

Paradise, Nevada

Dario Diofebi

Bloomsbury (Apr 6, 2021)

Hardcover \$28.00 (512pp)

978-1-63557-620-7

Dario Diofebi's novel *Paradise, Nevada* is as sprawling and colorful as its setting: the Las Vegas Strip, a four-mile-long cluster of hotels and casinos that attracts millions of tourists and gamblers from around the world.

The main characters of this mordantly funny tale of class warfare and greed all call Paradise home. Ray and Tom are both poker lifers who have descended upon Vegas (from California and Italy, respectively) to earn their keep through long hours playing Texas Hold 'Em. Their circuitous paths cross with Mary Ann's. She's a former fashion model, now serving drinks at the elaborate Positano Luxury Resort & Casino. They also encounter Lindsay, a local journalist who's on the cusp of breaking a blockbuster story concerning the Positano's mysterious owner, Al. The novel ably bounces between these four narratives, while dozens of secondary characters weave into each, all moving, slow and steady, toward a climactic event.

The novel's rich details are both its allure and its occasional undoing. The motivations and inner struggles of the main quartet are palpable. Each wrestles with personal demons and their decisions to remain in Las Vegas, even as the city's oppressive cheer fades beneath the double dealing and labor exploitation going on behind the scenes. How each comes to terms with, or pushes against, these issues makes the book prescient and powerful. At the same time, the story is larded by extraneous information, as of the minutiae of poker play. That it still manages to pack a sizable punch is due to the strength and depth of its tart narrative.

Sneaking sly wit and subtle profundities into its wide-ranging narrative, *Paradise, Nevada* is a wonderful saga that's both reflective of, and critical of, our modern age.

ROBERT HAM (March / April 2021)

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