut "Mixed Blood" (4 stars; my review is on Goodreads). Mr. Smith's first thriller, in addition to extreme violence and interesting plot, had depth and realistic characterizations. Both novels paint a horrifying portrait of Cape Flats, the Cape Town ghetto, but while the first book delivers acute social observation, "Wake Up Dead", also very brutal, is mostly about the plot and does not make connection between the violence and the social conditions.

Roxy, an ex-model and wife of an owner of a Cape Town agency that provides mercenary services, survives carjacking during which her husband is killed. Roxy's future is threatened by Billy Afrika, an ex-cop and a security contactor, back in Cape Town after being fired from his protection job in Iraq. A repulsive detective Maggott, one of the few non-corrupt cops, is trying to find the truth about the carjacking. These three as well as almost ten other main characters try to achieve their goals during a shaky truce between two powerful gangs. There will be blood - in mass quantities.

Everybody in Cape Flats constantly smokes meth (tik-tik), and meth-fueled vicious murders and rapes are common. Life of a black or a colored person has no value whatsoever. The violence is quite graphically described, although the climactic scenes toward the end of the novel are so theatrical that the brutality feels cartoonish. There are many well-written passages, but also several painfully bad sentences like, for example, "the elation he'd felt for the last day had drained slowly from him like stale piss down a backed-up urinal."

If you haven't read Mr. Smith, read "Mixed Blood" first. All there is in "Wake Up Dead" is the plot. The former is like a luxurious and nutritious dinner, the latter is just fast-food fare.

Two stars.

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## Rudi Opperman says

Thrilling, but very violent.

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## Tom V says

Man, this is a dark one. It just grinds away on you, like one of those tree-stump removal machines, eventually leaving a pile of chips where you thought your soul used to be. If there is a hero here, I can't find him; everybody in this work is playing the angle, getting the edge (sometimes a knife edge), working the system, gutting him before he guts you. The tension is unrelieved throughout and it's physically hard reading. Brutal.

Billy Afrika is back in town, looking for his mercenary pay to help protect the wife and child of his murdered former partner from the gang violence that is everywhere around them. There are enough murderers, rapists,

thieves, perverts, and drug dealers per square inch of page in this book to make one doubt that anything human exists in the wild west that is the Cape Town Flats. Enter a murdering wife, a cop gone rogue, rival gangs that will kill as quickly as breathe, killers dressed as Uncle Sam in minstrel-garb, and bag lady beheaders, and you'd have a more-than-comic stew if it weren't so gruesome. Four days in this hell, and everyone dead or nearly so...well you get the picture.

Mr. Smith Goes To Cape Town, and he didn't write a Jimmy Stewart movie script.

3 stars.

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### **Doug Cornelius says**

Looking for a page-turning crime thriller? Wake Up Dead is violent crime story, full of bad people doing bad things.

With a book title like that you shouldn't be expecting puppies, ponies and rainbows.

Two meth addicts on the streets of Cape Town decide to carjack a Mercedes. They pull ex-model Roxy and her husband out of the car and shoot him in the leg, leaving behind the gun in their meth-induced haze. Roxy decides on a quicky divorce and uses the gun to end her marriage. "Till death us do part."

That opening leads us through the steamy underbelly of Cape Town, South Africa. The action is unrelenting as Roger Smith peels back the story like the layers of an onion. The story drives you forward as each vignette has you wondering where it will take you next. The characters are interesting enough to keep you involved. None of the characters are likeable. Each is deeply flawed, if not down-right psychopathic.

This is Smith's second book. His first, Mixed Blood, has been optioned as a movie. Reading Wake Up Dead, it felt like a Guy Ritchie movie. Criminals coming together because a misfortune of events pulls them together. The murder and mayhem ensues.

The publisher provided me with a copy of the book in the hopes that I would review the book. It was very good, so I am willing to spread the word. The book goes on sale February 2.

If Wake Up Dead sound interesting, you can also read the first chapter of Wake Up Dead (.pdf) on the Roger Smith Books website.

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### **Janet says**

"A Thriller" is right--I had a hard time putting this book down. Full of action and characters who seemed to come to life. I'll look for more by this author.

