

The Valachi Papers Study Guide

The Valachi Papers by Peter Maas

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Plot Summary

"The Valachi Papers" by Peter Maas, provides an account of the internal workings of the Cosa Nostra, the Italian arm of the criminal underworld in the United States, as provided by one of its members. Joseph Valachi is a soldier in the Cosa Nostra for thirty years. He largely escapes jail time, but during the latter part of his "career," he receives a twenty year sentence on a narcotics charge. Valachi has just begun his sentence when he is whisked away to New York by Federal agents. The agents hope to pressure Valachi into talking about his drug operation by threatening him with another narcotics charge. Valachi refuses to talk and is returned to the Federal prison in Atlanta. Crime boss Vito Genovese is serving time at the same facility. He becomes suspicious that Valachi may have talked and puts a mark out on Valachi. Under the overwhelming pressure of having his life at risk, Valachi mistakes a fellow inmate for a potential assassin and kills him. Valachi is arrested for murder one but the charge is reduced to second degree murder when Valachi agrees to finally talk.

The timing for Valachi's revelations is ideal. Prior to the installation of Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the FBI's main focus had been hunting down domestic communists, neglecting the crime underworld at large. However, Kennedy gives the Justice Department new direction and focus is shifted to organized crime. In an effort to play catch-up in their knowledge about the underworld, the FBI frantically collects massive amounts of intelligence via electronic bugs and wiretaps.

At the time of Valachi's revelations, the FBI has strong suspicions that an organized crime syndicate exists but evidence is scarce and not conclusive. The account and details provided by Valachi, who the authorities feel has perfect retention, astounds the authorities. Through their recent electronic surveillance, the phrase "Cosa Nostra" has popped up occasionally but its meaning or importance is unknown. When an agent asks, early during his interviews, if the organization is the Mafia, Valachi corrects the agent. The Mafia is what outsiders call the Italian crime syndicate—insiders call it Cosa Nostra. Literally translated, Cosa Nostra translates to "our thing."

Valachi provides the FBI with the organizational structure of the Cosa Nostra. Cities, or in the case of New York City, portions of cities, are controlled by Families. Within each family is a Boss, Underboss, lieutenant and soldiers. While there are very few requirements to be a member of the Cosa Nostra, those requirements are intractable: all members have to be Italian, loyal to their Family and take a vow to never reveal the existence of the organization. Valachi confirms the hundreds of murders and other activities of the Cosa Nostra Families of New York City. The information obtained from Valachi is confirmed against the information they already have and the Federal authorities feel confident that it is reliable and invaluable.

For his safety, Valachi winds up serving his sentence in solitary confinement—a mark is on his head for violating the vow of loyalty and silence as a member of the Cosa Nostra. Although the Cosa Nostra continues to operate after Valachi's revelations, they will never be as powerful as they once were. The Cosa Nostra is successful in part due to

their elusive mystique and ability to operate in the shadows. With his astonishing revelations, Valachi shatters that advantage forever.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

In June 1962, inmate Joseph Michael Valachi kills a fellow inmate in the US penitentiary in Atlanta, GA. Valachi, a seemingly small time drug trafficker, is destined to become one of the best known criminals in America. He will ultimately confirm the existence of the Cosa Nostra, an organized crime syndicate whose elusive existence has been a debate among law enforcement for years. The Cosa Nostra [at time when the book is written in 1968] is the most profitable "corporation" in the United States, hauling in upwards of \$40 billion dollars annually. It pays no taxes but spreads monetary influence around to public officials of all levels.

Valachi is a marked man during his time in the pen and he knows it. Another low-level Cosa Nostra thug and fellow inmate accuses Valachi of ratting to the Feds about his knowledge of the organization's drug operations. Valachi has not "ratted" to the Feds. He assumes that either his accuser is trying to deflect guilt off himself or the Feds are playing games in spreading the word that he has talked. Three attempts have already been made on Valachi's life—he is going to have to take things into his own hands. There is no appeals system in the Cosa Nostra.

The Cosa Nostra is divided into major units each categorized as a Family. Valachi is part of the New York City family run by Vito Genovese, the most feared boss in the entire organization. Oddly, Genovese himself is serving time in the Atlanta pen on a narcotics conviction at the same time as Valachi. It is Genovese who orders the hit on Valachi. Genovese gives Valachi the kiss of death in his cell one evening and makes thinly veiled threats against Valachi's grandkids.

As things heat up, Valachi asks to be placed in solitary confinement. He makes a desperate plea, in the form of a cryptic letter, to another Cosa Nostra New York boss, Thomas (Three-finger Brown) Lucchese for help. He also tries to reach the Feds but his message that he is ready to talk is lost in the bureaucratic filter. For refusing to talk to the prison officials about the threat against him, Valachi is returned to general population. In the growing pressure he is under, Valachi kills inmate John Saupp, whom Valachi mistakes for Joseph (Joe Beck) DiPalermo, a Cosa Nostra inmate who he thinks is assigned to kill him.

Valachi is deeply bothered about killing the wrong guy. Later when he is on trial, a psychiatrist concludes that Valachi is clinically depressed by the errant murder as well as his being labeled a "squealer" by his Cosa Nostra cohorts. Word gets to US Attorney Robert Morgenthau that Valachi is ready to talk and gets Valachi's first degree murder charge reduced to second degree. Valachi pleads and receives a life sentence. He is transferred to a New York facility under the cover name of Joseph DeMarco. Initially, Valachi is not cooperative, taking his anger out on Narcotics agent Frank Selvagi, whom



he holds responsible for Genovese's ire. However, Valachi is smart enough to keep the Feds interested by revealing a few tidbits.

What begins to emerge in talks with Valachi is confirmation of the existence of the Cosa Nostra. Federal agencies are ordered to coordinate investigations based on information they are receiving from Valachi. Reports of conversations with Valachi are disbursed to a myriad of federal agencies. The FBI is adamant that they control the investigation, compelled by new interest in chasing organized crime after the installation of Robert Kennedy as US Attorney General. Prior to Kennedy, the FBI focuses on fighting communism within the US. With the sudden change in direction from the new AG, the FBI scrambles to catch up by gathering intelligence on organized crime activity through wire-taps and electronic bugging.

