

## The Cartel

Don Winslow

In this unsparing follow-up to his highly regarded *The Power of the Dog*, Winslow resumes his fictionalized account of the catastrophic Mexican-American drug war, now in its fourth decade. The novel begins in 2004, with kingpin Adán Barrera in prison and the man who captured him, rogue DEA agent Art Keller, keeping bees in a monastery, with a price on his head. Soon Barrera engineers an escape, forcing Keller back on the hunt and setting off a nightmarish chain reaction of *Godfather*-esque machinations, retaliations, and unholy alliances that are often hard to follow. Writing in his customary rat-a-tat prose style, Winslow expands the story to encompass dozens of peripheral characters, including a beauty queen-turned-drug empress, a 13-year-old prodigy killing for God, and a heroically dedicated band of journalists tasked with documenting the endless carnage. With most of law enforcement on some cartel's payroll and the rapidly dwindling newspapermen intimidated into silence, the cartels have nearly free rein to settle their gruesome turf wars and continue profiting from the endless U.S. demand for narcotics as once-proud Mexican cities fall into ruin. **VERDICT** The staggering body count will be a challenge for many readers to get past, but the payoffs for those who persevere are immense. Winslow's two-novel project about this still-raging conflict is entertaining, well researched, and difficult to process, a jarring glimpse into a reality about which many Americans remain blissfully unaware.

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