



The Damned

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The Damned Details

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Author : John D. MacDonald

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From Reader Review The Damned for online ebook

Tim says

A number of prominent writers for the past 40 years, including Walter Mosley, Stephen King, Dean Koontz, Jonathan Kellerman and Sue Grafton, have cited Mr. MacDonald as a major influence on their work. While Mr. MacDonald's genre was largely mystery, "The Damned" (1952) is a bit different. It is set at a ferry crossing from Mexico into Texas, with a several-hour delay. A number of Americans are waiting on the Mexico side, each with a different back-story and different ways of dealing with the delay and the oppressive heat. So there's a honeymooner with "trouble in paradise" as well as the man's ill mother along for the ride; there's a killer on the run; there's a married man escorting what might at first appear to be a bimbo; there's a couple of dancing/singing girls traveling with their snarky manager; and a few others. As the hours drag by, tempers are tested and some impulsive, aggressive behavior results, as well as other tragedies. Relationships are formed and broken. Reasons for their behavior are questioned. And ultimately, believe it or not, the denouement is complex but satisfying.

Of course, there have been other stories of strangers thrown together under stressful circumstances. William Inge's "Bus Stop" comes to mind, as well as Thornton Wilder's "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" and Stephen King's "Under the Dome." "The Damned" fits in this category nicely. Enjoyable, recommended, but I'm looking forward to reading Mr. MacDonald's mystery novels (I have "A Purple Place for Dying" [Travis McGee] on my bookshelf). Four stars.

Charles says

A good one.

Tim says

This is a John D. Macdonald (non-Travis McGee) story. A damned good one.

Mark says

I'll transparently admit that John D. MacDonald is not only one of my favorite crime writers, but one of my favorite writers, period. His voice, prose style, and regular authorial interjections, which many readers seem to really dislike, are what set him apart from the pack for me: he's smart, observant, has fascinating insights into human nature, and can really tell a story too. While I'm close to the end of my slow in-order read of the "Travis McGee" series, I'm comforted to know that I still have a lot of his "stand-alones" to go. THE DAMNED is from early in MacDonald's career (1952), when he was just starting to leave science fiction behind, and it's also allegedly one of his best-selling titles, owing to a blurb that the publisher somehow tricked the enormously popular Mickey Spillane into giving: "I wish I had written this book." (Well, there's not much chance of you ever writing a book half as good as something by JDM, Mick.) I don't think THE

DAMNED is a typical JDM book, and it's probably even a stretch to call it "crime fiction," even though some people die and even though you'd likely find the book in that section of a used bookshop. THE DAMNED picks up the lives of about a dozen Americans who are stranded together in Mexico because of a broken ferry, and as such it's a series of portraits both natural and psychological. It's a wonderful, fun, and even poignant read, with some interesting insights too into views of the time, 60 years ago--sort of a little Gold Medal 1950's CANTERBURY TALES.

Wade says

Close to perfect. The story takes place in the 1950s over maybe a fifteen hour period at a stalled ferry crossing at a small town in Mexico near Matamoros. An unbelievably interesting cast of characters are thrown together, along with a few plot sparks to ignite a delicious series of conflicts among them. MacDonald paints the inner thoughts and experiences and essences of the characters in a way that is fascinating and utterly compelling. This is the first book by MacDonald for me, and if his long list of other books are half this good, I'm set for a very long time.

Meghan McFadden says

Well, I have to say this was a nice surprise. The Damned may be one of the only books I've bought based solely on reviews read on Goodreads. I usually come to this site AFTER I've finished a book, I don't use it as a guide for what to buy. But lately I've been trying to read books I should have read in high school or college and/or authors I've never heard of but probably should have. John D MacDonald is one such author. Never heard of him. Had I seen just the cover of this book, combined with the dramatic title, I would have laughed and passed it by. But because of the reviews I read, I gave it a try.

This book is about a group of random people waiting on a ferry in Mexico who find themselves stranded temporarily. The cast of characters alone made it interesting but what so impressed me, given the fact that it was written in 1952 by a white man, is how sympathetic he paints the Mexicans in the story. They are not stereotypical representations of Mexican laborers. In fact, they come off better than the white Americans. This book has it all, sex, violence, death, intrigue but it's really a character study on people coping with life. I have since picked up two more John D MacDonald books (both from the Travis McGee series) and I'm looking forward to reading them.

Cashmere says

After finishing John D. MacDonald's exceptionally disappointing Ballroom of the Skies, it was wonderful to find him return to excellent form in **The Damned** .

As I read this book, I couldn't help but think of it in terms of a movie. Indeed, more than any of the other books I have read to date by John D., this one cries out to me to be adapted for the big screen. By Tarantino perhaps?

Anyhow, this unique story is about various people and their lives and histories and interactions as they wait for a car ferry that is having difficulty crossing a river in Mexico. John D. presents us with colorful and

clearly defined characters, often times revisiting events in the plot from various people's perspectives.

Having been so disappointed by the previous book I read, I eagerly breezed through this one in just a few days.

