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Joseph Kanon , Boyd Gaines (Narrator)

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**THE ACCLAIMED, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE GOOD GERMAN AND LOS ALAMOS RETURNS
WITH HIS MOST ABSORBING AND ACCOMPLISHED
NOVEL YET -- A MESMERIZING TALE OF HOLLYWOOD,
POSTWAR POLITICAL INTRIGUE, AND ONE MAN'S
DETERMINATION TO LEARN THE TRUTH
ABOUT HIS BROTHER'S DEATH.**

Hollywood, 1945. Ben Collier has just arrived from wartorn Europe to find that his brother, Daniel, has died in mysterious circumstances. Why would a man with a beautiful wife, a successful career in the movies, and a heroic past choose to kill himself?

Determined to uncover the truth, Ben enters the maze of the studio system and the uneasy world beneath the glossy shine of the movie business. For this is the moment when politics and the dream factories are beginning to collide as Communist witch hunts render the biggest stars and star makers vulnerable. Even here, where the devastation of Europe seems no more real than a painted movie set, the war casts long and dangerous shadows. When Ben learns troubling facts about his own family's past, he is caught in the middle of a web of deception that shakes his moral foundation to its core.

Rich with atmosphere and period detail, *Stardust* flawlessly blends fact and fiction into a haunting thriller evoking both the glory days of the movies and the emergence of a dark strain of American political life. It brilliantly proves why Joseph Kanon has been hailed as the "heir apparent to Graham Greene" (*The Boston Globe*).

Stardust Details

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From Reader Review Stardust for online ebook

James Thane says

Beginning with Los Alamos, Joseph Kanon has written a number of very entertaining books set in a recent historical context. *Stardust: A Novel* is set in Hollywood in the months immediately following World War II, and Kanon creates a vivid portrayal of the time and place that sounds very much like the truth.

Ben Collier, still in the Army, arrives home from Europe to discover that his brother, Danny, a successful movie director, is near death after an apparent suicide attempt. Racing to Daniel's bedside, Ben has a chance meeting on the train with Sol Lasner, head of Continental Pictures. Ben wants to make a documentary about the European death camps and pitches the project to Lasner. The older man takes a shine to Ben and ultimately agrees to let him make the film.

Shortly after Ben arrives in L.A., his brother dies. Ben refuses to believe that Danny would have committed suicide and so, while making his documentary, he also investigates the circumstances of his brother's death, determined to find the truth.

Kanon immerses Ben--and the reader--in the Hollywood of the mid-1940s. The world is changing, and the motion picture industry is under threat on a number of fronts. The public's taste in movies is changing; television is on the horizon, and the industry is also threatened by unscrupulous politicians who hope to make names for themselves by searching for Communists within the movie business. Ben Collier has a ringside seat for all of it, but his search for the truth about his brother's death unsettles any number of people and ultimately places Ben in danger of losing his own life.

The story occasionally loses momentum, and Kanon clearly appears to be more interested in recreating the time and place than he is in Ben's investigation, but he does the former extremely well. As a result, this book will appeal much more to readers who enjoy historical mysteries than to those looking simply for a good crime novel.

Ed says

I'm conflicted about this book. The topic, post WW II witch hunting for communists in the movie industry, is something I am interested in. The characters are interesting and believable. The plot, though, is often confusing.

Ben Collier returns from Europe to hear that his very successful and heroic brother, Daniel, has committed suicide. The rest of the story involves Ben trying to find out the truth, while producing a documentary about the Death Camps. As a result he becomes an insider in the movie industry and is eventually recruited to expose possible communist influence by a publicity hungry congressman, Ken Minot.

There are numerous sub-plots, some of which contribute to the plot confusion. Kanon's writing style does not help clarify things, either. He introduces characters willy-nilly, some of whom disappear never to be seen again while others become an integral part of the story. Towards the end of the book, I often had to go back to figure out "who was who in the zoo". The fact that many of the characters were emigre Germans didn't help.

In the conclusion, we do find out what really happened, but it comes across as essentially meaningless. It is disappointing to navigate through 500+ pages only to be let down at the end. Nevertheless, the total story was inherently interesting because of its focus on Hollywood, the post-war political climate, and the travails of German Jews before and during the war.

Michaela says

I feel like big chunks of this book are ... missing? I found myself lost -- and not in a good way a lot of the time. I know the time period, I love noir, etc. This was not a homage, it was just poorly done. Impossible to keep track of the (fictional) characters (the real-life ones stood out because they were, in reality, strong, vibrant personalities, unlike any of this book's fabricated characters), especially with the "surprise" culprit. Was expecting better; pretty disappointing.

Also, I have to say, as a Hollywood and WWII history nerd, the fact that Kanon played so fast and loose in such a blase (see the interview in the back of the paperback edition) way with the real timeline of the blacklisting, etc. was probably the most disorienting thing. I feel for the guy; he was trying to do American noir after doing the Berlin version, and just bombed out.