What excites the FBI is that what Valachi is spilling matches their most recent intelligence. FBI Agent James P. Flynn is assigned to have joint conversations with Selvagi. The name Cosa Nostra had been popping up in electronic surveillance leading the FBI to believe it represents what had been commonly called the Mafia. Valachi confirms to Flynn that the outside uses the word Mafia but on the inside, the organization is referred to as the Cosa Nostra which loosely translated from Italian means "our thing." Flynn is credited with being indispensable in the intelligence gathered from Valachi. He knows how to work Valachi—when to baby him, how to snap him out of a depression and, in short, how to win his confidence.

Flynn knows exactly what he is dealing with in Valachi who has been deemed anti-social by prison officials. Flynn determines that Valachi is acting out of revenge and a human desire to survive. He is a killer with no remorse, and has a devious and rebellious personality developed after living for years in a world of fear. After several months, the FBI takes over Valachi entirely. They meet with him four days a week and learn that by allowing him to ramble on uninterrupted they gain the most information. Valachi provides the basic organization structure of the Cosa Nostra, naming the cities in which there is Family control. Valachi reveals that there is a leader or capo, subcapo or underboss, and lieutenants who are in charge of the crews. A crew is comprised of soldiers who are selected for their individual experience and contacts. A soldier may run his own rackets independently. One requirement that everyone, capo to soldier, must meet: they must be Italian. While the Family works with other criminal organizations who are run by bosses of different ethnicity, no one in the Cosa Nostra is not Italian.

Valachi names the five New York City bosses who all purport to be successful business men running legitimate enterprises: Genovese is a scrap dealer; Joseph (Joe Bananas) Bonanno is in real estate; Carlo Gambino is a labor-management consultant; Joseph Profaci is an importer of olive oil; and, Thomas Lucchese is a dress manufacturer. There is no national "Mr. Big" in charge of the entire organization although Genovese is bidding for the title prior to his unfortunate departure to the pen. In lieu of Mr. Big, the Cosa Nostra is controlled by a commission (Commissione) consisting of nine to twelve bosses. The role of the Commission is to keep the loose network of the organization together and settle disputes between families. The commission also approves the appointment of new family bosses when there are vacancies.



In his conversations with Flynn and the other agents, the cagey Valachi is warned to never lie. If caught in a lie, everything he tells them will be discredited. Valachi complies, always delineating the information by declaring it first or second hand knowledge. Valachi pleads with the Federal agents at different times telling them that their efforts are futile. They can never bring the Cosa Nostra down. It is too big—like a second government. After venting his tales to the Feds, Valachi seems to gain a measure of self-worth. Valachi begins to care more about his appearance and hygiene. One flash of gallantry, Valachi never discusses any women involved with the organization. The only thing resembling an agreement between the FBI and Valachi is one to keep his family out of the fray.

Valachi enjoys the attention he is getting from the Federal agents. The FBI learns that the Cosa Nostra has Valachi traced to New York but wrongly thinks he is in a hotel in NYC. For his safety, he is transferred to Fort Monmouth in New Jersey. The interrogations take months to complete, the Feds constantly pushing Valachi for names, details. Valachi agrees to testify publicly before the Senate. The AG's office agrees since most of his information has been verified; his testimony might help pass more stringent anti-crime laws; and US citizens have a right to hear the information. Valachi's televised appearance before the Senate is largely a disaster. The Senators are grandstanding for their constituents and veer off subject to areas unknown to Valachi who has almost perfect retention but is easily confused when interrupted or pulled off topic.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Author Peter Maas describes his encounters with Joseph Valachi in this chapter. Maas first meets Valachi in January 1966 at the D.C. Jail. Valachi is being kept on the top floor, which had formerly been death row, under massive security—not in fear of his escape, rather in an effort to keep him alive. The Cosa Nostra has placed a \$100,000 price tag on his head. Maas is surprised that the little, gray-haired man he meets is responsible for so much commotion. Valachi is slim, exercises regularly and seems to be in good health save the fact that he smokes two packs of cigarettes everyday. He knows it is unhealthy but he asserts, "What else can I do in here?" (26). Maas eventually will interview Valachi twenty-two times between January and March 1966. In addition to conversations, Maas supplies Valachi with questions on a legal pad on which Valachi provides answers in long-hand.

Valachi is offended one time in the interviews with Maas—when he is asked about strong-arm tactics he used to collect loan payments. He is insulted that Maas would think he would harm a legitimate businessman. In another instance, Valachi is insulted when Maas shows up unannounced. He asks the writer to show more respect for him in the future. The Justice Department believes Valachi's claim of being involved in at least thirty-three murders but that he had never actually "pulled the trigger." In his younger days, he usually acted as the get-away driver. Later in his career, he supervised the set up of a mark, but never once actually killed him. As Valachi said, "Why should I lie? I'm just as guilty," (27).

For Valachi, life is not all bad. Valachi, who is a good cook, has a hot plate on which he cooks some of his own meals. Since he is isolated, he gets his own TV on which he sees snippets of his Congressional appearances. He hates the TV show "The Untouchables" because "It's all wrong." Valachi plays cards with the guards, exercises regularly and naps in the afternoon. Visitors like Maas and the Federal agents bring him goodies like cannoli and capicole. Like others who are around Valachi frequently—guards, US attorneys, FBI agents—Maas develops a fondness for him.

