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John Connolly and James "Whitey" Bulger grew up together on the streets of South Boston. Decades later, in the mid 1970's, they would meet again. By then, Connolly was a major figure in the FBI's Boston office and Whitey had become godfather of the Irish Mob. What happened next -- a dirty deal to bring down the Italian mob in exchange for protection for Bulger -- would spiral out of control, leading to murders, drug dealing, racketeering indictments, and, ultimately, the biggest informant scandal in the history of the FBI.

Compellingly told by two *Boston Globe* reporters who were on the case from the beginning, *Black Mass* is at once a riveting crime story, a cautionary tale about the abuse of power, and a penetrating look at Boston and its Irish population.

Black Mass Details

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From Reader Review *Black Mass* for online ebook

Wayland Smith says

A lot of crimes get solved by criminals informing on each other. It's not pretty, but it's how it works. So developing a good informant is what you want to do in law enforcement, right? Well, only if you stay within certain limits. This is about people going far beyond those limits.

Whitey Bulger was a criminal from the Boston neighborhood known as "Southie." He and his buddy Steve Flemmi got involved in more and more serious crimes, knocking their competition out of the way through the usual routes of extortion, threats, and murder, but with an ace in the hole: both Bulger and Flemmi were informants for the FBI, and crooked agent John Connolly went from being their handler to their co-conspirator. Connolly broke every rule in the book, and many laws, to keep his informants safe... from law enforcement. They thwarted investigations by local police, state troopers, and even other Federal agencies.

This is a story of crime, corruption, crossing lines, and a criminal enterprise that sounds like it should be a tv show (the case *was* made into a movie). FBI agents go bad, criminals prosper, and finally, eventually, the truth comes out due to some very persistent prosecutors and some non-tainted law enforcement. It's a scary tale about how bad it can get when the system goes wrong.

Kelly says

Not the best read if you are looking for a story-telling version of these events (as this is not the type of book to give you the play-by-play-on-the-scene action and dialogue of a good story). But, a fantastic book if you are looking for a solid background on the life of the notorious Southie Irish gangster Whitey Bulgar, his associates, and their corrupted relationships with the FBI.

It was fascinating to read about Bulgar/FBI's relationship, and how they progressed over time. All starting with a deal between Bulgar and an FBI agent. Bulgar chose to secretly inform this FBI agent on rival Italian mobsters, for his own benefit of taking control of criminal activities in the area. In exchange, the FBI gained important information to take down their number one target: the Italian mob.

This deal eventually lead to the FBI agent (for his own professional interests) being protective over his key informant, to turning his a blind eye to Bulgars criminal activities, to a friendship between him and Bulgar, to corruption and bribery, and eventually to the agent actually assisting Bulgar on his crime-spree and becoming an accessory. It was equally fascinating to read just how long they all got away with it!

3.5 stars

Grace says

When I was in my early teens I had an unhealthy obsession with the mafia. I read every single book Mario

Puzo wrote, *The Way of the Wiseguy*, Joey Pistone's *Donnie Brasco* among other mafia books. Reading *Black Mass* was like returning to an old friend, but I'm no longer a pre-teen. I now know that besides just protecting their family, the people in the mafia actually killed some people who were not bad guys. See, as a kid I figured that they just killed each other, and since they were bad guys, no harm, no fowl.

Reading *Black Mass* was agonizing because you saw it getting worse. You read about the bad guys get away with all sorts of shit and the FBI get dirtier and dirtier and dirtier. I had to keep reading, but it got pretty disgusting. Yuck. Glad that I revisited the genre, and I can safely say that my secret career plan is no longer to join a "family". Also, right after I finished reading it I heard on NPR that Whitey Bulger was finally caught. If you have an unhealthy fascination with the mafia read this book, but otherwise, just read the Wiki article.

Gina says

The term "black mass" essentially refers to a deal with the devil. In this case it refers to a handshake deal between criminals Whitey Bulger and Steve Flemmi and their FBI handlers John Connolly and John Morris, with a few others, to do pretty much whatever criminal activity they wanted as long as they fed them some occasional tips on other mobsters. Those tips, of course, paved the way for Bulger and Flemmi to run the gun, drug, and off book betting trade in Boston in the 1970s-1980s.