Keith says

First-class period fiction the way it should be written. Kanon's story of Hollywood during the period immediately following World War II captures the glamour of the studio system and personalities of the heyday of the 1930's but foreshadows the eminent achromatization of a changing world. Ben Collier, still in uniform, returns from Europe to find his brother on his death bed and becomes involved in the mystery of his death. Was it attempted suicide, an accident or murder? Was his beautiful but seemingly cold widow, Liesl somehow involved? Should he have the feelings that he does about his brother's wife? Kanon sweeps the reader along in a breathless mystery with fictional characters that seem real and a "stream of conscience" style that captures the flavor of events that are complex enough that you don't figure it all out until Ben does.

Heather says

Overall I enjoyed this book; it had an interesting narrative, included real events, and made them interesting. The author's clearly done his research on this time period.

I had some trouble with the writing style. There were so many misplaced modifiers, that I had trouble following who was saying what and had to re-read passages to figure things out.

Also, it was a bit long with no real purpose for being so.

It's worth reading, but I thought the ending could have been more clearly explained and more compelling.

Christine Zibas says

The best mysteries take their readers into another world, and capture their imaginations with puzzling human behavior. Joseph Kanon is surely one of the best, as demonstrated in his recent book, *Stardust*. While using a particular historical milieu can be tricky (not all readers are interested in the same events or historical era), Kanon wisely uses the nearly universal lure of Hollywood's glamour to lure his readers into this mystery.

The Hollywood of Kanon's *Stardust* is that of 1945, just after the end of World War II, when life in the United States is a mixture of the memories and impact of the recent war and a new hope for the country. It's also a time of government probes questioning loyalty within the country, with a perceived Red Menace (American Communists), which is thought to be a danger to the country. Of course, in Hollywood, it's the era of the studio movie, with big name stars dominating the screens and dreams of movie makers (while the impending worry of television's popularity lies just beyond the immediate horizon).

Against this backdrop is the story of Ben Collier, a GI who makes news reels about the war, taking the train out to California with the disturbing news of his brother's recent suicide attempt. While on the train heading west, Ben is befriended by a studio head, who will later agree to help Ben make a documentary about the concentration camps and those who died in them. Overshadowing it all, however is the mystery of his brother, Daniel.

A war hero and successful movie maker, it seems unfathomable that Daniel would take his own life, as asserted by the studio (which positions it as an accident for the press). There is also some speculation that Daniel's actions may have been the result of an affair, having occurred at a rented apartment no one knew about. Only Ben thinks foul play was involved, and is determined to pursue the question to its stunning end.

It's a richly layered story, with reverberations of World War II and the family history (with links to Germany and Daniel's role in helping people escape from Nazi Germany to freedom). There's also the component of McCarthyism and the years of blacklisting and trials that affected so many working in Hollywood. Then there's the working world of motion pictures, and Kanon takes his readers deep into the studios with this story. Most of all, it is a tale of knowing another person. The revelations about Ben's brother and the suicide/murder end up to be quite stunning.

In all, Kanon has created a unique world for his readers, with a good use of the historical time frame, capitalizing on what people know generally, and then taking that one step further. He has created interesting characters and relationships, and keeps readers on edge as they try to ferret out who the good guys and bad guys really are. He provides extraordinary insight into relationships of all types (family, love, professional, friendship) in his novel. *Stardust* provides readers with a fascinating story that, at the end of the day, is so much more than the average mystery.

Shelley says

I'm torn on this. The atmosphere is incredible - noirish story of Ben, leaving the army in 1946 and heading to Hollywood because his director brother has apparently killed himself. Ben doesn't believe it and starts investigating. You've got elements of Hollywood, Communism, love, betrayal, murder, and more. It got pretty convoluted and complicated and I'm not sure that's a good thing. I loved the look at golden age Hollywood and all the back scene back stabbing and manipulations, but it just went places I wasn't totally

sold on.

Charlie Boswell says

Kanon has moved a bit from his usual WWII milieu to the years immediately after when some in government worried about Communists under every bed. This is a first rate mystery with major insights into the movie industry of the period (many historical characters), lingering hostilities due to the war, family secrets, and a host of really interesting folk. Kanon continues to write really good dialogue and create a believable historical background. Highly recommended.

Madeline Ashby says

My mother (who very much needs a Goodreads account) referred this to us. It's compulsively readable, sexy, and intelligent. I carried it with me everywhere until I finished it.

As a mystery novel, Stardust is almost perfect. It does everything that a good Elizabeth George or James Ellroy novel does, but in shorter time and with more grace. It revolves around the protagonist's search for his brother's killer, and his simultaneous attempts to find financing for a documentary on the Holocaust and to reconcile his politicized childhood in Germany. Like any good mystery novel there are several other puzzles to solve surrounding the primary one, and these are clouded by memory, nostalgia, hurt, and arousal. The story is set in Hollywood, and all the characters are too used to playing a part to be genuine with each other or with themselves.

