



The Jack Bank: A Memoir of a South African Childhood

Glen Retief

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An extraordinary, literary memoir from a gay white South African, coming of age at the end of apartheid in the late 1970s. Glen Retief's childhood was at once recognizably ordinary--and brutally unusual.

Raised in the middle of a game preserve where his father worked, Retief's warm nuclear family was a preserve of its own, against chaotic forces just outside its borders: a childhood friend whose uncle led a death squad, while his cultured grandfather quoted Shakespeare at barbecues and abused Glen's sister in an antique-filled, tobacco-scented living room.

But it was when Retief was sent to boarding school, that he was truly exposed to human cruelty and frailty. When the prefects were caught torturing younger boys, they invented "the jack bank," where underclassmen could save beatings, earn interest on their deposits, and draw on them later to atone for their supposed infractions. Retief writes movingly of the complicated emotions and politics in this punitive all-male world, and of how he navigated them, even as he began to realize that his sexuality was different than his peers'.

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