



# King of the Jews

*Nick Tosches*

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## King of the Jews Nick Tosches

So begins **Nick Tosches's** sprawling biography of Arnold Rothstein, which, in fact, is so much more: not only an elegy to old New York but an idiosyncratic history of the world as told in Nick Tosches's inimitable style.

Known by many names -- A. R., Mr. Big, The Fixer, The Big Bankroll, The Man Uptown, and The Brain -- Rothstein seemed more myth than man. He was gambling, and he was money. The inspiration for Meyer Wolfsheim in **The Great Gatsby** and Nathan Detroit in *Guys and Dolls*, he was rumored to be the mastermind of the Black Sox scandal, the fixing of the 1919 World Series. He was Mr. Broadway and had his own booth at Lindy's Restaurant in Manhattan, where he held court.

Now, in **King of the Jews**, Nick Tosches, "one of the greatest living American writers" (*Dallas Observer*), examines Rothstein's extraordinary legacy by placing him at the center of nothing less than the history of the entire Western world.

## King of the Jews Details

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Author : Nick Tosches

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# From Reader Review King of the Jews for online ebook

## Leonard Pierce says

Arnold Rothstein, the original Tough Jew of the 20th century, was the first man to see the criminal profit potential in Prohibition, and he rigged the goddamn World Series and got away with it. Why would you not want to read about a guy like that, especially if Nick Tosches does the writing?

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## Brian says

This book was not about Abe. This was a wandering journey around New York in the early 1900's and before. Tosches is clearly a skilled writer and that made this book tolerable as a whole, even if parts were not. Good enough writing to give another one of his books a try at some point during a drought of ready material.

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## Mat says

I'm sure almost all of you have heard of the term 'anti-Semite', right? And probably most of you are familiar with the term 'anti-hero'? So would it be okay to use the word 'anti-biography'? Because that is the only term that comes to mind which comes close to describing what this book actually is.

First, some background as to how this book came into my hands. Although the series of *Boardwalk Empire* has long since finished, I always find myself out-of-touch with what is popular at the time. And part of me doesn't care. Because the really good stuff is timeless and so if it is timeless, does it matter at which point in time you latch onto it? A co-worker (and friend of mine) and yours truly were just shooting the breeze in the office one day and suddenly we got around to talking about *Boardwalk Empire*, who our favourite characters were, yada yada and eventually the conversation slowly gravitated, inevitably, towards Arnold Rothstein, AKA 'A.R.' or 'The Big Bankroll' just a few of the many monikers by which this man was known. My co-worker friend then mentioned that he had a biography on AR if I was interested. As I was big-time into *Boardwalk Empire* at the time (and still am) I instantly said 'yes', eagerly awaiting the moment to sit down and read more about this mysterious, but dangerously intelligent man, if we can trust the little information we have on Rothstein (which is one of the author's main points actually).

However, if I had actually gone ahead and purchased this book thinking that I was going to read a biography, I would have been seriously seriously pissed off, to the point where I probably would have asked for my money back. Because it's not a biography in any conventional sense of how we have to come think of what a biography should be, what it should encompass and so on. However, what I ended up liking about this book was how Tosches challenges the....'brazenness'! (yes that's the word) of most biographers and shows how if we dig a little bit deeper for background information on sources, most biographies would soon look like raggedy boats with more holes and leaks in them than the Titanic. And I agree with him on this.

Having said that, what I DIDN'T like about this book is how the elements are too disparate. I don't mean that it's not cohesive enough in its content. I mean, I get to the end of the book and wonder what in God's name were those first 200 pages of this biography even doing placed inside this book? There is so much

information in this book, and this is the interesting part because there is a lot of really really fascinating info in this book, but I failed to connect most of the dots. Or maybe that's it - maybe there aren't any dots to connect to form a whole. This book was more something like a collection of thoughts and notes related to Arnold Rothstein, the history of religions (especially the Jewish faith), the history of the underbelly of New York and a history of the Jews of New York all wrapped up into one enigma inside an even bigger mystery, coated in the thick chocolate sauce of a puzzle.

