



To Asmara

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This national bestseller by the highly-acclaimed author of "Schindler's List" tells the deeply moving and spellbinding story of an alienated Australian journalist's soul-searching journey across a war-torn Africa.

To Asmara Details

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Wendy Tanner says

I was enthralled by this book. Having just returned from a 6 week visit to Ethiopia, I was keen to read it, to see how it portrayed the country I'd just been to, and its neighbour, Eritrea. I also had become friends with several people who had moved to my area in Australia from these two countries as refugees, so it had a double relevance for me.

I enjoyed Keneally's style immensely. The way he created an intriguing work of fiction, based on historical and anthropological information that he'd obviously researched very well. I had been to 3 different museums in Addis Ababa, including the Museum of Red Terror, which depicted a lot of the atrocities that had been committed under the relatively recent rule of Mengistu and his socialist Dergue, from 1977 to 1991. The book was written in 1998, so Mengistu was still in power, and was still terrorising his countrymen, especially the intelligentsia and anyone who dared to threaten or question his supreme authority. So very similar to other communist dictators, like Pol Pot in Cambodia, or Mao in China. What I did not realise, however, that he and his regime brought down so much destruction and ruin on the neighbouring state of Eritrea, which at that time was still part of Ethiopia. What the book also reveals is the incredible resilience and inventiveness of the Eritreans, who were fiercely fighting for their country's independence. The schools and hospitals that were hewn out of the sides of hills, the way they captured and repurposed the Soviet supplied arms that the Ethiopian army was using. They were portrayed by Keneally with such sympathy and respect. I had obviously only seen the perspective of the Ethiopians during my visit there.

Keneally also depicts very well his characters and as they move through the battered and bombed landscape, towards the lost gem of Asmara, we see many details of the life and customs of the Eritrean people.

Rebecca says

I wanted a lot more information on the causes of the conflict and the cultures of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Hanaan says

I was delighted by this book. The story wasn't earth shattering, and many critics feel that Keneally's treatment of the Eritrea-Ethiopia war was far too one-sided. This did not bother me at all. The author's insights into his characters were incredibly sensitive. I found myself aligned with the him - I almost continuously agreed with what he thought was important and what wasn't. So it was very satisfying and I would recommend it to anyone.

Daniel Prokop says

I really enjoyed this book though I found it a little clunky to start with and Thomas Keneally is awesome.

I have worked in Eritrea and found the people inspiring just as Thomas writes in the book. I know that whilst this is fiction that Thomas Keneally did travel twice into Eritrea during the conflict at great risk to his life

and I met one Eritrean man who met with Thomas during his research trips.

Towards Asmara is a great story, wonderful accurate insights into people set against a background of one of the little known 30 year conflict.

Claire says

Australian journalist travels to Eritrea during the civil war to write about the insurgents, but discovers he only went to escape the fact that his wife left him for a guy they met at an aboriginal town in the middle of the desert. Thomas Keneally is a great author and manages to walk the line between being an overly-optimistic peace corps type and a cynical journalist who covered violent tragedies in remote lands for a few decades.

J.R. Rogers says

Evocative, but at times Keneally drills down too deeply in an attempt to present a picture of starving Ethiopian peoples and Eritrean rebel factions and how they are able to survive. With an interesting back story about a young woman seeking her father and a feminist aid worker struggling to understand what is happening with an eye to helping in some way. However the backstory chapters, about the hero Darcy's former life and divorce in Australia never satisfactorily detailed, are disruptive. A must read, however, for anyone striving to understand the complexities of the ethnic struggles and the resultant continual war against the Ethiopians that was so much the backdrop of modern day Eritrea.

Victoria says

Compelling story about war torn Eritrea

Anna says

I hadn't read Schindler's List or anything when I read this - but a friend from Eritrea told me to read this in order to understand his country. I'm not sure it's possible to gain that sort of understanding through a book, let alone one, but it did give me a glimpse to his homeland. I hope that one day Eritrea can again be free, and I can visit my friend, Yonas, in his home. Right now, he's exiled in Denmark, but he's one of the lucky ones who escaped, rather than face forced labor and death.

Chris says

Facinating novel on Eritrea and the civil war with Ethiopia

Tamara Niemi says

An amazing read that is really like rides I've been on through the region. It's a slow, wandering book, full of odd characters thrown together under strange circumstances. I loved this book, it brought back memories of many trips and many strange travel companions.

Andrew Cox says

I couldn't really get into this book. This may have been because I have been so busy performing "A Midsummer Nights Dream" & was over preoccupied with other things. I just could not really develop any relationships with the characters. It came alive at the end when Henry's true purpose was made clear (which was surprising) but I just hadn't been gripped. There is a detachment to the central character which echoed the desert landscape & some of the scenes of war, which although provided a kind of buffer between some of the horrors of war left me feeling not particularly sympathetic to the characters.

Chris says

Read it on kindle - i wasn't thrilled with the book as it felt clunky ...but i tend to not like books read as e-books as much as those read in book form.

ashok says

From the author of Schindler's Ark, is this book about the Eritrean war of independence. The narrator, a journalist going through personal issues of rejection, finds himself at the forefront of a news story on the Eritrean war.

This is a sparsely documented period of recent history - and the book deserves credit for attempting to portray a semi-fictional account of this time.

The basic setting is this -- in the 1980s the Ethiopians under the Dergue regime, carpet bombed Eritrea -- what they considered to be a "rebel province". The Eritreans responded by uniting themselves behind a single front, and eventually ended up defeating their mightier cousins.

The book was written in the late 80s, during a period when things were idealistic about the Eritrean freedom movement. However, the narrator, poses questions for the future for this tiny nation state 'how will this committed military machine fighting for independence cope with independence and the absence of a uniting foe?'. There is a point in the narrative involving a bureaucratic Eritrean military commander where the narrator imagines the military commander in a free Eritrea, behaving in exactly the same manner.

As history will tell us, a couple of decades have passed in Eritrea since the independence war and much of the idealism has disappeared. A refreshingly open constitution was never allowed to pass in 1997. It remains

a single party state run by oppressive former freedom fighters.

Karlan says

This novel about the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict was listed in the bibliography of CUTTING FOR STONE. The novel follows a small group of foreigners into the war zone with the action seen through the eyes of Darcy, a journalist. It is a compelling, upsetting story by the author Schindler's List.

Velvetink says

Found at a cake stall. 1 of 7 books for \$5 total!.