The story is fascinating if not new. The government has collaborated with criminals to its own ends many times (this book mentions a few). What makes this one important is how long the collaboration continued and the direct impact the criminal activity had on the citizens and neighborhoods of Boston. It is obviously written by journalists as it moves from fact to fact to fact with little room for exposition. When exposition is attempted, it is awkward. Several facts are mentioned but dropped as it doesn't forward the core story. Good for the book, but as a reader I would have found more details on Bulger's rape charges while in the military or details in the murder of one of Flemmi's long time girlfriends interesting.

I haven't yet watched the movie. This served to make me more interested in the subject matter.

Brina says

Earlier this year I for the first time read Mario Puzo's iconic *The Godfather* and then watched the trilogy of films. A genre changing experience, Puzo glorified organized crime while also bringing underworld dealings out of the shadows. Following the publication of this now modern classic book, a myriad of books and films featuring the mafia emerged. Last week I noticed a goodreads friend Becky had reviewed *Black Mass*, the true story of a deal between Irish mobsters and their FBI handlers written by Boston Globe reporters Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill. Having had a positive experience with *The Godfather*, I decided to pique my interest and read about the dirty dealings of the Boston crime underworld.

The South Boston neighborhood has long been considered a poor younger sibling to its swanky northern Boston locales. Long populated by generations of Irish immigrants, ties to the neighborhood run deeper than blood. With the catholic church, schools, and Irish towns of origins being ethnic markers, gangs quickly formed among the neighborhood boys. As Southie fathers worked long hours at blue collar jobs to support

growing families and mothers relegated to the role of homemaker, boys joining gangs became a rite of passage in which they may have experienced more love and attention than they did in their home life. As the middle brother in a family of six children, James "Whitey" Bulger soon found a 'home' in Howie Winter's Winter Hill gang. Quickly rising through the ranks, Bulger's persona soon grew to legend proportions in his South Boston Irish neighborhood. His charismatic albeit pushy personality caught the attention of many younger kids including one John Connelly. The two Southie natives would be linked for the rest of their long, tumultuous lives.

It is 1975. Having finally been transferred to the Boston office of the FBI following a stint in Manhattan, John Connelly is assigned to handle the wheelings and dealings between the Irish and Italian mafia. With Irish leader Howie Winter on the lam and members of the Italian Angiulo targeted by the feds or imprisoned, Whitey Bulger and his go to pal Stevie Flemmi look to fill the power vacuum and take over the Boston underworld. With one of his own now entrenched in the FBI office, Bulger was ripe to take over as the crime king of Beantown. Soon, a deal followed with Bulger and Flemmi becoming key FBI informants to Connelly and his superior officers including John Morris. In exchange for information on a whos who list of Boston Mafioso personalities, Bulger and Flemmi would go on to enjoy immunity from indictment for the next thirty years.

In all Bulger and Flemmi would go on to be involved with every crime imaginable including drug trafficking, money laundering and extortion, and having a hand in twenty one murders over a twenty year period. With the unwritten South Boston rule against ratting a fellow Southie to the authorities, the two would operate in broad daylight and little could be done to stop their rise to power. Each time the FBI moved toward a conviction, Connelly would tip off the pair and like clockwork they would disappear. Additionally, should any South Boston family man question Bulger's authority, he would conveniently be put out of business or worse found to be disappeared within days. The case of Stephen and Julie Rakes' South Boston Liquor store epitomizes how Bulger and his underlings would threaten decent citizens until they got the result that they desired and would stop at nothing short of murder to get what they wanted. In short, Bulger was the feared underworld king of Boston.

Bulger and Flemmi might still be operating today if it was not for a chance meeting between ousted FBI operative John Morris and Boston Globe reporter Dick Lehr, an author of this book. Hinting that Bulger had long been used as an informant, Lehr, O'Neill, and a team of reporters slowly started a fact finding mission to uncover the dirt on Bulger. As word started to leak out, Bulger's grip on the Boston's underworld started to unravel, and he found himself on the lam, as had many of his mafia bosses before him. Fingers started to point as Bulger, Flemmi, Connelly, and Morris all blamed each other for the corruption, and none were willing to talk to authorities until they were guaranteed full immunity and absolved from wrong doing. Despite believing the opposite, none of the four key operatives found himself to be above the law when indictments fell.

