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Foreword Review

Dead Ball: A Harvey Blissberg Mystery

R. D. Rosen
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In the all—American sport of baseball, a “dead ball” is a
ball that is out of play; while the ball is dead, no runners can advance, no player may be put out, and no runs may score. In this novel, past racism and murder threaten to put African-American player Moss Cooley—and his attempt to break Joe DiMaggio’s 56-game hitting streak—“out of play.” When Cooley, the Providence Jewels’ star player, receives an anonymous threat in the form of a headless lawn jockey, Harvey Blissberg, former detective and retired ballplayer for the same team, is forced from his couch and his mid-life depression to protect Cooley and keep him in play and in the game.

The author won the prestigious Edgar Allan Poe award for his first Blissberg novel; this is the fifth in the series. Before turning his talents to fiction, Rosen wrote for television, winning three Emmys for a news satire and contributing to *Saturday Night Live*. He has also published nonfiction books, humor, and essays.

Rosen creatively reveals the characters of Blissberg, and the person threatening to take Cooley permanently out of the game, through their perspectives on baseball. The villain loves the game as a safe “series of compartments, and most of all the rules of the game contain the anarchy outside the game.” Blissberg, on the other hand, sees baseball as “a stately procession of conflicts, each one a test of will, cunning, and expertise.”
In the story’s conflict the author’s clean, ordered images of baseball stand in stark contrast to the darker, horrific images of racism. “The old black-and-white photo showed a young black man, his hands bound in front of him, swinging by the neck from a rope tied to a thick tree branch. Two men, one in a well-creased hat, smiled guiltily right at the lens.”

While the surprising twists and turns of people and history keep the reader guessing, the outcome is assured, because, even as a child, Blissberg had “a gift for finding errant baseballs hit into the woods, complemented by a sense of responsibility to find the ball, whether or not he had been the one to hit it. He took a profound pleasure in it.”

The mystery aficionado, the sports fan, and the reader who simply loves a good story will all take profound pleasure in *Dead Ball*.

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