That said, don't expect a jaded, cynical story. There are wonderful moments of true emotion, here. That's what sets the story apart from the majority of mysteries you could read this year. This isn't a story about Sam Spade or Mike Hammer or any of the other noir anti-heroes who have had all feeling beaten out of them by life. Ben Collier has survived the war and bears the scars of it, but still confronts his future with a relatively open heart and mind. It's refreshing, and it keeps you rooting for him throughout, even when he makes the occasional misstep. It also makes the end all the more satisfying -- not only has the mystery been solved, but Ben has grown and is better prepared to face post-war life.

Susan says

Stardust was a pick for my mystery book club. I had never read Kanon before so I was unfamiliar with his previous books. The book started off well capturing my interest. I liked the introduction of Ben and his meetings of Sol, Paulette, Fay, and Liesl. It was also interesting seeing Ben's brief reunion with Danny and meeting Liesl's family. Then the book lost me for a bit and I struggled to keep at it. I did keep at it, and overall the story was good. I wasn't able to figure out what really happened to Danny before the end because the book had many twists and turns. The character development of Ben was good, and as a reader I cared about Ben and what happened to him. Although the character that did grab my attention was Sol even though he wasn't a major part of the story and plot. I liked the relationship being built between Ben and Sol, and I liked reading about Sol bringing Ben into his world. Sol hadn't had any kids, and since Ben's father wasn't part of his life it was this relationship that stood out in the story for me. Overall the book had a good mystery, but I'm not sure if I will seek out another book by this author.

Pam says

When you want Hollywood in its golden age - Bogart, trench coats, Bergman, long dresses with sparkling jewels, LA sunsets, studio lots - read this book. I've admired Kanon since he wrote his Edgar-awarding winning *Los Alamos*. He does atmosphere better than anyone. He starts with an elegant, trans-continental train journey at the close of WWII with a movie studio head and an American GI pitching the government's idea for a movie documentary about the concentration camps. The GI is the son of a famous German director killed by the Nazis before the war. From there the scene moves to Hollywood complete with a brother who attempted suicide (or not) despite a successful directing career of his own complete with a movie star home (think pool, projection room, etc.) and gorgeous wife. Into this mix comes a McCarthy-era politician, gossip columnist to the stars, a child star grown too old for the screen, communists, immigrants wanting to return home, and the remote horrors of the war. Espionage, love, murder, FBI, and even Tijuana then get pulled into the wide-angle lens of Kanon. He is terrific and I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book.

Ben says

Thoroughly enjoyable mystery set in post-World War II Hollywood. You get some noir, some love story, some Hollywood glitter, as well as the good-for-your-brain "history" of the German emigre experience and the horrors of the early HUAC (or at least a fictional version of the HUAC). I occasionally felt like Ben (our gumshoe hero) gets his clues handed to him a little too easily, but there are still plenty of twists and turns. And a slimy senator gets his comeuppance from a studio head—which does read exactly like a scene from a movie, but it stirs up the righteous indignation like few things can. Recommended.

Leslie says

This is one of those books that is good but would be better if it were shorter, like about a hundred pages shorter. A tougher editor would have forced cuts that would have produced a stronger, tighter, leaner, more propulsive book. I like long books, but they need to earn their length, and this one doesn't.

Steph (loves water) says

Mr. Kanon did a fantastic job with atmosphere, authentic Hollywood post WW2, very noir. Points for that. However, the book was entirely too long. I could have lived without the multiple kaffeeklatsches with the Germans. That would've cut the book down about two hundred pages (I exaggerate). I did like the ending very much. Four stars for atmosphere, two for the story, rounded up to three stars. I wanted to give it four but really did not care in the end about the Germans.

Al says

Immediately post WW II, Ben Collier is on leave from the army and learns of the death of his brother, a film industry executive, in a fall from a hotel balcony in LA. Ben's journey to LA and his relentless search for the facts of his brother's death drive the plot. Along the way, the author explores the film industry of the time, the witch hunt for Communists in the industry, and the plight of German refugees adrift in post-war America. Ben encounters movie executives and stars, reporters, bad guys, and his brother's widow (not necessarily in that order).

I've read Canon's whole kanon; oops, I mean Kanon's whole canon. Maybe I would have liked this book more if I had read it earlier in the list. The good things about the book are that Kanon has a good feel for dialogue, his writing is clean, and his general evocation of the period seems very realistic. The bad things are that the book is w-a-y too long, Ben is way too clever and lucky, and the major premise of the book is very forced. Add to all that a truly impossible finale, and it just doesn't come up to his other work. One has the feeling that Kanon just wanted to write an homage to this period and the Communist witch-hunt, and the story was sort of an afterthought.