Black Mass has been reissued four times and has been made into a movie starring Johnny Depp and Kevin Bacon. If it is as thrilling as the book, I should be in for a fun ride. Lehr and O'Neill have penned Black Mass in thrilling fashion in the style of old fashioned journalism that is sure to fall by the wayside as newspapers continue to decline. It is through their efforts that the Boston Irish mafia finally got their due in court and saw key players brought to justice. Quoting The Godfather on more than one occasion, Lehr and O'Neill did not forget to remind readers that this is unfortunately a true story albeit molded after the iconic Corleone principle of omerta. As ties still run strong in South Boston, the FBI continues to be on high alert for suspicious underworld activities occurring there. Black Mass was a thrilling way to spend a gloomy, December weekend and I look forward to revisiting this story on film.

4 stars

Samantha says

For any reader looking for a dramatic, engrossing true crime story, this one is fantastic. It is well organized, well written, and because of Whitey's recent capture, well timed! (well: the book has been edited since his capture; it originally came out well before.)

I won't say much except that the Bulger/Flemmi alliance with the Boston FBI is a story that should have been made up. How a relationship this corrupt could have happened, and happened for so long, is just gross/despicable/infuriating/you name it. And I'm not naive; I doubt Boston is that clean right now--but I'd like to believe I live and work in a less corrupt town than the one that's described in this book.

On a related note, knowing more about the Whitey case only disappoints me that Billy Bulger won't follow his brother to prison. I think the pair both deserve severe punishment for different yet overlapping reasons. Not only am I convinced that Billy knew exactly what his brother was doing for decades, and lied and lied and lied about it, I am positive that he did nothing to deter what he saw, heard, or knew because his brother's "bullying" (extortion and executions) benefited him: it gave him absolute power of Boston from every angle.

Lastly, I want to share my biggest fear, which is not that Whitey will go free, but that his evilness is almost iconic enough and cool enough to get him out of the level of trouble and isolation he deserves.

Nancy Oakes says

The scene is Boston, starting in the 1970s. The FBI has made it a top priority to clamp down on organized crime (in this case, the Mafia, populated by the Italians of North Boston). John Connolly, a very young FBI agent, is called to the Boston office to work in the Organized Crime unit. The idea was that if he could find someone to rat out the Italians, the FBI's job would be made much easier. Connolly begins to cultivate James (Whitey) Bulger, a former acquaintance from Connolly's old neighborhood in South Boston. Bulger was a career criminal, beginning his future occupation as a young boy, and he and one of his associates, Steve Flemmi, had ties to the Italian mob in Boston. Whitey was also part of a gang in Southie. He became an informant for the FBI, and in return, he was given protection by the FBI. His information was very helpful and did help to put away some of the Mafia guys, but in the meantime, he also gave info on anyone in South Boston that he considered might be standing in his own way as he rose up through the ranks of the criminal underworld.

The authors, Lehr and O'Neill, used a variety of first-hand sources to not only write this book, but to break the entire story in the Boston Globe. What they examine here is basically the true cost of the information provided by Bulger. While he's giving them good information, he's also being allowed to literally get away with murder.

I won't go further into this book, but I picked it up the other night and could hardly put it down once I started. I guarantee you that if you have an interest in organized crime, this is a no-miss story. I would like to say that I was appalled by the sheer abuse of power from members of an institution created to protect the

American public, but frankly, it's getting harder and harder to be surprised any more.

Very well written and very taut; I highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in organized crime, the FBI, in the so-called Irish Mob in the United States or in true crime in general.

CC says

Written by Boston Globe reporters, Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neal, *Black Mass* is the true story of how members of Boston's Irish mob used their relationship with their childhood pal and newly appointed FBI agent, John Connolly, to become informants against their competition, the Italian mob. All the while, they continue with their own crime, corruption, and murder without reprimand, until a defense attorney, named Cardinale, exposes the decades long travesty.

All this has the potential to be explosive. Unfortunately, the writing itself puts the reader at arm's length. Most of it reads as a dry list of facts rather than a journey into the story, or people. I don't know. There were so many meandering details that after a while I gave up trying to figure out what was supposed to be important and what was just another meandering detail. The book does spark in the last third, when Cardinale finally arrives. He anchored the story and gave it forward momentum -- something was finally happening! Better late than never, though it was too late to make this a truly captivating read.

Jacky Mac says

Being from Boston, Whitey Bulgar has always been a 'local legend' and I have read several books about him and his life of crime. This book was the most articulate and detailed. It included shocking facts about corruption and misguided loyalty. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes crime or non-fiction books.

Emily says

Too much FBI, not enough gangsters.