After the Feds exhaust Valachi's wealth of information and the White House bows to pressure from Italian-American groups to suppress publication of his story, he is transferred to a Federal prison just outside of Detroit. Many of the Feds feel that this transfer will scare off anyone else within the Cosa Nostra ready to talk. However, Valachi receives maximum security measures. Since he is in isolation, he again has his own TV. However, since he cannot work and earn the maximum \$15 per month, he is allowed to take contributions from outsiders—mainly women lauding his bravery. In April of 1966, Valachi tries to commit suicide by hanging but fails at the attempt. Maas is recruited to visit Valachi to dissuade him from another suicide attempt. Maas learns that Valachi remains fearful of retribution from the long arm of the Cosa Nostra and is upset that he no longer has a hot plate.



The vast majority of Valachi's information proves reliable. AG Robert Kennedy deems the information invaluable in exposing an enterprise that thrives on human suffering and is devoid of morality. William Hundley of the Justice Department proclaims that the information provided by Valachi verifies the existence of this elusive organization and "showed us the face of the enemy." (37) Valachi knows where "all the bodies are buried."



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Italians do not invent organized crime in America, but they do perfect it. Their expertise is based on their background—their roots are mainly in Sicily and Neapolitan Camorra—where loyalty, contempt for law and talent for organization are all part of the culture. The first sign of Italian influence in the US criminal world is the emergence of the Black Hand extortionists who threaten the lives of the children of their fellow transplanted countrymen unless they pay up. Born in a poor, rough neighborhood of East Harlem, Valachi is exposed to criminal activity early in life. His own father pays \$1 a week for protection. The Valachis live in bug-infested and filthy conditions.

At 18 years of age, Valachi becomes part of a burglary ring called the Minute Men. He usually drives the get-away car. This gang is responsible for hundreds of crimes between 1919 and 1923. Valachi is arrested and convicted of burglary and sentenced to Sing Sing for several years but is out on good behavior in nine months. Back in New York, he immediately returns to smashing windows and stealing again. The action has moved from 108th Street to 116th Street and he has been replaced by another driver. He organizes a new, smaller gang and continues burglary operations. Valachi is shot by a cop on one job and almost dies. Valachi becomes involved in a love/hate relationship with a rough Irish gang but soon abandons them when they move onto armed robbery.

Valachi is arrested and convicted of another burglary and is sent back to Sing Sing, sentenced to serve three years and eight months. An attempt is made on his life in Sing Sing—he is seriously wounded in a stabbing—because of his former association with the Irish gang. Valachi is told by fellow inmate and murderer Allesandro Vollero to never trust the Sicilians. When Valachi gets out, he will send him to see Capone in Chicago. This is Valachi's first hint of a secret organization. After leaving Sing Sing, Valachi decides against going with Capone—he wants to stay on familiar turf in New York. He runs his own burglary operation for a short time. Through a mistress he lives with and a few old contacts, Valachi pulls closer to involvement with the Cosa Nostra.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

There is trouble in the air in the Italian underworld of 1930—in-fighting in the form of the Castellammarese War is raging. Organized Italian racketeering does not off until the 1920s, sparked by the constraints of the Prohibition. While other criminal groups cash in on Prohibition, the Italians take advantage of their knowledge of home-made brew and take a giant step toward racketeering. Joseph (Joe the Boss) Masseria is Mr. Big, with Capone, Lucky Luciano, Genovese and others waiting in the wings.

The Italian mobsters remain faithful to their roots with tensions high between Sicilians and Neapolitans. One of the most clannish groups consists of men who originally hail from in and around the Sicilian town of Castellammarese del Golfo. These men are loyal to Salvatore Maranzano, one of the New York bosses. Joe the Boss, wanting absolute power, decides to eliminate Maranzano, Joe Bananas and other Sicilian bosses. Joe the Boss makes the mistake of taking on another war and has gang leader Gaetano Reina killed. This action unites Reina's gang with Maranzano against Joe the Boss Masseria. Men on both sides are being eliminated—it is a bloodbath.

The war wages on as Valachi is driven to an unknown location in upstate New York where he is introduced to Don Salvatore Maranzano and indoctrinated into the Cosa Nostra, vowing in a ritual spoken in Italian to never betray its secret. Betraying this secret or violating another member's wife both bring the penalty of death without trial. Joe Bananas is selected to be Valachi's godfather who pricks Valachi's trigger finger, drawing blood as part of the induction. Maranzano reminds his men that Masseria is their number one target in the war which has continued to rage on throughout 1930 and 1931, yielding a count of sixty dead bodies. Valachi is recruited to take part in several of the assassinations. Two of Masseria's most trusted members, Lucky Luciano and Vito Genovese, turn on him and vow to Maranzano that they will kill Joe the Boss. Based on that promise, Maranzano agrees to halt the war. The promise is kept and Masseria is murdered in a restaurant. The Castellammarese War is over.

Maranzano surfaces as the most powerful boss and represents the modern Cosa Nostra. Maranzano, a highly educated man who speaks seven languages, gathers his men, 500 or more, and explains the structure of the new organization with the families, bosses, under bosses, lieutenants and soldiers. No personal avenging of the death of a loved one who is killed during the war is allowed on penalty of death. Valachi is allowed to choose his boss and stays with Maranzano. All the bosses gather at a large banquet to honor Maranzano and gift him with \$115,000—in cash and piled in the middle of the dining table. Maranzano tells Valachi that the war is on again. Before he can really be the Boss of Bosses, Genovese, Luciano, Capone and others will have to be eliminated. The very next day, Maranzano is murdered in his office—he is shot and his throat is cut—by several men pretending to be detectives.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

On the day Maranzano is killed, forty mobsters across the country who are affiliated with him are taken out, all on the orders of Lucky Luciano. Luciano has recruited Jewish mobster Dutch Schultz, who owes Lucky a favor, to perpetrate the execution of Maranzano. Valachi learns that he is a target and hides in the attic of a fellow soldier who speaks on his behalf to Lucchese. Lucchese has heard that Valachi was in on some of Maranzano's money-grabbing but Valachi denies it. Lucchese will think about it but tells Valachi he is not in danger. In the intervening days, Valachi is advised by The Gap to go with Vito Genovese who welcomes Valachi and promises that he will have respect—respect meaning he will not be targeted for execution. Other cohorts of Valachi are not so lucky.

