



The Laughing Monsters: A Novel

By Denis Johnson

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The Laughing Monsters: A Novel By Denis Johnson

Denis Johnson's *The Laughing Monsters* is a high-suspense tale of kaleidoscoping loyalties in the post-9/11 world that shows one of our great novelists at the top of his game.

Roland Nair calls himself Scandinavian but travels on a U.S. passport. After ten years' absence, he returns to Freetown, Sierra Leone, to reunite with his friend Michael Adriko. They once made a lot of money here during the country's civil war, and, curious to see whether good luck will strike twice in the same place, Nair has allowed himself to be drawn back to a region he considers hopeless. Adriko is an African who styles himself a soldier of fortune and who claims to have served, at various times, the Ghanaian army, the Kuwaiti Emiri Guard, and the American Green Berets. He's probably broke now, but he remains, at thirty-six, as stirred by his own doubtful schemes as he was a decade ago.

Although Nair believes some kind of money-making plan lies at the back of it all, Adriko's stated reason for inviting his friend to Freetown is for Nair to meet Adriko's fiancée, a grad student from Colorado named Davidia. Together the three set out to visit Adriko's clan in the Uganda-Congo borderland—but each of these travelers is keeping secrets from the others. Their journey through a land abandoned by the future leads Nair, Adriko, and Davidia to meet themselves not in a new light, but rather in a new darkness.

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The Laughing Monsters: A Novel By Denis Johnson Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, November 2014: In this slim, fiery, full-speed-ahead novel, National Book Award winner Denis Johnson has created two of the more memorable characters I've read this year. Roland Nair and Michael Adriko are soldiers, spies, friends, liars. They've fought side by side, witnessed torture and death. They also once made stacks of illicit cash (diamonds), and now Michael has an outrageous plan to make more (uranium - maybe). Years after they last parted, they reunite in Freetown, Sierra Leone, with Michael's innocent and stunning fiancé along for the adventure. Uncowed by the madness and deceptions swirling around them all, Michael is an absolutely shimmering fictional creation -- both an elegant trained killer, and a lovable man-child. He's full of secrets ("more will be revealed" is a verbal tic) and dark wisdom ("people don't quite understand - to be eaten pays a compliment to your power"). He's also lustful, greedy, tormented, violent and, incongruously, hopeful and hilarious. What Michael really wants is love, and family -- the home he's never had. As he drags his friend and fiancé deeper into West Africa, in a desperate search for his long-lost village, we root for Michael, even as this irresistible and infuriating child of war barrels exuberantly toward darkness. In a murky post-9/11 world, Johnson seems to be saying, trust and friendship are what we make them. --*Neal Thompson*

Review

"This high-suspense tale offer a more convincing portrait of amoral intelligence agents and the havoc they wreak than almost any journalistic account of Third World skullduggery" Washington Post Sunday "For all its chaos and complexity, The Laughing Monsters is one of Johnson's most disciplined efforts" -- Nathaniel Rich Atlantic "This echoes of Graham Greene's bleak cynicism and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, it's a gripping romp through a world of corruption, government interference, big business manipulation and all sorts of other shenanigans to boot" -- Doug Johnstone Big Issue "It has an irresistible sense of hopelessness" -- Eva Dolan Metro "Short, sharp-edged and often very funny novel" -- Scott Bradfield Literary Review

About the Author

Denis Johnson is the author of eight novels, one novella, one book of short stories, three collections of poetry, two collections of plays and one book of reportage. His novel Tree of Smoke won the 2007 National Book Award.

Users Review

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Stephanie Wilkes:

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