Bonnie says

I've always been intrigued by biographical Mafia stories, but this account of the boundaries crossed by the FBI was shocking. That officials went above and beyond to protect criminals who were committing murder, to leak secrets compromising hundreds of man-hours of work, and to tell lie after boldface lie was straight out of Hollywood. Looking forward to watching the movie at the end of week to see how it correlated to the book.

Becky says

I was absolutely glued to this book after the first 30 pages where the South Boston scene is set. I know jack about south Boston, I'm not really drawn to books about crime, but this is book was immaculately researched and wholly unbelievable, and yet its all true. I think its an especially important book as you see the evolution of wiretapping and information gathering culminating in today's Patriot Act. A good book to devour.

Robert Palmer says

This book is a fascinating topic of the FBI (John Connolly) getting in bed with the MOB (Whitey Bulge) and it took the justice department about 20 years to figure it out and finally bringing both Men before the court. I do believe that the Authors spent a lot of time researching the lives of both Men,who both grew up in South Boston and formed a partnership that as the title of the book tells us "a devils deal " it reminded me of an old saying " the devil is in the details " . However no matter how much researching they did, the writing was not very good,in chapter after chapter they told the same story over and over again, I began to think they were getting paid by word (just like publishers of Pulp fiction used to do)

Michaela says

The Black Mass by Dick Lehr is a story of an alliance between the FBI and the Irish Mob. This novel recounts the alliance itself, the relationships between Mob bosses and FBI agents, and also with the Italian Mafia. Dick Lehr tells the story with exceptional details and first hand accounts of some of the most famous mobsters of all time.

The novel is focuses on the two main figures of the alliance; former corrupt FBI agent John Connolly and James "Whitey" Bulger. The two grew up just doors down from eachother in the Old Harbor Housing Projects in South Boston (more famously known as "Southie"). In the beginning of the novel, Connolly recalls one of the first interactions that he had ever had with Bulger. It was when he was younger, and he and his friends were at a store. They all wanted ice cream, but had no way to pay for them. Then the tough,already infamous, 16 year old Whitey Bulger walked in. Even at such a young age, he was known around the projects as the toughest guy that you will ever meet. Whitey walked over the kids, staring at him in awe. He picked John Connolly up, sat him on the counter, and bought him some ice cream. Little did Connolly know, that same guy who bought him ice cream all those years ago, would be the same guy that Connolly would be tracking down his whole FBI career, and later make an unholy alliance that would end it as well.

Whitey Bulger is probably the most famous mobster of all time. He was born on September 3, 1929. He had ties with the Winter Hill Gang, he worked with other mobsters such as Steve Flemmi, Frank Salemme, and his hit-man Johnny Martorano. During his lifetime, he was always known as a fierce enforcer. He had a stone cold stare that would cut deep into anybody's soul. His nickname came from his blonde, almost white hair. Although known as the toughest man alive, he did have one soft spot; it was only for his mother. He loved with his beloved mother right up until the day she died, even while he was conducting business.

Along with the relationship/alliance that Whitey had with John Connolly, the book also shared stories of his relationship with mobsters of different organizations. Other mob bosses included Gennaro Angiulo. Gerry Angiulo was a memeber of "La Cosa Nostra" that operated out of the North End in Boston. The way that the Irish and Italians felt about eachother were not good feelings. They both hated one another, and always had to be the ones with the most power, to be on top. This battle continued all the years that they were

competing.

The alliance between Whitey and John Connolly grew from one being that Bulger would inform Connolly of activity surrounding other mobsters, to one that Connolly was protecting Bulger. Connolly was protecting Bulger and covering up his tracks so that Bulger would never be convicted, and basically never be found. Had been protecting them from prosecution by feeding Bulger information about possible attempts to catch them. The FBI eventually caught wind of this. Connolly was later convicted with racketeering and obstruction of justice. In 2008, he was moved to a Massachusetts prison and is currently serving the remainder of his sentence for second degree murder. Connolly went from being one of the best FBI agents, to a man that is going to basically rot in prison for the rest of life.

Overall, I found this book extremely interesting. This is probably the most interesting Mob book that I have read so far. I found it crazy how John Connolly would risk his whole career just to protect someone from his old neighborhood. He ruined his whole life, and is now paying for it. Whitey Bulger has always fascinated me. This one man controlled so much and caused so much fear in everyone he encountered. The thing that amazed me most was he got away with all the murders, and conning for all those years. I think the question is everyone's mind was "Will Whitey ever be caught?" The day when I heard that he was caught, I couldn't believe it. To this day, I think the reason he gave up without a fight is because he is sick. Before he dies, the only thing I want to hear is what his voice sounds like. I need to put a voice to his face. I just want to hear him speak, and tell his side of this very famous story.

