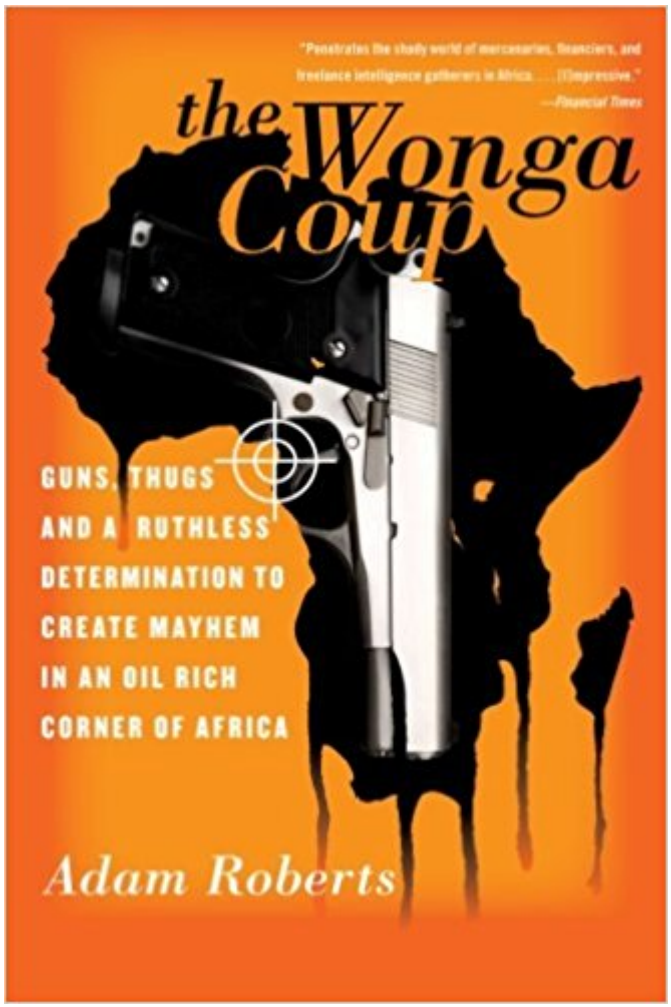
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The Wonga Coup: Guns, Thugs, And A Ruthless Determination To Create Mayhem In An Oil-Rich Corner Of Africa



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Synopsis

Equatorial Guinea is a tiny country roughly the size of the state of Maryland. Humid, jungle covered, and rife with unpleasant diseases, natives call it Devil Island. Its president in 2004, Obiang Nguema, had been accused of cannibalism, belief in witchcraft, mass murder, billiondollar corruption, and general rule by terror. With so little to recommend it, why in March 2004 was Equatorial Guinea the target of a group of salty British, South African and Zimbabwean mercenaries, travelling on an American-registered ex-National Guard plane specially adapted for military purposes, that was originally flown to Africa by American pilots? The real motive lay deep below the ocean floor: oil. In The Dogs of War, Frederick Forsyth effectively described an attempt by mercenaries to overthrow the government of Equatorial Guinea — in 1972. And the chain of events surrounding the night of March 7, 2004, is a rare case of life imitating art—or, at least, life imitating a 1970s thriller—in almost uncanny detail. With a cast of characters worthy of a remake of Wild Geese and a plot as mazy as it was unlikely, The Wonga Coup is a tale of venality, overarching vanity and greed whose example speaks to the problems of the entire African continent.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The most terrifying thing about this chronicle of a failed coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea is that it’s not a Graham Greene novel but a true story. Roberts, an Economist staffer, chronicles the plot by foreign mercenaries and merchants to topple the country’s brutal dictatorship solely for the "wonga" (British slang for "money, usually a lot of it"). An irresistibly lurid tale is peopled with bellicose profiteers, particularly of the neocolonialist sort from Europe and South

Africa, with long histories of investment in oil, diamonds and war-for-profit. Among these self-styled gentleman adventurers are Margaret Thatcher’s son, Sir Mark Thatcher, and "rag-and-bone intelligence men" who linger in hotel bars, "picking up scraps of information... selling them on to willing buyers, whether corporate or government." The audacity of the coup’s planners is almost admirable, though Roberts rightly chastises them for their oil-soaked greed. As he lifts the curtain to the backrooms of power in postcolonial Africa, the reader finds that not much has changed on the continent since 1618, when the "Company of Adventurers of London Trading to the Ports of Africa" became the first private company to colonize Africa for profit. (Aug.) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"A real-life pulp thriller, sardonic, riveting." -- Dallas Morning News"A remarkable piece of reporting told in lucid prose. As in so many African stories, no side emerges unsullied." -- Entertainment Weekly"Roberts’s account dutifully traces the paper trail of this ’rent-a-coup,’ which implicated associates including [Margaret Thatcher’s son]." -- The New Yorker"The book gets inside the world of African mercenaries, arms suppliers, and intelligence traders." -- Seattle Times"[Roberts] draws a convincing picture of wholesale corruption and brutality on the part of the country’s ruling class." -- New York Times Book Review --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The late FBI Deputy Director W. Mark Felt became renowned as the anonymous and well-informed source on the Nixon Watergate affair, advising "The Washington Post" reporters Woodward and Bernstein to, "Follow the money" and all would be revealed...and, it was. Of course, its always a safe bet when confronted with an otherwise perplexing or apparently rrational business or political affair to follow that advice, since power aligns along financial meridians: it always has and, unless human nature changes radically, it always will. How else to explain the warm welcome ("You are a good friend and we welcome you") extended by then American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (Washington, D.C., April, 2006)to Obiang Nguema, longtime dictator of the African backwater of Equatorial Guinea? Answer: Follow the money!Obiang Nguema, reviled by many independent human rights organizations as one of Africa’s worst dictators (okay, maybe the worst) was a complete unknown outside Africa and most African nations didn’t pay him too much mind either...until oil was discovered. Then, suddenly, the transformation: "Our friend in Africa!" It is a given that Obiang’s record as head of government was hardly one worthy of emulation. Obiang