Ed says

This John D. MacDonald novel, written in 1952, was his fifth non-SF novel since his debut with *The Brass Cupcake* (1950). A Mexican river crossing and disparate characters thrown together by a disrupted ferry service interact under stresses both internal and external.

THE HEAT HIT THEM ALL . . .the scorching heat of Mexico, and it ate at their nerves. The stalled ferry held them in the heat until they could stand no more. The honeymooners fought, and loved and fought again. The pretty little tramp clawed her married lover's eyes. The trembling killer looked behind and knew his time was short. There were others waiting, too, some good, some bad, but all of them tormented by the shape of disaster to come.

Time gave them all a second chance. Most of them stepped on the face of time.

Sincere W. says

Of all the authors that I admire, John D. MacDonald is the one I would have liked to have a meal with most. He had a wisdom about man's motivations that few authors can rival. That wisdom really comes across in this novel.

The situation at the heart of this story is a delayed river crossing. The delay forces an assortment of characters into a confined area. The result is a riveting tale that touches on love, maturity, loyalty, degradation and derangement.

There's sex, murder, betrayal and malice. There are characters that feel realer than people you meet in ordinary life. And there are ideas here that will leave you changed having encountered them.

The novel is only about 180 pages long, and the pages go fast. Yet the story is dense; you won't be left with that unsated feeling relatively common of shorter novels. You'll feel "full" by the time you hit the back cover.

What I love about this story is how masterfully the characters are constructed... torn apart... and then reshaped. None of the characters leave this story the way they came into it. Some break good and some break bad. But they all change in some profound way.

The only thing I didn't like - and the reason I settled on 4 stars instead of 5 - is that some of the subplots are much more engaging than others. It gave parts of the novel an unevenness, and you're tempted to skip ahead to get back to the "good" plot lines. The irony is even the "bad" plot lines are very good. Its just that, like I said, some are better than others.

This is an excellent read.

doug bowman says

The tradition of strangers meeting on the road is as old as the Canterbury Tales, and this literary genre is given a South of the Border slant as a group of strangers meet at a ferry crossing in Mexico, where the crossing is slowed by a bureaucratic glitch. Steinbeck used the same literary conceit in *THE WAYWARD BUS*, and MacDonald uses it to showcase his strengths as a writer. In his non-Travis McGee novels, MacDonald was incredibly adept at characterization based conflict, and this novel showcases that particular talent. Each character's back-story baggage is fleshed out in conflict with another character, driving the ebb and flow of plot-lines into a series of personal climaxes. He is such a talented writer that his stories never sink into soap-opera clichés.

Pamela says

Where have I been that I haven't been reading MacDonald? He's like the best of Jim Thompson and Patricia Highsmith all rolled up into one. No, I take that back. He's better than even that. If you haven't read him, then stop what you are doing and read him NOW!

Matt Lenz says

"The Damned," by John D. MacDonald is very satisfying. Written in 1950, it is a convoluted story that refuses to give the reader peace until the final pages. Heavy rains have knocked out the ferry landing on a river in Mexico and cars back up in the dusty heat waiting to cross. MacDonald lets you get to know many of the occupants in each of the cars and Bill Danton emerges as the hero, a tough and decent man. Impatience and blistering heat work to expose the weaknesses of most of the characters. Linda and John are newlyweds, but it doesn't take long to see that John is a mamma's boy making you wish they were married. The cover of the paperback version I read had a price of 35¢ and a little box on it that said: "Over one and a half million copies of this sensational novel in print." It was the sixth printing dated 1960. The cover art and cover copy didn't invite me to read the book, but the printing in the little box intrigued me. How could it satisfy over a million and a half readers? Well, it did.

Daniel Polansky says

Excellent and peculiar. About a handful of people who get stuck at a ferry crossing near the Mexican/American border, and the misfortunes which befall them. I picked up one of MacDonald's at some point earlier, something which was a bit more straight detective-y and I liked it but didn't love it. This was much better. The writing is really on point, each of the different characters feels well-realized (mostly; in keeping with the noir tradition the assholes and villains are better drawn than the more decent characters.) MacDonald's writing is astute in its depiction of sexual mores as well as casual racism. The structure is likewise really peculiar, with each short chapter taking place from the POV of one of the different characters, ranging from casual gangsters to emasculated husbands. A lot of other mid-century noir writers – Chandler, Hammet, the other McDonald, etc. – had the prose chops to go toe to toe with more or less anyone (almost)

but were hampered by having to stick to the usual genre conventions, which are fun but limiting. It's interesting to see what can be done out of those boundaries, kind of like what Highsmith was doing with *Price of Salt*. Hey, is this out of print? Because if so, it would slot neatly into the NYRB classic's catalog. Keep.

Lee Thompson says

Man, John D. MacDonald was a fucking master (writer, not actual love maker, at least that I know of.)

Jilles says

This book was written 60 years ago, so some stereotypical is in there, but this is definately one of MacDonald's best stand-alone novels.
