

Deadly Diamonds

John F. Dobbyn

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This gangster novel is breathlessly paced and populated with priceless characters.

"I've seen dead bodies. You can't be even partially Irish without chalking up some more wakes than weddings." So explains the hero of John F. Dobbyn's delightful modern-day gangster tale of blood, diamonds, and mob wars. Set in the locations and told (at times) in the vernacular of *The Town*, *Mystic River*, and *The Departed*, Dobbyn's *Deadly Diamonds* is a Beantown beauty of a story, served sometimes with a Guinness and at other times with a Chianti, depending on which of the many warring, sleazebag mobsters Dobbyn's lead character is confronting.

That hero is the son of an Irish father and a Puerto Rican mother, yet attorney Michael Knight is as Southie as it gets. His friends, priest, and partner are all from the old neighborhood, as are the Irish-American thugs who drag him into an enthralling plot about diamond smuggling, greed, murder, double-dealing, and mob politics.

Brightest of the lot is one "Packy" Salviti, whom Dobbyn dubs "the king of the apes" and describes as "a gangster practically from the time he left his mother's womb" with "a conscience as calloused as a long-shoreman's fist." A priceless, classic bad guy, neither Mario Puzo nor Jimmy Breslin have done better than Dobbyn in this regard; his creations are a mix of pure evil, pure idiocy, and pure joy.

With three exceptions the novel is excitingly paced. Just as the reader is drawn in and nearly breathless, Dobbyn breaks stride to insert Part II—a fifty-five page digression to Sierra Leone and Dublin which adds nothing to the story that a half-page soliloquy could not have taken care of. Dobbyn does this again in a (thankfully) brief Part IV, whose twelve pages again add nothing that could not be explained briefly and simply by a character. He does this again later, but as that third tangent feeds off these two and comes after the main story is done, it can be ignored.

Fortunately the rest of the book is a strong and exciting read. Knight is a believable protagonist, as are the supporting cast of priests, other lawyers, cops, secretaries, and a Chinese-American actor named Harry who, along with ex-IRA gunman, make up his team. The gangsters of the rival Boston mobs are a bit broad and at times over-the-top, but they need to be; they need to mouth the stock yet expected deadly threats and crude jests, if only to flesh out their characters.

Deadly Diamonds is an exciting, well-written, colorful, and thoroughly delightful gangster story, one fit to sit on a shelf between the works of Breslin and Puzo.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (Fall 2013)

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