Lucky Luciano earns his nickname. As a young mobster, he is kidnapped by members of another family. He is tortured, cut with razors, hung by his thumbs and left to die—but he survives and is known as Lucky from then on. Luciano goes on to become the most powerful Cosa Nostra boss ever known. He eventually controls every racketeering operation in New York City.

After the purging of Maranzano's faithful, Luciano moves to reduce tensions and curb the bloodletting. He establishes consiglieri, or councilors, whose initial purpose is to protect the soldiers from potentially vindictive lieutenants. Luciano breaks down the old Sicilian vs. Neapolitan grudges. He is a pragmatic leader who strengthens the Costa Nostra's scope and influence throughout the US underworld. Luciano even coordinates operations in some cases with non-Italian mobsters. This seeming cooperation and peaceful co-existence shields what is Luciano's real goal, which is total domination of organized crime.

One of Luciano's lieutenants, Frank Costello, is running slot machines in New York City. Valachi musters up the nerve to ask Genovese if he can have some. Genovese gives him twenty—which translated means Genovese would authorize identifying stickers for them, but Valachi would have to fund them. The color of the stickers signifies to the police that the machines are protected. Valachi places his slots in East Harlem and soon is making \$2,500 a week on them. Valachi, 26-years old and affluent, is ready to settle down. He meets Mildred, daughter of a dead racketeer, and romance is in bloom—but her family does not like him. Of all people, Genovese steps in on behalf of Valachi, assuring the family that Valachi is well suited to marry Mildred. Soon after his marriage, Valachi gets his first contract hit job. He recruits two of his cohorts, gets friendly with the target and lures him to an empty apartment on the pretext of joining a crap game. Valachi's co-conspirators are there waiting and shoot the 22-year-old to death.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Fiorello La Guardia is the new Mayor of New York and runs all the slots out of town. Valachi relocates his machines to New Orleans but that soon fails too. Next, Valachi and friend Bobby Doyle (Girolamo Santucci) get permission from Genovese to get into the numbers racket, sometimes called the policy game. It gets its name from the penny insurance that was popular in the 1920s. Daily winning numbers are based on the outcome of daily horse races. Numbers racketeers, like Valachi, are able to rig the results.

The numbers enterprise does not at first work out for Valachi as he has a major loss in the first few days of operation. However, family Boss Lucky Luciano bails him out by fronting him \$10,000 in working capital. Luciano's deal includes the influx of three new partners from the family and a chief controller, Moe Block, who is experienced in the operation of the numbers game. Block, like most controllers, is Jewish. Luciano acknowledges that the Jews are superior to the Italians in accounting skills. As of the writing of the book, the numbers racket just in New York City alone rakes in a quarter of a billion dollars annually. There is overhead, however; the beat cop who covers the area where a numbers operation takes place is typically paid some \$2,000 per month to look the other way.

Finally Valachi gets his operation off the ground with the new infusion of cash and begins profiting some \$1,250 per week. Not aware of Valachi's connection with the Cosa Nostra, Block lets some Jewish friends of his know about Valachi's successful operation. One of these men, Shapiro, threatens Valachi and attempts to sell him "protection." He is murdered, set in a drum full of concrete and dumped in the East River. Valachi later learns that Jewish racketeer Dutch Schultz was behind the extortion plot because Valachi and his partners were cutting into Schultz' numbers profits.

The practical Luciano preaches to his family to cooperate with Schultz—but his underlying goal is to eventually take over the lucrative Schultz empire. By the late 1920s, Schultz has absolute control of beer distribution in the Bronx. Schultz takes over this racket by scaring off one Irish gangster and crippling and blinding a second. Schultz has been briefly out of commission when he is arrested and jailed. However, spreading some of his monetary influence around, he is soon acquitted. Schultz has his lieutenant murdered after finding out that he is overly cooperative with the Luciano family while he is confined. When Schultz plans to have a bothersome Justice Department attorney, Thomas Dewey, knocked off, Luciano contracts his murder. Killing a Justice Department attorney will open up a can of worms and ruin the numbers racket in New York. Luciano does not want to risk that. Luciano takes control of Schultz's numbers operations to the benefit of Valachi and the other numbers operators. Valachi ventures into loan-sharking and horse race betting rooms. Dewey, now a Special Prosecutor and left without Schultz as a target, begins to focus on Luciano. Although Luciano never wanted to get

into prostitution, he does so since it is his duty as boss of the family to develop new business. In 1936, Luciano is arrested and convicted for multiple counts of compulsory prostitution and sentenced to fifty years in prison.

In 1942, Luciano plays a controversial role during World War II. The US government recruits Luciano to prevent, by brute force, the New York waterfront from being taken over by the enemy. Based on his contribution to World War II, his lawyers get Luciano out of jail. However, since he has never applied for US citizenship, the Feds immediately deport him back to Italy. With Luciano's departure, a new avenue of power opens to Luciano's sub boss, Vito Genovese who spent time during the war back in Italy where he was decorated by Mussolini with the highest award a citizen could receive. He is a darling of the Fascist regime. Later, Dewey starts to focus on him and Genovese flees the US for Italy where he apparently hides a good deal of cash.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

With both Luciano and Genovese out of the picture, at least temporarily, Frank Costello becomes the acting boss of the Luciano Family—not a good situation for Valachi. Valachi does not know Costello well and Costello is more concerned with his booming racketeering business—slots, bookmaking, gambling casinos and other enterprises—than Family matters. Costello has a good business sense and prefers to use his political connections more than muscle.

Valachi's friendship with Bobby Doyle begins to fall apart. Valachi's lieutenant is Tony Bender (Anthony Strollo), who Valachi does not trust and dislikes intensely. Costello is busy making money. There is no one in "upper management" that Valachi can go to. Doyle tells Valachi that he is selected to beat up a soldier in another family. Valachi does not like the plan since the lieutenant (Tommy Brown) in the other family is a friend of his. Valachi arranges for the beating and with the help of two cohorts armed with baseball bats, the target winds up in the hospital for six months. The other family is outraged and Valachi is told by Doyle to take the rap. Valachi barely escapes being in big trouble with Tommy.

