

KIRKUS REVIEWS

CELEBRATING 70 YEARS AS THE NATION'S PREMIER INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW JOURNAL

▷ (STARRED) Ellroy, James
BLOOD'S A ROVER

Ellroy calls this third leg of "The Underworld USA Trilogy" (American Tabloid, 1995, The Cold Six Thousand, 2001) an historical romance, but it's also very much a gangster novel, a political novel, a tragic-comedy, a poignant love story—and remarkably entertaining no matter how you slice it.

The stage is mammoth, and big-time players get to strut around on it: J. Edgar Hoover, Richard Nixon, Howard Hughes, for instance, interacting to make 1968-72 so undeniably colorful. And, to some, so regrettable. No pussyfooting portraits here. Ellroy limns a Nixon convincingly tricky, a pernicious Hoover, fatally poisoned by his own hate-mongering, and a paranoid, physically ruined husk of a Hughes, nicknamed Dracula, and kept alive by daily injections of heaven-knows-what. But it's the lesser-knowns who give this story its strength, particularly the women. Karen Sifakis, out of Smith and Yale, tall, striking and very tough, whose politics are unswervingly left, but who will transcend them when it matters. Joan Rosen Klein is even more emphatically left. And a shade tougher. The daughter and granddaughter of Communists, she's prepared to die for her causes and will kill for them too. Both are powerfully drawn to Dwight Holly, an FBI agent with agendas so byzantine that even Ellroy seems hard-pressed to untangle them. What Dwight lacks in clarity, however, he makes up for in bad-boy charm. The action begins with a daring, daylight Wells Fargo heist that is all meticulous planning and endless betrayals. Snakelike, it coils its venomous way through the novel.

The book is repetitious in places and confusing in others. Still, you won't easily put it down.

(First printing of 100,000. Author tour to Boston, Chicago, Denver, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Portland, Ore., San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, D.C.)