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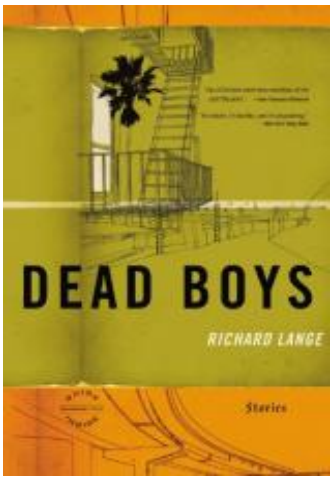
Dead Boys: Stories

by Richard Lange



About the Book

These hard-hitting, deeply felt stories trace men --- straight arrows and outlaws, have-it-alls and outcasts --- as they take stock of their lives and missteps and struggle to rise above their troubled pasts. A salesman considers his tenuous relationship with his sister after she has been brutally attacked. A house painter looks forward to moving his family out of their seedy neighborhood as he plans his last bank robbery. A drifter finds a chance at love when he delivers news of a barfly's death to the man's estranged daughter.

These are hard-boiled tales of life on the edge in a city where the sun hurts your eyes and dreams die more often than they come true. Full of heart and heartbreak, **Dead Boys** is the debut of an astonishingly talented new writer.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the collection?s title, **Dead Boys**, help thematically link these stories? What do you think the author means to imply about the men in these stories from the title?

2. In ?Long Lost,? Spencer observes, ?The streets down here are something else. The sun never quite reaches them over the tops of the building, and those who have chosen to live in this constant twilight collide with those who have no choice and those who are simply, in one way or another, lost? (page 80). How do you think this description of Los Angeles, and the city itself, shape the lives and hopes of the characters in **Dead Boys**? Is there something about the city that attracts characters like these, or something about it that creates them?

3. In ?Loss Prevention,? Jim says, ?There exist certain wildflowers that must be burned in order to bloom, and who?s to say I?m not one of them?? (page 169). To what degree do you believe this is true of Jim, and of other characters in **Dead Boys**?

4. Many of the men in these stories have trouble with the women in their lives. Is there something about these male characters that makes them prone to relationship issues? What about them do you think the women are attracted to?

5. Discuss what happens to the narrator at the end of ?Everything Beautiful Is Far Away?? Does his life end the way John Wayne the monkey?s does, or is there still hope for him?

6. Do you agree with the narrator of ?Bank of America? when he says, of robbing banks, that ?I?d always imagined that when you crossed the line, you saw it coming, but it turned out to be more like gliding over the equator on the open sea. Don?t let them kid you, it?s nothing momentous, going from that to this? (page 41). Do you think anyone is capable of crossing the line, given the right set of circumstances?

7. The narrator in ?Blind- Made Products? betrays Mercedes?s trust in more than one way. Which do think is the most damaging? How does the present- day story of his helping Dee Dee move relate to the flashback of his relationship with Mercedes?

8. In the story ?Dead Boys,? the narrator justifies going car shopping, despite not being able to afford a car, by telling us that, ?I was just driving by and saw the balloons and heard the music. The Glendale Auto Mall. It seemed like a place where something was happening? (page 225). What do you think he means by this? Can other actions he takes in the story be explained by this comment?

Author Bio

Richard Lange?s stories have appeared in *The Sun*, *The Iowa Review* and *Best American Mystery Stories*, and as part of the *Atlantic Monthly*?s Fiction for Kindle series. "Apocrypha" was awarded the 2015 Short Story Dagger by Great Britain's Crime Writers' Association. He is the author of the collections DEAD BOYS and SWEET NOTHING and the novels THIS WICKED WORLD; ANGEL BABY, which won the Hammett Prize from the International Association of Crime Writers; THE SMACK; ROVERS; and JOE HUSTLE. He received the Rosenthal Family Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was a 2009 Guggenheim Fellow.

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