Valachi reluctantly stays in the numbers operation with Doyle but branches out into loan sharking or shylocking. Valachi is successful in this enterprise, steering clear of legitimate businessmen as clients, but building up a customer base comprised of bookmakers, numbers runners and people in other illegitimate operations. Valachi never uses threats or muscle in collecting. Rather than break arms, he ceases to deal with those who do not pay up. Valachi makes upwards of \$1,500 a week on this enterprise.

Valachi gets a new partner, Johnny Robilotto, in his loan shark business who is able to secure new business for the operation. Robilotto is not part of the Cosa Nostra because his brother is a cop. Later, boss Albert Anastasia gets Johnny into his Family. Robilotto is known to be in illegal alcohol operations. Valachi has word of more alcohol business but Robilotto cannot take more business on. When Doyle hears about Valachi's offer, he horns in on the operation and takes a cut for himself. Eventually, Bender wants money out of the deal which leads to the break up of Valachi's partnership with Robilotto.

Valachi is having very little direct activity with the Family. He is making good money from his loan-sharking and numbers operations. He becomes part owner of a restaurant and a dress-making factory—both provide tax cover for him. Valachi sets up a small prostitution ring with six young girls.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

The 1930s is not a good era for racketeers. The most feared Jewish mobster of the day, Louis (Lepke) Luchalter is ultimately electrocuted. No Cosa Nostra boss has ever faced a like end—in fact most bosses never see the inside of a jail. Lepke is in narcotics, labor, trucking, restaurant and other operations. After Lepke's conviction, a member of his gang Abe Reles reveals the existence of a band of Brooklyn mobsters who are responsible for a series of gangland executions. This group is known as Murder Incorporated. Soon after these revelations, Reles plunges to his death from a sixth floor window although he is surrounded by policemen. The benefactor of Reles' death is Albert Anastasia. Reles was set to testify against Anastasia in an upcoming murder case. Valachi is certain that Anastasia is behind Abe's demise.

Valachi continues to distance himself from the Family and next decides to get into horse racing. It is one of the most exciting and enjoyable ventures of Valachi's life. This is one area where Valachi plays it straight. When another mobster suggests fixing some races, Valachi adamantly refuses. He wants his horse to win fair and square. Valachi ultimately is the owner of several horses.

World War II begins and Valachi's many enterprises are being hit. Only his dress factory, which is now making military clothes, is profiting. There is plenty of legitimate employment around so profits from his loan-sharking and numbers operations fall off. Two mob friends ask him to join them in heroin trafficking but he declines. The Cosa Nostra takes advantage of the rationing of commodities—like sugar, meat and gas—and creates the Black Market where such items are more readily available but at a much higher price. Valachi gets into an illegal gasoline operation and makes upwards of \$200,000 between 1942 and 1945. Valachi purchases stolen gas rationing stamps and sells them at a huge profit. The profits from his Black Market operation support Valachi's horse racing activities and allow him to buy another restaurant.

Valachi gets a call in early 1945 that Vito Genovese is on his way back from Italy.



Chapter 9: What Happened to Eric

Chapter 9: What Happened to Eric Summary and Analysis

Genovese is being returned to the US as a result of the 1934 death of Ferdinand Boccia. Ernest (The Hawk) Rupolo has been sent to prison for his part of the execution. Paroled in 1944, he repeats history and within weeks is involved in another shooting. In an effort to make a deal, he reveals to the Feds Vito Genovese's role in the Boccia murder. With the testimony of a corroborating witness, Genovese is indicted for murder.

A US Army CID man, Orange Dickey accidentally uncovers Genovese's whereabouts in Italy during an investigation of the Black Market operation there. After he arrests Genovese, Dickey learns about the murder indictment in the US, but cannot find anyone in Italy who is willing to get involved. Dickey decides to escort him back himself. To win his freedom, Genovese first tries to bribe Dickey with \$250,000 in cash. When that does not work Genovese threatens him. Genovese's mood changes abruptly when he realizes the Cosa Nostra is watching out for him. A star witness in the Boccia murder is mysteriously poisoned in jail. After Genovese arrives in the States, his case is dismissed. All the witnesses are either missing or refusing to talk. Rupolo's mutilated body shows up a short time later in New York's Jamaica Bay.

Valachi escapes possible execution after he beats up a fellow soldier, Frank Luciano, who is his partner in a new restaurant venture. After Valachi learns that Luciano is taking all the profits and gambling them away, he beats him unmercifully. Since Valachi has broken a code by beating up a fellow Cosa Nostra, Valachi is "brought to the table," given a trial. The trial is overseen by none other than the most dangerous and ferocious of underworld bosses, Albert Anastasia. Valachi is terrified but, to his relief, Anastasia finds in favor of Valachi due to Luciano's blatant thievery.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

William (Willie Moore) Moretti is a close friend of boss Frank Costello. Moretti's operation is in New Jersey. Although Moretti is only a lieutenant, he has a powerful stronghold on New Jersey operations, with an "army" of sixty men. With Genovese's return, Costello needs the continued support of Moretti to strengthen his position. However, Moretti is increasingly becoming a problem for Costello. Moretti is suffering from advanced syphilis. As the disease attacks his brain, Moretti has spells when he babbles crazily about things better left unsaid. Costello keeps a watchful eye on Moretti, spiriting him out of town with a doctor and nurse when he shows signs of talking too much. Moretti barely holds on to his sanity when subpoenaed to appear before the US Senate and New Jersey grand jury. Moretti is becoming too friendly with reporters and enjoys sharing stories with them about the "old days."

