



# Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked

By Ivan Vladislavic

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**“Surely one of the most ingenious love letters—full of violence, fear, humour, and cunning—ever addressed to a city.” —Geoff Dyer**

This dazzling portrait of Johannesburg is one of the most haunting, poetic pieces of reportage about a metropolis since Suketu Mehta’s *Maximum City*. Through precisely crafted snapshots, Ivan Vladislavic observes the unpredictable, day-to-day transformation of his embattled city: the homeless using manholes as cupboards, a public statue slowly cannibalized for scrap. Most poignantly he charts the small, devastating changes along the postapartheid streets: walls grow higher, neighborhoods are gated off, the keys multiply. Security—insecurity?—is the growth industry. Vladislavic, described as “one of the most imaginative minds at work in South African literature today” (André Brink), delivers “one of the best things ever written about a great, if schizophrenic, city, and an utterly true picture of the new South Africa” (Christopher Hope).

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## **Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked By Ivan Vladislavic Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

In a post-apartheid world, the city of Johannesburg is a complicated place: racial divides still run deep, inextricably interwoven with crime and poverty, and endlessly complicated as the haves and have-nots negotiate new arrangements defined in terms of protection, invasion, and a tenuous level of common feeling. Novelist and Johannesburg resident Vladislavic recounts his day-to-day experiences and examines them from a step removed, watching as his city grows more obsessed with security: walls grow higher, neighbors more suspicious, private security forces more prevalent (hired even for middle class dinner parties). Vladislavic is exploring revolutionary ground, providing one of the most detailed looks yet at the post-apartheid city, helping define it as he ventures through it. Vladislavic can ramble, but does so with humor and care, while offering much insight on class and race relations, and urban survival in general; neither does he resort to overheated righteousness. While a certain amount of fluency in South African culture may be necessary to fully appreciate it, this book will intrigue any reader with its intense, you-are-there depiction of a city in flux.

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From [Booklist](#)

Not your usual tourist view, this on-the-streets account by a white Johannesburg native is about what it is like to live there now, how it has changed since the end of apartheid—and how it has not—the dynamics of the rich diversity, the sorrow and guilt of the continuing unemployment and desperate poverty, the vicious racism, the violent crime. The keys in the title may be metaphor, but they are rooted in fact—security being a constant obsession with anyone who has anything to lose—the absurdity of not knowing what all your keys are for anymore, the guilt about the hungry guard and those who live in manholes. Driven by fear, Vladislavic and his wife do try to leave, but they quickly return home to Johannesburg. Dickens is his model; he needs the “noisy rhythm outside his window,” and no move to the relative safety of suburban subdivisions will replace what is lost. In a series of sketches, the close-up detail reveals the place he loves, but readers will connect Vladislavic’s keys to those of other cities. --Hazel Rochman

Review

“Reminds me sometimes of Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul* and sometimes of James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, but it is altogether one of a kind. . . . He leaves his readers consoled by the feeling that art and goodness alike can be impervious to squalor.” (Jan Morris)

“*Portrait with Keys* is a beautiful book, affecting and ingenious, opening new intellectual vistas onto art and architecture, poetry and urbanism.” (Ian Volner - Bookforum)

“A rare, brilliant writer. His work eschews all cant. Its sheer verve, the way it burrows beneath ossified forms of writing, its discipline and the distance it places between itself and the jaded preoccupations of local fiction, distinguish it.” (Sunday Times [London])

“A wonderful book about Johannesburg....This is a love letter to Johannesburg and a truly marvelous piece of work. I read it and was deeply moved.” (Justin Cartwright - Literary Review)

“A passionate account by a man who loves his city, shocking because it so embraces the things most people try to avoid thinking about.” (The Independent [UK])

“Freshly engaging, with its wry take on security and a homeless underclass that stashes its winter wardrobe in manholes beneath Africa’s richest city.” (Maya Jaggi - The Guardian)

“Like the city it studies, *Portrait with Keys* is complex, with vast rewards for the patient reader.” (Tracey D. Samuelson - Christian Science Monitor)

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **David Ochoa:**

The book *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. Why then must we leave a good thing like a book *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*? Several of you have a different opinion about publication. But one aim this book can give many details for us. It is absolutely suitable. Right now, try to closer with your book. Knowledge or details that you take for that, you are able to give for each other; you can share all of these. Book *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and massive function for you. You can search the enormous world by open up and read a guide. So it is very wonderful.

#### **Charlie Bowers:**

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#### **Lorenzo Logan:**

Precisely why? Because this *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap it but latter it will zap you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who else write the book in such wonderful way makes the content interior easier to understand, entertaining technique but still convey the meaning fully. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this anymore or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of benefits than the other book have got such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking means. So , still want to postpone having that book? If I ended up you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

**Kenneth Poor:**

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