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### **Amelia Strydom says**

I can't believe I haven't heard of Roger Smith before, especially since he is a South African author. Wake Up

Dead is a fast-paced thriller with lots of action: it starts with a bang and the suspense builds right up until the cataclysmic end. I liked the characters and found myself rooting for the protagonists (who certainly weren't angels). It is NOT for sensitive readers, though, the gang-violence is upsetting and pretty graphic. Looking forward to my next Roger Smith read!

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## **Mack says**

This review is based on an ARC of Wake Up Dead by Roger Smith, (the author of Mixed Blood). Wake Up Dead will be published by Henry Holt & Co in February 2010. Roger lives in Cape Town, South Africa. His web site is Roger Smith Books

Links to sources that show the environment in which Wake Up Dead is set are at the end of the review.

As with Roger's first book, Mixed Blood, Wake Up Dead hits me at an intellectual as well as emotional level. It isn't a read-toss-forget novel. A good bit of this feeling come from my having lived in Pretoria, South Africa as a young boy, between 1952 and 1956. Looking back now I am stunned by what was happening at the time with apartheid and how clueless I was. I came to South Africa and at 6 yrs old and left when I was ten so that is perhaps understandable. When I learned of Mixed Blood as part of the pre-publication publicity I started about the setting in which Roger sets his books and I realized that he is doing more than producing a thriller. There is history behind the story.

First Sentence: "The night they were hijacked, Roxy Palmer and her husband Joe, ate dinner with an African cannibal and his Ukrainian whore."

Roxy is an American ex-model married to a gunrunner and broker for mercenaries. The book opens with a business dinner where Joe and the elegantly dressed cannibal (he might only have eaten one heart for the cameras) are finalizing a deal.

Unknown to Joe and Roxy, when they leave the restaurant they are followed by two low-level thugs from Cape Flats -- Disco De Lilly and Godwynn MacIntosh. Joe and Roxy are hijacked at the gate to their house, Joe is wounded, and the gangsters leave in Joe's Benz. Roxy makes a decision that leaves her husband dead and her a not-so-grieving widow.

The point of view shifts to Billy Afrika, an ex-cop just back from Iraq where he worked for a contractor providing security services for the U.S. Billy's employment had been brokered by Joe Palmer and Billy would like to know why he hasn't been paid. Arriving back in Cape Town, Billy returns to the Flats needing a weapon. He meets people from his past who will have a part in the story including a detective with the unfortunate name of Ernie Maggott. Ernie remembers Billy from when he also was a Cape Town detective and doesn't remember Billy fondly. He also wants out of the Flats and is looking for the big case to get him promoted.

Meanwhile, Disco De Lilly is consumed by the fear of a psychopath named Piper. Piper is still in Pollsmoor Prison but that doesn't lessen Disco's fear. While in prison himself, Disco was Piper's "wife" and the crude tattoos carved into his body reflect Piper's obsession. Billy and Piper also have a history.

The hijacking, Roxy's actions, the obsession of an imprisoned psychopath, and the return of Billy Afrika start a chain of events that will leave a bloody trail through the Cape Flats and culminate on a Cape Town beach.

## Review

The Okapi 907E knife has a significant role in the story as the weapon of choice of Piper. Roger Smith wrote me that "the Okapi of choice is the 907 E. It has put many brown men into bodybags. Quite a pretty knife, too." The Okapi has a distinctive shape and knowing what the knife looks like made the story more immediate for me.

Wake Up Dead is a crime thriller and there are elements I want to be present if the story is to appeal. Obviously, plot is important. Also, with thrillers you expect a faster pace and more intense action. I also look for a strong sense of place, sharp writing, and well developed characters. If I feel that the story and actions of the characters are plausible, all the better. Books like this are not disposable reads and make me think about them long after I've turned the last page. Wake Up Dead nails everything I want in a thriller.

Thrillers often have complicated and conspiratorial stories. Wake Up Dead is complex with regard to the interaction of the characters but it deals with basic human weaknesses like greed, lust, ambition, and revenge. For me this is a positive, it keeps the story grounded.