Genovese spreads the word that Moretti is a danger to all the families and he must be taken out. Soon all the bosses are in agreement with him. An open contract is placed on Moretti—whoever has the opportunity will do the job. Valachi's former loan sharking partner Robilotto winds up killing Moretti. Valachi lies low after hearing about the hit just in case there are unexpected ramifications. Robilotto is arrested for murder and Valachi is brought in for questioning. Valachi is never approached again about the murder and the charges against Robilotto are dropped due to insufficient evidence.

Valachi receives his most important contract from his lieutenant in September 1952. A soldier in the Lucchese Family, Eugenio Giannini, it is learned, is an informant for the Bureau of Narcotics. He has to be eliminated. Even though Giannini is cooperating with the Feds, he maintains his underworld activities. While Giannini is in Italy conducting some drug and counterfeit operations, he is arrested by Italian authorities. After being acquitted in Italy, Giannini returns to New York where the Bureau of Narcotics keeps him under close surveillance.

Valachi recruits some young thugs to take out Giannini. There are several attempts on Giannini but they are aborted when Valachi realizes the Feds are tailing the target. Giannini is frequenting a dice game in East Harlem. Valachi gets permission from his lieutenant to do the job at the dice game even though it is run by Cosa Nostra. After Valachi confirms that the Feds are not following Giannini to the dice game, the thugs murder him.

Valachi is next tapped to arrange for the murder of Steve Franse who worked closely with Genovese's wife. After Genovese's wife files for divorce and starts telling the authorities too much about Genovese's operations, Franse is blamed for not reining her in. Franse dies of strangulation at the hands of Valachi's young recruits. Late in 1953, Valachi finds that his old friend, The Gap, is a marked man. It has been learned that he was talking to the Feds. Valachi refuses to have anything to do with the hit on his old

friend. He tries to give The Gap a subtle warning, but to no avail. The Gap is shot to death in a restaurant in early December.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

In 1948, acting boss Frank Costello orders the Luciano Family to stay out of drugs. Heroin trafficking is seen by the general public at large as unacceptable while other operations such as gambling and prostitution are met with either acceptance or indifference. On top of that, the Cosa Nostra fears the Bureau of Narcotics who doggedly harass the families. While the FBI relies on informants to gain knowledge about the Cosa Nostra, the Bureau of Narcotics infiltrates its operations with undercover agents who are highly motivated and more daring and less disciplined than FBI agents. Due to easy profits, many of the families ignore Costello's stance and continue their drug ops.

Valachi is arrested and sentenced to five years in 1956 on a narcotics conspiracy charge. The conviction is reversed and Valachi is released on what he terms a "bad rap." Valachi is actually been involved in what is his first narcotics deal in 1952, which the Feds miss. It is an international operation that involves smuggling heroin into the US from France. Valachi and some of the other underlings are cheated out of their profits by Bender and Genovese.

Internal conflict increases from Genovese's desire to be Boss of Bosses. A failed attempt is made on Costello's life in May 1957. The bungled attempt causes the Genovese Family to face possible retribution from the much-feared Albert Anastasia. Genovese gets word out that Costello must be eliminated because he, Genovese, is marked for assassination by Costello. Costello does not retaliate and is soon no longer a problem when he is arrested and convicted for income tax evasion.

The families begin to war again when Anastasia's number two man, Frank Scalice, is taken out. The killing is ordered by Anastasia himself when he learns that Scalice for years has been selling memberships in the family for \$50,000 each. Genovese plots with Anastasia's lieutenant, Carlo Gambino, to eliminate Anastasia. Gambino is angry at Anastasia for Scalice's death. Anastasia is eliminated while relaxing under a pile of hot towels at a barbershop.

Genovese calls a meeting where developing a strategy to deal with the Bureau of Narcotics is discussed. Most Bosses vote for not allowing any drug operations. Any member violating this law will receive the death penalty. The meeting is held in a small town near Buffalo. An alert New York state trooper becomes suspicious of the visitors and sets up a roadblock. Although an estimated fifty men escape the scene, the police arrest sixty Cosa Nostra. The arrested men are charged with conspiracy but the cases are weak and later dismissed. The incident is more humiliating for the Bosses than anything else, with some seen running through the woods liked scared rabbits. Within the next year, Vito Genovese is indicted and convicted in a narcotics case and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

In 1957, the liquor license for Valachi's restaurant, the Lido, is revoked for undisclosed ownership. The license has been under the name of his former partner's son but the state authorities finally see through this ruse. Valachi's long arrest record precludes him from being approved for the license. Valachi's dress factory closes after he discovers that his partner has not paid withholding taxes on the employees for years. He has to sell all the machinery to cover the back taxes. His loan-sharking money is used to open up another failed restaurant in New Jersey. Strapped for money, Valachi goes back into narcotics for a quick fix. To supplement this income, he beefs up his loan-sharking operation and gets into a potentially lucrative jukebox operation.

Valachi is upset that his old partner Johnny Robilotto is taken out because of his close association with Anastasia. The police are looking for Valachi on a narcotics charge. To elude them, he goes into hiding. A snitch alerts the authorities of Valachi's whereabouts in Connecticut and they arrest him. After getting out on bail, Valachi flees to Canada but returns when ordered to by the Family. On his way to meet his bondsman, he again escapes to Brooklyn where he alludes capture for a month. The Family's anger over his actions compel him to turn himself in again. Valachi is in the Atlanta federal prison where Genovese is serving out his sentence. Valachi receives another sentence for twenty years for narcotics violations to be served concurrently with his earlier sentence.