So, to conclude, I don't even know how to rate this book - as a biography? as a piece of fascinating writing? as a form of condemnation of priggish, confident (and lying) other biographers? You read it and tell me.

Now, the million dollar question is....is this book worth reading?

In my opinion, the last 100 pages are worth reading - this mostly focuses on Rothstein's gambling habits, a sort of deconstruction/analysis of the infamous fixing of the 1919 World Series, which AR may or may not have been responsible for etc...Secondly and finally, Tosches is a very good writer for the most part and that is one of the redeeming factors about this book. If he wasn't a good writer, I probably would have given up on this book after the first 80 pages or so.

But do not read this if you are looking for a traditional biography. Although I'm sure it is very very inaccurate, I'm going back to watch *Boardwalk Empire* - not for an accurate account of Rothstein's life because I know I won't get it there but just for an interesting fictitious interpretation of who he might have been.

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## **Abraham Lewik says**

An exceeding-a-lingly difficult book to judge. Not what I expected, but excellent nonetheless, but not excellent in the genre to which it belongs. Consider this an exercise in critical reading, which parts to skim and where to go slow. There is filler material. It is often quite fun. Why should the corrupt politicians of the past be thrown down when it imply a clean gene pool for the next generation of civil servants? Has your mayor once delivered the post or taken away the rubbish?

It is written as though a most successful criminal of the era was it's subject. Which denotes sex & drugs & rock'n'roll but implies conspiracy. Thoroughly grounded in the era when opium was legally shipped then first made illegal, it's the little flourishes which make it seem a bit rich in moments. Impoverished in other moment, certainly, yet the courtroom records yield repute and the section on "four sportin' events: rat killing by a weasel, rat killing by a dog, rat killing by a man, and dogfighting" gives the secure foundation of Mr. Rothstein's criminal impulse.

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## **Greg says**

An interesting exercise in how to write a fully truthful biography about someone who there is an utter lack of actual facts about. Meandering and chock of all kinds of facts about all kinds of subjects, except about the subject of the book. Worth reading just for his rants equating NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg to Adolph Hitler.

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## **Ali says**

Arnold Rothstein is a very interesting character and his interview with Zoe Beckley as compared to what is known of him historically is both amusing and insightful.

However; my praise of Tosches' book ends there. His many tangents and mini porn scenes are both irrelevant and at times offending. He tries to tie them in as messianic irony as he chastises both the Jewish and Christian faithful. Tosches seems to me to have had two separate books in his head, and was unable to either stick to one long enough to complete it, or even to research either to their fullest extent. He could have easily focused in on Rothstein and the going-ons of the time and told an interesting bit of history. But instead he defaulted to taking pot-shots at his personal pet-peeves and using a supposed 'biography' as a soap-box for his sermon.

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## **Jeffrey says**

I thought this book would be a gonzo gangster story similar to "In the Hand of Dante", and it became a pseudo-history of the Jews in NYC.

The historical allegations are self-referential enough to annoy any historian. The gangster story circles around the crime without getting into details.

The book is entertaining and pleasant. It is not preachy, nor overly long, nor too detailed.

The strength of "King of the Jews" is dragging the reader into a historical fiction, while the poor sucker expects a detective novel. It's a swindle worthy of Arnold Rothstein.

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## **Maureen says**

Oh yeah, Arnold Rothstein, the first Jewish organized crime boss, rum runner, and helluva guy. In many ways, this is Nick Tosches' paean to New York, and a lot of it is a straight-up rant, done in the style that only Nick and Lester Bangs can achieve. This is the 4 a.m. chain-smoking, thirteenth whiskey kind of writing that makes me yearn for more.

