



## The Last King of Scotland

By Giles Foden

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### **The Last King of Scotland** By Giles Foden

Shortly after his arrival in Uganda, Scottish doctor Nicholas Garrigan is called to the scene of a bizarre accident: Idi Amin, careening down a dirt road in his red Maserati, has run over a cow. When Garrigan tends to Amin, the dictator, in his obsession for all things Scottish, appoints him as his personal physician. And so begins a fateful dalliance with the central African leader whose Emperor Jones-style autocracy would transform into a reign of terror.

In **The Last King of Scotland** Foden's Amin is as ridiculous as he is abhorrent: a grown man who must be burped like an infant, a self-proclaimed cannibalist who, at the end of his 8 years in power, would be responsible for 300,000 deaths. And as Garrigan awakens to his patient's baroque barbarism--and his own complicity in it--we enter a venturesome meditation on conscience, charisma, and the slow corruption of the human heart. Brilliantly written, comic and profound, **The Last King of Scotland** announces a major new talent.

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# The Last King of Scotland

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## **The Last King of Scotland** By Giles Foden Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1018817 in Books
- Published on: 1999-10-26
- Released on: 1999-10-26
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .70" w x 5.20" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

No, we're not talking Bonnie Prince Charlie here. The title character of Giles Foden's debut novel, *The Last King of Scotland*, is none other than Idi Amin, the former dictator of Uganda. Told from the viewpoint of Nicholas Garrigan, Amin's personal physician, the novel chronicles the hell that was Uganda in the 1970s. Garrigan, the only son of a Scots Presbyterian minister, finds himself far away from Fossiemuir when he accepts a post with the Ministry of Health in Uganda. His arrival in Kampala coincides with the coup that leads to President Obote's overthrow and Idi Amin Dada's ascendancy to power. Garrigan spends only a few days in the capital city, however, before heading out to his assignment in the bush. But a freak traffic accident involving Amin's sports car and a cow eventually brings the good doctor into the dictator's orbit; a few months later, Garrigan is recalled from his rural hospital and named personal physician to the president. Soon enough, Garrigan finds himself caught between his duty to his patient and growing pressure from his own government to help them control Amin.

From Nicholas Garrigan's catbird seat, Foden guides us through the horrors of Amin's Uganda. It would be simple enough to make the dictator merely monstrous, but Foden defies expectation, rendering him appealing even as he terrifies. The doctor "couldn't help feeling awed by the sheer size of him and the way, even in those unelevated circumstances, he radiated a barely restrained energy.... I felt--far from being the healer--that some kind of elemental force was seeping into me." And Garrigan makes a fine stand-in for Conrad's Marlow as he travels up a river of blood from naiveté to horrified recognition of his own complicity. As if this weren't enough, Foden also treats us to a finely drawn portrait of Africa in all its natural, political, and social complexity. *The Last King of Scotland* makes for dark but compelling reading. -Alix Wilber

#### From Publishers Weekly

A vivid journey to the turbulent heart of 1970s Uganda, British journalist Foden's bracing first novel chronicles the strange career of a fictional Scottish physician, Nicholas Garrigan, who serves as the personal doctor and occasional confidante of dictator Idi Amin. Having sequestered himself on a remote island in Scotland, Garrigan reflects, through a fog of self-deception and regret, on his stint as Amin's sidekick, from their first unlikely encounter after a back-road accident (Amin's red Maserati sideswipes a cow) to his installation in the capital as the ruler's house physician. Enjoying the perks of this position, Garrigan ponders an affair with the British ambassador's wife, tends to Amin's sometimes comical afflictions (in a memorable scene, he coaxes a burp from the dictator as if he were a giant infant) and even admits to a "sneaking affection" for him. Garrigan grows so detached from the gradually mounting atrocities of the regime that it takes a visit to the dictator's torture chambers and a harrowing trek across the wartorn countryside for him to glimpse the extent of his own complicity. Expertly weaving together Amin's life story (intertwined with Scottish history for reasons that remain rather vague, though the novel's title is a moniker Amin gave to himself), Foden writes with steely clarity and a sharp satirical edge, allowing serious questions to surface about the ethical boundaries of medicine and the crumbling Western influence in Africa. Garrison is the perfect foil for Amin, whose overwhelming physical presence, peacockish rhetoric and cold-blooded savagery are so well captured as to make this novel more than a mesmerizing read: it is also a forceful account of a surrealistic and especially ugly chapter of modern history. Agent, A.P. Watt. First serial to Granta. (Nov.) FYI: Foden has been an editor of the Times Literary Supplement.

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#### From Kirkus Reviews

A remarkable debut novel by British journalist Foden (The Guardian), who describes in the best Conradian tones an idealistic young physician's descent into the maelstrom of Idi Amin's Uganda. In a remote and wintry corner of Scotland, Dr. Nicholas Garrigan is trying to look back through the snow piling up outside his window on his days in the tropics. The son of a Scots Presbyterian minister, Nick grew up in the wee town of Fossiemuir and saw very little of the world beyond Edinburgh before passing his medical exams and accepting a post with the Ministry of Health that sent him to Uganda in the early 1970s. This, then, ``is a story of various strange happenings in Central Africa, happenings which involved the author, Nicholas Garrigan, in a professional and private capacity.'' And how: Nick landed in Uganda just as Idi Amin was transforming his Emperor Jones-style autocracy into a full-fledged reign of terror, and Nick not only survived the bloodletting but rose (through the typical succession of circumstantial flukes that controls these things) to become Amin's personal physician. From his place at the Emperor's right hand, he witnessed all the absurdities, barbarisms, and venalities symbolizing much of postcolonial Africa tribal wars, the scapegoating of Asian ``profiteers,'' palace intrigues, assassinations. There was one horror, though, that Nick couldn't be prepared for: he actually came to like Amin as a person. This affection makes for difficulties when, in the novel's foreground action, British operatives try to enlist him in a plot to poison the dictator: his refusal to take part in the scheme makes for even more trouble after Amin falls from power and Nick must seek asylum in a Britain that now views him as an alien functionary. In the end, of course, Nick comes to see that he has been an alien from the start: a recognition that's little consolation but no minor achievement. Lurid and delightful, written with wit and real maturity. (First serial rights to Granta) -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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**Travis Smith:**

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