Jessica says

If you've ever been curious about Whitey Bulger, the Winter Hill Gang, Southie politics or FBI corruption, this is an excellent primer. The Boston Globe investigative journalists who reported on Bulger for numerous years pulled together all their research and the trial transcripts to create this informative and unbelievable tale. At times I got a little bogged down keeping all of the people and stories straight because this is truly an example of fact being stranger than fiction. And my interest in the book started to wane at the end but I'm not sure if it reflects any fault of the authors or just my interest in the subject just reached its natural limit. But it was a good read and helped me to better understand the legacy of Whitey Bulger that still looms so large in Boston.

Lady ♥ Belleza says

Black Mass has been sitting on my bookshelf for quite a while, I was looking for a third book about Jimmy "Whitey" Bulger written by Dick Lehr, I have "Whitey" and have been trying to find "Underboss". Then I saw the movie "Black Mass" (starring: Johnny Depp and Benedict Cumberbatch as the Bulger brothers and Joel Edgerton as John Connolly, former FBI agent) was scheduled to be released in September 2015. I decided I had to read the book before I saw the movie, which I desperately want to see.

In 1988 Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill started to write a story for the *Boston Globe* about the Bulger Brothers, Jimmy and Billy. One was Boston's most powerful criminal and Billy was the most powerful politician (which some might say is the same, but hey he never killed anyone, that we know of). In the course of the investigation, they discovered that Jimmy Bulger seemed to be made of teflon, since 1965, while he climbed the ranks of Boston underworld from street soldier to boss, he had not been arrested, not once. He seemed to know when the authorities were closing in on him. He knew about wiretaps. Some in law

enforcement felt 'the fix was in' even so far as 'the FBI had secretly provided him cover all these years'. But there was no proof. Mobsters hated informants, this was the world Whitey Bulger lived in. In the end however, the FBI had to come clean, Bulger and Flemmi (Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi) had been informants for over 20 years.

The first meeting between John Connolly, FBI agent and Jimmy Bulger was in 1975, Flemmi was already an informant at this time, had already experienced the protection the FBI could offer, he was never questioned about his criminal activities, even the murders he may or may not have committed. When asked, he told Bulger "Go talk to him." The deal was made, and the fix was in. There is more to this story than two mob guys being informants and more FBI involvement than one agent covering up. Connolly covered Flemmi and Bulger, other agents covered him. There was a massive head in the sand approach to what was going on. The truth started to come out in 1997, 10 months later after sworn testimony and the opening of secret FBI files the Boston FBI office was revealed to be a gigantic stack of shit. This book tells it all.

Detailed with extensive documentation this books read like a too good to be true Godfather book, except its true, and it's fascinating. I recommend this to true crime fans in particular fans of mafia books.

Vincent says

I liked the book a lot and was quick to read. Probably not the best time for me to read a book about how corrupt the FBI is as I hate them and already know that they are corrupt. I would recommend it though, very detailed and really interesting.

Sabot says

I did not care for the sensationalist style of writing which was used in this book. Though it purports to be a work of journalism, phrases such as the following are not uncommon:

"Stephen's little girl wandered into the kitchen to see what was going on [...] 'Isn't she cute?', Flemmi said. The gangster tousled her blond hair. The gun's hard metal caught the girl's attention, and she reached for it. Flemmi let her touch it, and the girl even put part of the gun in her mouth. 'It would be a sin for her not to see you' [...] His voice sounded strange and far away, and then Julie Rakes realized her husband was crying. Stephen explained the sudden turn of events, about a new deal which had fallen into their laps, and Julie listened in cold silence, a numbness washing over her."

Despite a list of sources and notes in the back, passages such as the one above occasionally gave me the impression that I was reading a pulp novel rather than a true account. That being said, the story was interesting and I did finish the book. I chose to give the book two stars due to the 'it was OK' caption (meaning it is still a passing grade in my view).

Megan says

Great research. Awesome insight. Saw the movie and wanted so much more! Fascinating to see just how corrupt the law enforcement really was. The rise and fall of the Bulger/Flemmi empire.

Ashley says

I really dunno how this became the movie "Black Mass"....

- To Long
 - To Winded
 - And To Boring...
-