

★ **Serengotti****Eugen Bacon**

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Set in rural Australia, Eugen Bacon's novel *Serengotti* follows a programmer who travels to an isolated African migrant community where little is as it seems.

The novel begins with Ch'anzu having a breakdown—over a drowning marriage, a troubled twin brother. Ch'anzu rages against the injustices that zie experiences as an African Australian, which led to hir exploded job. Caught up in depression, zie gets a call to write a computer program in Serengotti, a small rural community populated by displaced people—mostly migrants from Africa who left war-torn countries as widows, child soldiers, or orphans. They distrust newcomers like Ch'anzu. The place itself, with its mesh of cultures, forces Ch'anzu to face hir grief, potential, and power in new and unexpected ways.

Perhaps prophetic dreams trouble Ch'anzu too. The narrative perspective changes occasionally, resulting in a speculative edge, even as the action stays grounded. Ch'anzu's voice radiates both power and vulnerability as zie tries to make sense of hir severed connections from hir old life and growing attachment to this new community with its dreams of healing and new life.

The writing pulses across the page, electric with images and style. It moves between interior monologues, straight narrative, and poetic descriptions with ease, incorporating Australian slang, Swahili, Bantu, and even made-up language explanations. The characters occupy a rich linguistic landscape—and there are a lot of them, all drawn with fine detail and precision: a pair of healing twins, Lau and Tau; an ethereal night-runner, Aviana; and Sticky, a former child soldier who claims to have killed a lion.

A twisting plot, a setting rife with potential danger, and a past full of its own skeletons all build to a head in *Serengotti*, a novel about an African Australian and the migrant community zie comes to call hir own.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (July / August 2023)

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