



## Underworld: A Novel

By Don DeLillo

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With cameo appearances by Lenny Bruce, J. Edgar Hoover, Bobby Thompson, Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason and Toots Shor, "this is DeLillo's most affecting novel...a dazzling, phosphorescent work of art" (Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*).

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## **Underworld: A Novel By Don DeLillo Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #43098 in Books
- Brand: Scribner
- Published on: 2003
- Released on: 1998-07-09
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x 1.90" w x 5.25" l, 1.54 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 848 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

While Eisenstein documented the forces of totalitarianism and Stalinism upon the faces of the Russian peoples, DeLillo offers a stunning, at times overwhelming, document of the twin forces of the cold war and American culture, compelling that "swerve from evenness" in which he finds events and people both wondrous and horrifying. *Underworld* opens with a breathlessly graceful prologue set during the final game of the Giants-Dodgers pennant race in 1951. Written in what DeLillo calls "super-omniscience" the sentences sweep from young Cotter Martin as he jumps the gate to the press box, soars over the radio waves, runs out to the diamond, slides in on a fast ball, pops into the stands where J. Edgar Hoover is sitting with a drunken Jackie Gleason and a splenetic Frank Sinatra, and learns of the Soviet Union's second detonation of a nuclear bomb. It's an absolutely thrilling literary moment. When Bobby Thomson hits Branca's pitch into the outstretched hand of Cotter--the "shot heard around the world"--and Jackie Gleason pukes on Sinatra's shoes, the events of the next few decades are set in motion, all threaded together by the baseball as it passes from hand to hand.

"It's all falling indelibly into the past," writes DeLillo, a past that he carefully recalls and reconstructs with acute grace. Jump from Giants Stadium to the Nevada desert in 1992, where Nick Shay, who now owns the baseball, reunites with the artist Kara Sax. They had been brief and unlikely lovers 40 years before, and it is largely through the events, spinoffs, and coincidental encounters of their pasts that DeLillo filters the Cold War experience. He believes that "global events may alter how we live in the smallest ways," and as the book steps back in time to 1951, over the following 800-odd pages, we see just how those events alter lives. This reverse narrative allows the author to strip away the detritus of history and pop culture until we get to the story's pure elements: the bomb, the baseball, and the Bronx. In an epilogue as breathless and stunning as the prologue, DeLillo fast-forwards to a near future in which ruthless capitalism, the Internet, and a new, hushed faith have replaced the Cold War's blend of dread and euphoria.

Through fragments and interlaced stories--including those of highway killers, artists, celebrities, conspiracists, gangsters, nuns, and sundry others--DeLillo creates a fragile web of connected experience, a communal *Zeitgeist* that encompasses the messy whole of five decades of American life, wonderfully distilled.

#### From Library Journal

Dennis Boutsakaris reads skillfully from DeLillo's carefully abridged opus (LJ 9/1/97), which begins with an extended prolog describing a memorable 1951 World Series game. The baseball hit in the game's climactic home run becomes a focal point for the sprawling novel. The ball's various owners are meticulously profiled as 40 years of American history and culture are sketched. The resulting panorama of the modern age is reminiscent of E.L. Doctorow's splendid *Ragtime*, yet ultimately the audio fails to move or engage the listener. DeLillo's powers of description are acute, and the intricate structure he has devised for his story is a marvel, but these overpowering virtues seem wearily mechanical. The lengthy parade of characters is collectively forgettable. The underlying theme of garbage provides an air of quiet desperation to the grim litany of current events and interwoven plot lines. Not recommended. John Owen, Advanced Micro Devices Lib., Santa Clara, Cal.

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#### From Booklist

DeLillo always writes large, but here he has reached new dimensions as he taps into all the terrifying and

confounding forces unleashed by the inception of the nuclear age. His stylistically magnificent, many-voiced, and soulful novel begins on October 3, 1951, at New York's Polo Grounds, where the decisive game in the race for the pennant between the legendary Giants and Dodgers is taking place, the same day the Soviet Union detonates an atom bomb. It's a spectacular scene, and DeLillo is everywhere: the announcer's booth where Russ Hodges is losing his voice; the stands where a young truant named Cotter is catching his breath after jumping the turnstile; the box seat where J. Edgar Hoover and friends exchange small talk and insults; and on the field, where baseball history is being made, and the unifying symbol of the story, the ball hit into the stands in the game-winning home run, begins its talismanic journey. As DeLillo zooms in on each sphere of action, and each psyche, he achieves an unsurpassed intensity of sensory and psychological detail, which is rendered with exquisite tenderness. He never once loses this quality, this warmth and sorrow, as the narrative sways back and forth in time, and as more and more compelling characters and situations are introduced. There's Nick Shay, a waste-management expert burdened by a violent past; Klara Sax, an artist creating a monumental work in the middle of the desert out of decommissioned B-52s; and incendiary genius Lenny Bruce. Like novelists E. L. Doctorow and Thomas Pynchon, DeLillo uses historical figures to great effect, but DeLillo is a far more emotive and spiritual writer, and *Underworld* is a ravishingly beautiful symphony of a novel. *Donna Seaman*

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