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## **Bro\_Pair ????** says

What a piece of shit. Did you somehow get it in your head this would be a biography of gangster Arnold Rothstein? What a sap. We get to Arnold's birth on page 181. I'd say there's maybe about 50 solid pages of writing about Rothstein's life in a 315 page book; it's fine it doesn't have an index, as there's no information you'd need to look up. In between comparisons of the NYC smoking ban to Nazi Germany domestic policies, and (I'm not joking) soft-core intercalary chapters about a woman fucking Jesus, Tosches finds time to block-quote other sources. What are these sources? Well, you're in luck if you were eager to learn, at tedious length, what other, non-Tosches authors have written about subjects like dice, 18th century Jewish fraternal organizations, and Henry Ford. Most of them are not sources about, say, Arnold Rothstein -- any mention of

a previous account of the subject's life is introduced so that Tosches can triumphantly mock the biographer as a grifting liar, conned by fabulists and invented stories.

Not so with Tosches, who's a street-smart guy. You can tell that because he writes about smoking, and drinks in bars you've never heard of, and breaks the fourth wall to be transgressive and edgy. And a street-smart guy would never -- and I'm just guessing here -- sign a contract to turn a Vanity Fair article about Rothstein into a book, panic upon realizing that no amount of research will uncover enough material with which to construct a biography, and instead, pad two covers with a few hundred pages of "retarded sexuality and bad poetry."

This is gonzo gone very bad, and while Tosches has written worthwhile work, writing of this sort should be dealt with ruthlessly. Arnold Rothstein would demand it.

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### **Brian K. says**

More than a biography... Nick weaves the story of supposed Mob moneyman Arnold Rothstein, with historical context and insightful commentary on common culture.

If you're looking for a straightforward biography, go somewhere else. If you're looking for a good story, read this one.

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### **Greg Correll says**

Halfway through and this is like Weekley's lexicography on mini-bennies and mushrooms. Nick makes my teeth ache he's so good. as he veers into peers into found moments, marginalia, meta-narratives a paragraph long, a re-raveling exploration of Hebrew etymology, and more. Death bed hijinks with lawyers. Arnold's cipher father, a Jew from Bessarabia named Harris, go figure, infected by Five Points in the mid-1800s.

This is bravura poetry and rich history. He has more in common with James Elroy than with Susan Wise Bauer (but they make a fabulous trio, and Susan is sly and brilliant in her innovative chapter structures of her first two world history volumes).

I love and learn from every page of "King of the Jews", as a writer, from his exuberant, confident audacity of how he structures the information to how he integrates idiosyncratic prose poetry forms into a history of a charismatic criminal, for goodness' sake.

As a landzman, Rothstein is a shande fur de goyim, a shame before the goyim, to me. Which makes him fascinating. Tosches skates to the edge but with firm control, as he considers Jewish character and history with frank and fresh eyes. I am hyper-aware of slights to the tribe; this book is brilliant.

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### **Harold says**

Ehhhhh. Interesting at times but it's all over the place. Not that much about Rothstein. I guess one of the problems is that maybe not that much is really known about his business. By necessity considering his business.

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**Patrick Brown says**

I'm a Nick Tosches fan -- and there was some of his characteristically caustic style here -- but my fucking god was this book self-indulgent. I can't see what the smoking ban in New York City bars has to do with the great and powerful Arnold Rothstein. Anybody else read this train wreck?

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**Matthew says**

such a great book

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**Patrick DiJusto says**

Nick Tosches writing can best be described as "Oooh, look at me, I'm writing a book about Arnold Rothstein. But even when I'm talking about Arnold Rothstein, I'm talking about me. Did you notice how I put that word next to that other word? That's writing. That's what I'm doing right now. Notice how I'm talking about me again? Despite what everyone thinks, Arnold Rothstein probably didn't actually fix the 1919 world series, I discovered. Did you notice who discovered that? Me. I did. Notice how I'm talking about me again? The Jews suffered from anti-Semitism. I had nothing to do with that. Look at how well I researched Arnold Rothstein's family, back to his grandfather. You don't want to read about his grandfather. Fuck you, I'm the writer here, not you. F. Scott Fitzgerald was a shitty writer. Not like me. Notice how I'm talking about me again? Arnold Rothstein got shot, and someone forged his will. Fucking lawyers, man."

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