himself was a torturer, possible cannibal and personal beneficiary of hundreds of millions of dollars purloined from petroleum revenues. His government has a no less enviable record: it purged political opponents, expelled/murdered minority tribesman such as the Bubis, stole from the Equatorial Guinean people who, given access to their fair share of oil revenue, would have had a per capita income of around $6000.00, but instead had and have around 0.5% of GDP expended on education (lowest in the world) and 1.8% of GDP on health care (again lowest anywhere).Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented a long history, extending from independence from Spain up to the present moment of extrajudicial killings by the government (although practically, that doesn't matter: most judges have no legal training and are Obiang relatives), police brutality and execrable conditions in the infamous Playa Negra Prison. A popular government? Only amongst the First World countries that extract the oil: nothing like dealing with a pliable dictator instead of a fractious democracy.So, with that background, abundantly illustrated by the author, Adam Roberts, the scene was set for a coup d'etat. Like most coups, this one was motivated by money and power but, unlike most coups, this one was orchestrated explicitly for those purposes and was attempted by a colorful group of mercenaries and financiers, including Sir Mark Thatcher (son of Margaret), Simon Mann (former SAS and Executive Outcomes) and others out of a Frederick Forsythe novel...but Forsythe himself was involved in at least one coup attempt against the Obiang clan! What better material for a book!About one third of the text provides the horrific details of Obiang clan rule. The remainder catalogues the comic opera coup organization devised by Mann and his colleagues. Their effort was rankly amateur: poor planning, bad logistics, lack of secrecy, failure to gain unequivocal (if covert) support from neighboring governments (e.g., Nigeria) and "interested" third parties (US, Spain) and failure to secure arrangements with the real power brokers, the multinational oil firms. This constellation of ineptitude and bungling lead to the inevitable ruin of the organization well before any action took place in Equatorial Guinea. Mann and many of his colleagues and employees were incarcerated in horrific conditions in Zimbabwe (another paragon of virtuous African governance) and others ended up in legal trouble in South Africa. The putative new head of government, Moto, was returned to obscurity. Thatcher was humiliated and Obiang solidified his already iron grasp on power. A bad end for the Wonga Coup, indeed and for the people of Equatorial Guinea, who seem to be stuck with the Obiang clan for the indefinite future.Roberts, a highly experienced reporter, demonstrates his skills quite aptly in preseniting this complex but buffoonish plot, interviewing many of the participants and telling an engaging tale. In short, his is a superbly researched piece of investigative reporting and fascinating book. Once again, he demonstrates that its always a good idea to "follow the money".

Returned from business trip to Malabo July 2010 and found the area better than represented in the book. Books like this serve a purpose, not the least of which is to discourage mercenary coups, but one needs to put them in context. I'm not qualified to judge whether it's spin is too little or too much, but Malabo in 2010 was different in a few meaningful ways (and the same in others - indicating the need for continual improvement). It is still in need of sustainable development and I'm sure that more of the country's wealth should trickle down, but there was a bustling restaurant and bar district with lots of music, laughing, and conversation. Several local restaurants were mentioned as "good" but my colleagues were keen to show me their favorites - and they're more "down to Earth" kind of folks that don't usually wear jackets to dinner. We had a good meal at The Bantu and a couple of cold refreshments at The Fang and The China Sisters. The malaria eradication program seems to have been successful but is a continuing battle - I took daily malerone. Malabo is definitely an Africa city, and you don't want to get cross-threaded with the authorities, but it has things to commend it (in a developing country sense) - not the least of which are the hospitable local entrepreneurs. I encourage those there with political influence to do all they can to help small businesses.

I was halfway through this book, when some of the names and people being mentioned, and some of th events sounded very familiar. I discovered that this was not a work of fiction, but the true story of an ill-fated coup attempt to overthrow a brutal African dictator, by a band of white Soldiers of Fortune, (who had an agenda of their own). I thought the book got bogged down in a few places, but I did manage to finish it, and I am glad I did.

This reminds me of those great movies with old English actors who want to help out in the war and get the gang together to go on one last caper.I believe this was an extension of a magazine article and it does read like one. Do not expect great prose. It is the story of some mercenaries who were going to overthrow the dictator government in Equatorial Guinea and install their own government so they could loot the oil reserves.The cast of characters is a lot of fun. The plot fails for the most basic of reasons: human nature.This is a good vacation or beach read.

Good read

THis was an interesting book which came across as believable, however, it seemed to stretch on inordinately at times. If you are into "Africa" or "mercenaries" this is worth the reading, but I don't

see this being a big seller in mainstream reading. I have no regrets in buying and reading it, but this is a "hard core" special interest read.

I just finished reading this book a few moments ago. This book is well detailed and covers all of the players involved both fairly and accurately.However, my gripe with this book is really with its style. The book seems so BLAND for a book with as interesting a subtitle as this one has. The story is told in fashion that is seemingly uninspired and didn't keep my attention for very long.Again, I reiterate, that the basic story of the coup and it's major players are covered and presented fairly, But, again, this story, to me at least, should have been a much better read...

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