In an effort to make him talk, Narcotics agents bring Valachi back to New York, threatening him with yet another narcotics charge. However, Valachi does not cooperate. An agent tells Valachi that Tony Bender is dead and that he, Valachi, is on the hit list. Back in prison, Genovese arranges for Valachi to be assigned to his 8-man cell. After at first seeming friendly, Genovese and other Cosa Nostra inmates start giving him the cold shoulder. Valachi figures they think he squealed to the Narcs. Afraid of being poisoned, Valachi only eats packaged food from the commissary. He avoids the shower room where many murders are committed. Under extreme pressure, Valachi picks up a pipe and kills an inmate he mistakes for a potential assassin.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

Since Valachi's day, two of the Cosa Nostra bosses pass away from natural causes. Vito Genovese is in prison but is not replaced because he is too feared. In addition to Genovese, the other NY dons are Gambino, Bonanno, and Colombo. Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Buffalo, Philadelphia and New Orleans have bosses as well. Giancana in Chicago has been hounded by police so much that he is almost worthless. The others are either sick or aging or both. Genovese has lost credibility with the rest of the members since it was a member of his family who confirmed the existence of the Cosa Nostra.

After a failed power grab, Joseph Bonanno retires to Arizona for a while but then comes back to New York with guns blazing, causing more internal strife. The Angelo Bruno family of Philadelphia makes a power-grab in Reading, successfully corrupting everyone from the mayor on down. Ultimately, Federal agents are able to rescue Reading from the mob. In New York, agents are able to uncover a corrupt thread running through the mayor's inner circle. Cosa Nostra has largely stayed out of drug operations but still make huge incomes from illegal gambling and skimming on vending machines, jukeboxes and licensed gambling casinos.

The current trend for the Cosa Nostra is to move into a somewhat legitimate form of loan-sharking, although they still prey upon the poor. The mobsters bully their way into legitimate businesses that are desperate for cash including Wall Street securities houses, builders and manufacturers. In return for the money, the Cosa Nostra generally wants a piece of the business. Once in a legitimate business, the Cosa Nostra reverts back to old tactics—muscling out competition and arranging for advantageous labor contracts with corrupt union officials. Although their presence is not always obvious, their impact on labor and business is far-reaching. Their illegitimate business still rakes in millions—in NYC alone the Cosa Nostra's numbers racket brings in upwards of \$250 million a year. The numbers game hits the poorest neighborhoods the hardest.

After Valachi's revelations, the Cosa Nostra still operates but it will never be the same. In their hey-day, the families relied on their elusive nature and mystique to be their most effective. Valachi destroyed that forever. As Valachi's story ends, he is alone in jail. He never hears from his wife or son—they have disowned him. His one hope is that the American people will benefit from knowing what the mob is all about.



Characters

Joseph Michael Valachi

Joseph Michael Valachi is born in Brooklyn, New York, of Italian immigrant parents. As a teenager, he becomes involved in the Italian crime underworld that will later become known as the Cosa Nostra. Valachi has good survival instincts as his career in the Italian syndicate endures for over thirty years—an unusually long tenure as scores of his cohorts in the crime world are executed by their own.

Valachi is also fortunate to escape serving much time behind bars for the majority of his career. During his time with the mob, he is involved in thirty murders—although he never pulls the trigger or tightens the wire around a neck. Surprisingly, soldiers in the Cosa Nostra are able to operate independently in earning illegal incomes. The only caveats are that they get permission from their lieutenants and cut their bosses in on the action.

Over the course of his career, Valachi earns millions in illegal gambling operations, prostitution, drug operations and loan-sharking. He owns several legitimate businesses—a dress factory and several restaurants—which he uses as tax covers. The most personally satisfying venture Valachi undertakes is horse racing, owning several horses himself. This is one area in which Valachi plays it straight and honest. He refuses to "fix" any of the races his horses are in—he wants them to win fair and square.

Toward the end of his career, Valachi winds up in jail with, of all people, the much-feared crime boss Vito Genovese, who suspects that Valachi is squealing to the Feds about the organization's drug operations. Valachi is not talking, but the cynical Genovese marks Valachi for elimination anyway. Under this pressure and the innate instinct to survive, Valachi finally breaks and talks to the authorities. He confirms the existence of the Cosa Nostra which up to that time has been only vaguely hinted at. Valachi breaks the back of the Cosa Nostra which has always relied on its ability to operate in the shadows. By exposing the organization and all its gory history, Valachi takes that advantage away forever. Although the Cosa Nostra continues to operate after Valachi's revelations, they are never again as powerful or as successful as they once were.

Vito Genovese

Vito Genovese is the boss or capo of one of the five New York City Families of the Cosa Nostra. He is the most feared of all the bosses within the entire organization. Like most other bosses, Genovese presents himself to the world as a legitimate business. Throughout his rise in the Cosa Nostra, Genovese, smart and ambitious, has designs on becoming the national "Mr. Big," or the Boss of Bosses, in charge of the entire organization



Vito Genovese, who is born in Italy, has spent time back in his homeland during his career with the Cosa Nostra. Genovese is deported back to Italy in one case and hides there to avoid prosecution in another instance. During World War II, Genovese is decorated by Italian dictator Mussolini with the highest award a citizen can receive. Genovese is a darling of that Fascist regime. Genovese is not idle during his time in Italy. He becomes a powerful force in the lucrative Italian Black Market, making himself a small fortune. Many Cosa Nostra underlings, including Valachi, are happy when Genovese is out of pocket. Genovese is a cruel and vindictive boss who trusts no one.

Genovese is indicted for the murder of a Cosa Nostra underling and is tracked down in Italy by a US Army CID man. Genovese is returned to the US but the organization has come through for him. A star witness in the murder case is mysteriously poisoned in jail. After Genovese arrives in the states, his case is dismissed. All the witnesses are either missing or refusing to talk.

Genovese himself is serving time in the Atlanta Federal penitentiary on a narcotics conviction at the same time as Valachi is inmate. It is Genovese, suspicious that Valachi is squealing to the Narcotics Bureau, who orders the hit on Valachi. Genovese gives Valachi the kiss of death in his cell one evening and makes thinly veiled threats against Valachi's grandkids. Ironically, the pressure applied by Genovese pushes Valachi, fighting for his very survival, to ultimately reveal to Federal agents the entire story of the Cosa Nostra.

