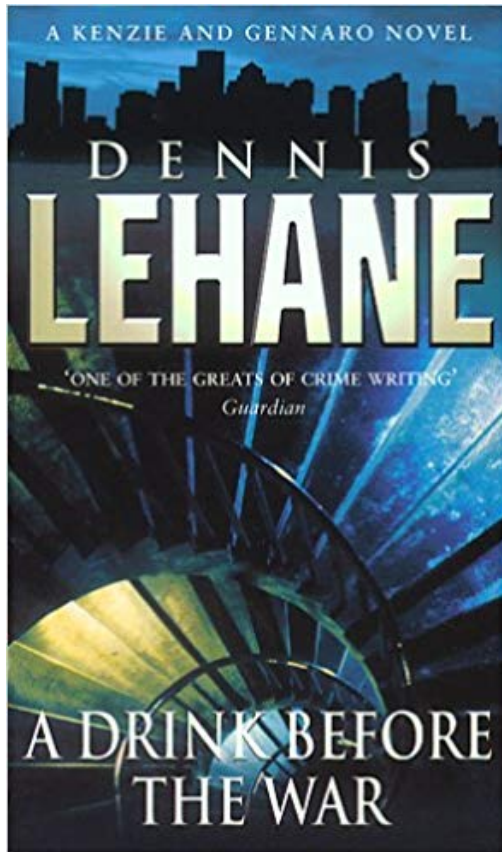


A Drink Before the War *by* Dennis Lehane



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Reviews of the *A Drink Before the War* *by* Dennis Lehane

Nten

I don't think Dennis Lehane has it in him to write a bad book, but of the six or seven I have read, "Live by Night" was the most disappointing. It may be that the subject matter does not have much appeal for me. "The Given Day" is just as bloody and violent but it's also inspiring. I guess I just find it hard to believe in Joe Coughlin. He seems like to good a guy to lead the life of a gangster and yet he does. There's cognitive dissonance to his character that I find hard to reconcile. Also, the plot is a little too disjointed. All the transitions were a little too abrupt - especially the last few pages. It took me awhile to engage with the book - like way more than I am used to - but I have to say once I got into it, i was completely hooked. Bottom line is that I recommend it. However, I would encourage anyone new to Lehane to start with "The Given Day", "Mystic River", "Shutter Island", "Since We Fell", "The Drop" first. It has been many years but I enjoyed his private detective series too. Especially "Moonlight Mile".

Uaha

I enjoy Lehane's writing and this book hooked me by the end of the first page - nothing like having one's feet in concrete and to be on one's way out into the center of the bay on a one way trip to focus one's view on mortality. The only regret I had was that the story ended. I know Ybor City as there is a certain restaurant there [the Columbia] where I have gone for Cuban food for many years. Lehane captures a time and the context of life in this place and Florida, a place far too many people associate with little old ladies with blue rise in their hair and Disney World with a dash of South Beach tossed in to season. Tamp/St Pete is a different place than that and has a history which is a great background for the events in this novel. Lehane did a good job capturing this world although I am sure there are those who would disagree with me.

Others will no doubt write about plot specifics. I will not because I do not want to spoil the read for people who buy the book. I do agree with those who compare it to the Godfather book. There are some differences because Coughlin is obviously not Italian and his father is a cop. But Lahane develops a great story based on Coughlin's life starting as a petty criminal and going on from there.

Tojahn

This book had been lying around on my "to read" table for several months. I knew it was a best seller - that the movie made from it was nominated for an Academy Award - and yet, when I finally took it on vacation and read it - I have been kicking myself for not finding this author sooner. Dennis Lehane has a way with character development, plotting and dialogue that is pure pleasure to read. His characters come alive, you become immersed in the plot and you have a hard time putting the book down as one chapter just pours into another. Most know by now that this is about three guys who grew up together in an area near Boston and how their lives were star crossed from the outset. You will get to know them, their wives, mothers, fathers, friends, and enemies and you will laugh with them, cry for them and sometimes pray for them. This is a top flight novel and a classic that will live in your memory for along, long, time.

catterpillar

This novel follows the life of a young Boston gangster, Joe Coughlin, through the Prohibition era. Joe, whose father is a senior police officer, craves the outlaw life and excitement of the night when the normal rules of society don't apply. He starts off as a small-time hoodlum holding up banks and speakeasies, then gets embroiled with a young woman who is also the lover of a big-time hoodlum, does a stretch in prison, survives by forming an alliance with a mafia chief and is sent down to Tampa Florida to take over the rum business for this boss' syndicate. There, he meets the love of his life.

The central proposition the book explores is whether bad money can lead to good; whether crime and violence can be whitewashed or redeemed. It also takes a look at religious morality versus practical morality. Joe is in many respects an honorable man in a dishonorable trade. He doesn't trade in violence for its own sake but is forced to resort to horrific violence periodically in order to survive. He is loyal to his friends and generous to his enemies. He is untainted by the racism of his era. He is not especially greedy in a world where everyone is greedy. He is, in the author's depiction, a fundamentally good man in a rotten world. And of course, this position is untenable and an awful price has to be extracted.

I must say I found this book less compelling than some of Lehane's wonderful moral tales set in the hard world of South Boston. There were periods when nothing much happens and the narrative tension slackens. The characters don't snap to life, especially the villains who are not sufficiently

villainous. Joe's lover is also two-dimensional. The history was kind of interesting but the setting lacked the immediacy of Lehane's contemporary novels. And I thought the book lost momentum when the scene switched from Boston to Florida -- as if the blazing sun bleached and sapped the narrative strength. That said, it was still an interesting read.

Went Tju

Lehane is a heck of a writer . I suspect he is a liberal but he attempts to at least be a bit fair about social issues. That is the sign of a very good writer. This book is fast paced, has interesting characters, a subplot involving romance and lots of sensible violence. I liked it. I will read the next book in the series. Racial strife always gets the blood boiling and Lehane does a good job of showing people as they really are. A smart book.

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