The lead up to the scenes of action and violence is very well done. Sometimes you know something is about to happen, other times it's "huh, I wasn't expecting that." Roger's thrillers are very violent but I've never thought that the violence was gratuitous. Brutally honest, yes. He writes about a segment of society where sudden and senseless violence is the norm and he has met the people capable of those acts.

A strong sense of place is something I enjoy in a story. After reading Wake Up Dead, I did some Internet searching, looking at Pollsmoor Prison, photos of former gang members, scenes of Cape Flats. I felt like I already knew those places and people from the descriptions in the book.

Wake Up Dead is written from multiple points of view. These points of view gradually build up a composite image of the people and events and their relationships. In some cases you can see that event A will probably lead to consequence B but other times I found myself sitting there thinking about what I just read.

Roger also has an interesting way with descriptions about people and events, often involving dark humor.

*The whore had yellow braids, the dark roots cross-hatching her skull like sutures on a cadaver.*

I don't think anyone will have a problem building a mental image from that description.

The cannibal is described as having an elegant French accent leading to this scene

*Then Joe gave her the look, invisible to anyone else, and she knew that the men needed a few minutes to talk business. Weapons or mercenaries. Or both.*

*Roxy stood. "Let's go to the bathroom."*

*"I don't need," the whore said, clearly new to this part of the game.*

*The cannibal elbowed her beneath her plastic tits. "Go and piss." Coming from his mouth it sounded almost like a benediction: Go in peace.*

In Mixed Blood and now Wake Up Dead I've admired the way Roger builds his characters. He does evil really well though he says the characters write themselves. Piper, for example, is about as scary and real a character as I have encountered in fiction. Billy you want to root for but he isn't an agent for good. Disco you feel sorry for, his life on a course for destruction, but you wouldn't want to be his buddy. Roxy is a

basically good person who does bad things but isn't someone you can consider sympathetic. You know who the characters are and where they came from.

Wake Up Dead is a well done and exciting crime thriller that I recommend highly. It is available for preorder. If you haven't read Roger's first book, Mixed Blood, pick up a copy at the same time. It also is set in Cape flats, has everything I like in a thriller (see above), and a wonderfully nasty detective named Gatsby.

Links to give you insights into the story, the setting, and the characters.

Roger's video trailer for Wake Up Dead.

A photo of the Okapi came from World Knives where you can buy one for yourself. I did. You can also use it to slice fruit and carve decorative items.

Slide show of Cape Flats and Cape Town on Roger's web site.

Slide show of prison body art with voices of former prisoners.

Photographs of South African prisons by Micheal Subotzky.

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## **Rob Kitchin says**

If you're heading on holiday to South Africa do not pack this book; indeed, the South African Tourist Board probably has a contract out on Smith's head. It's difficult to think of a crime that it is not committed in Wake Up Dead - armed robbery, murder, theft, blackmail, rape, fraud, bribery, assault, kidnapping, cannibalism, abandonment, carjacking, drug dealing, the harvesting of body parts; the list is endless. And they happen multiple times. In other words, Wake Up Dead is not for the faint hearted. From its inception it's a fast moving, violent tale, whose pace and body count rises as it progresses to its bloody conclusion. Few of the characters have any redeemable qualities; one way or another they are all on the make, scrabbling and fighting to stay alive and out of each other's clutches. And yet it is oddly compelling, sucking the reader into a gritty, gripping story that is full of twists and sucker punches. At times the violence seems a little gratuitous, but in the main illustrates the social realities of gang culture in the ghetto and prison, and the cheapness and tenuous nature of such lives. Given the pace and intricacies of the interlocking subplots, the story could have easily slipped into a narrative mess, but Smith writes with an assured hand that keeps everything in motion but straightforward to follow. I was hooked from the start, caught in the headlights as the carnage and life histories of its victims unfolded on the page. The most visceral, action packed rollercoaster ride of a novel I've read this year.

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## **Bernie Charbonneau says**

I really enjoy the novels produced by this South African writer. These are not for the faint of heart as they are graphic and deal with the underworld of the Cape flats. Definitely not a holiday classic!

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## **Skip says**

I was thrilled to find another South African crime writer, but found the violence in this book to be excessive. The book opens with a carjacking in Cape Town where the arms dealer husband of American Roxy Palmer dies and the gangbanger perpetrators (Disco and Godwynn), take center stage. Meanwhile, ex-cop turned mercenary, Billy Afrika is owed money, goes to see the husband, and then decides Roxy can help. Meanwhile, a local cop smells a rat, and decides to investigate the killing. Finally, Piper, a psychopath prisoner, is bent on getting his paroled jailhouse "wife" Disco back. Afrika ignites a gang war, and there is mayhem and slaughter galore. A dark thriller, with an authentic feel, showing the underbelly of poverty and despair in Cape Town.

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## **Joemmama says**

This thriller is one that keeps you up, and reading to the end! Set in South Africa, Roxy, an American model, and Joe, her gunrunner husband, a man with very unsavory friends, are carjacked, leaving Joe dead in a pool of blood. Disco and Godwyn, the carjackers, are meth addicts, who have no idea what they've gotten into. Joe owes money to Billy Afrika, a mercenary, and former policeman, who appoints himself Roxy's protector, hoping to cash in and get his money from her. Also thrown into the powder keg, is Piper, a convict doing several life sentences, who wants nothing more than to be reunited with his prison "wife" Disco.

South Africa is like so many countries, divided into the "haves" and the "have nots". The grinding poverty is shown in great detail, along with the corruption and despair, that seems to hang in the air.

All the ins and outs make for one exciting and unforgettable story that will make you think about what you might do, either the same or differently, in the same circumstances. I look forward to reading Roger Smith's other novel, "Mixed Blood".

I received this book from Library Thing Early Reviewers.

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## **Francis Kessy says**

Despite being a 290 pages thriller, the whole plot took not even a week. The Book is about a Business Man hijacked with his wife on their way home after meeting a cannibal. After hijackers had left and dropped their gun, the irresistible wife shot the Husband.

A series of events erupt and within few days the wife get the Car. It is a fiction about the post apartheid South Africa and some of the plots seem to be real like the spooky lives of inmates at Pollsmoor Prison, a prison I hear you wouldn't want your enemies to be in there.

I truly recommend it for a person who like fast paced thrillers.

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## **Matt says**

I think I was just the wrong audience for this book, since I found the tone and the general crassness of its attitude a turn off almost from the very beginning. I don't mean to be a prude, and I think I like some material that's a little bit edgy-- hell, I think I gave Kathy Acker five stars at one point, etc-- but I felt the way that prison rape was a joke except when it was the worst possible thing anyone could imagine, and the way that dominates the book, was a little obnoxious, in a snickering behind your hands kind of way. I felt the same about the pervasive violence against women, the sorta-smears against black Africans and muti, and well, the fact that the prostitute here was Ukrainian, which felt pretty central casting to me as well.

I like a book that effectively delivers thrills. But for me, what thrills this book delivered were undermined by the attitude of the narration, which wanted to be tough as nails but felt like high school locker room posturing. I know that in modern crime writing there's a kind of one-upsmanship that goes on, and really, I don't really care too much in the abstract. But I read this book and it kind of turned me off.

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## **Barbara ★ says**

I liked the story but this is a tough read and not for the faint of heart. I kept reading hoping that something would redeem someone but no such luck. This is a rough book from beginning to end.

All the characters have basically lost or given up their humanity and therefore have few redeeming qualities. I can honestly say that I didn't like any of the characters, they are all violent and out for themselves. Though Piper is the only one who actually scared me. What a maniac. Our heroine (and I use that turn lightly since she murdered her husband) is not a very nice person and (view spoiler)

The story moves from one violent encounter to another without stopping for breath and violence is definitely the name of the game in Capetown - murder, blackmail, gang rape, drugs, kidnapping, assault, nasty prison encounters and basically anything else of a violent nature that you can imagine was in this novel. The author definitely has a way with words. I listened to the audiobook so I can only recall one sentence but it's a doosey.

*He was fighting his way out like a newborn out of a world of shit.*

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## **Delta Tish says**

I really enjoyed this book, it keeps you wondering whats going to happen.

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