Thomas (Three-finger Brown) Lucchese

Thomas (Three-finger Brown) Lucchese is a New York city Cosa Nostra boss. He earns his nickname by the loss of his index finger in an accident. At the time, there is a well-known major league pitcher called Three-finger Brown who also has a missing digit.

Peter Maas

Author Peter Maas becomes part of the story. Maas recounts his many in-person interviews with Joseph Valachi. Like most people around Valachi—lawyers, agents, guards—Maas grows fond of the old mobster.

John Joseph Saupp

Valachi kills fellow inmate John Joseph Saupp after mistaking him for a Cosa Nostra inmate Joseph (Joe Beck) DiPalermo who Valachi has heard is sent to assassinate him.

Joseph DeMarco

Joseph DeMarco is the cover name given to Valachi when he is transferred to a New York prison, poised to talk to the Feds in detail about the operations of the Cosa Nostra.

Albert Anastasia

Albert Anastasia is one of New York City's five Cosa Nostra bosses. Known as the Mad Hatter, Anastasia is considered a bloodthirsty murderer who loves to kill. Understandably, he is greatly feared by most underlings. Anastasia is assassinated in a barbershop by a warring faction within the organization while he is enjoying a facial under a pile of warm towels.

Lucky Luciano

Lucky Luciano is one of New York City's five Cosa Nostra bosses. Luciano is a natural leader and is credited with designing the structure of the crime organization that is to emerge and become known as the Cosa Nostra.

Carlo Gambino

Carlo Gambino is one of New York City's five Cosa Nostra crime bosses. Like the other crime bosses, Gambino presents himself as a legitimate businessman. Carlo Gambino purports to be a labor-management consultant.

William Moretti

William (Willie Moore) Moretti is only a lieutenant in the Cosa Nostra but has a powerful stronghold on New Jersey operations, with an "army" of sixty men. Toward the end of his life, however, he is becoming a problem—his advanced case of syphilis makes him somewhat senile and apt to talk too much. Vito Genovese orders his execution—which he considers a mercy killing.

Frank Costello

Frank Costello is an acting boss of the Lucky Luciano Family. He is more interested in his personal business successes than in the internal fighting among the families. A hit ordered by Genovese on Costello fails. Costello does not retaliate and allows Genovese to take over the Luciano Family.



Objects/Places

US Penitentiary, Atlanta, GA

Joseph Valachi is confined in the US penitentiary in Atlanta, GA, for the trafficking of heroin. Valachi murders a fellow inmate there in 1962.

Brooklyn, NY

Joseph Valachi is born and raised in Brooklyn. Most of his criminal activity is confined to the area in and around Brooklyn. Valachi turns down an opportunity to become part of Al Capone's Chicago Family because he wants to stay on familiar turf in New York City.

Fort Monmouth, New Jersey

Federal authorities transfer Valachi to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, for his extensive questioning that will last for months. This location is selected for Valachi's safety—the mob has put a contract out on him.

Cosa Nostra

The Cosa Nostra is an intricate web of criminal activity that is the dominant force of organized crime in America. Membership is strictly confined to those of Italian heritage. Translated literally from Italian, the phrase means "our thing."

Castellammarese War

The Castellammarese War is an internal war that wages between Sicilian members of the Cosa Nostra and Neapolitan members of the organization. The war's name stems from those members who are part of one the most clannish Italian groups—men who originally hail from the Sicilian town of Castellammarese del Golfo.

Buffalo, NY

Genovese calls a meeting of all crime bosses in a small town near Buffalo. The police become suspicious of all the visitors and are able to arrest sixty of the Cosa Nostra dignitaries, while fifty escape. The incident proves to be more embarrassing than anything else, with the escaping Dons seen running through the woods like scared rabbits.



Italy

To be a member of the Cosa Nostra, a man has to be full-blooded Italian—no "mixed breeds." Many members are born in Italy and seek refuge there when things get too hot in the US. Crime bosses Lucky Luciano and Vito Genovese are both deported back to Italy although they both ultimately re-emerge in the US.

New Jersey

New Jersey is an important part of the New York Cosa Nostra operation. Cosa Nostra lieutenant William Moretti has a stronghold on New Jersey's operation and has a formidable "army" of sixty men.

Washington, D. C.

Valachi agrees to testify publicly before the Senate in Washington. Valachi's televised appearance before the Senate is largely a disaster as the Senators lead him off to topics with which he is not familiar. Valachi is housed in the Death Row section of the D.C. Jail for his safety.

East Harlem

Valachi and many of his Family cohorts run numbers—also called policy games—in the poor neighborhoods of East Harlem. When unemployment is high before WW II, Valachi has more customers, people trying to make a little money. Little do they know, however, that the games are rigged in the gang's favor.

Themes

Murder and Terror

Although the Cosa Nostra divides the country into families which are led by crime bosses, the true authorities of the Cosa Nostra are murder and terror. As the story opens up, Valachi has killed an inmate whom he mistook for his potential assassin. Valachi has been marked by Cosa Nostra boss Don Vito Genovese for execution. Valachi is so terrorized by this eventuality that he kills the wrong man. Murder and terror come part and parcel with membership in the criminal underworld.

Valachi informs the Feds that he has been involved in upwards of thirty murders over the course of his tenure with the mob. Men like Valachi become desensitized to the brutality and cruelty that is part of the territory. However, the images that are burned in the minds of these men can only enhance the terror that, as a human beings, must lie within. Perhaps they wear their cavalier approach to life and death as a defense mechanism and find that it is the only way they can deal with the gravity and morality of such actions.

The underlings in the Cosa Nostra, of course, fear the brutal and cruel bosses that run the families. However, these bosses, these kingpins, are no more safe than anyone else. The terror that permeates the entire organization only breeds suspicion and terror among all its members. There is almost a domino effect in the Cosa Nostra slayings. One crime boss, Maranzano, is deemed to be too-money grabbing. He is shot and has his throat cut by Cosa Nostra pretending to be detectives. The murder is arranged by Jewish crime head Dutch Schultz. A short time later, boss Genovese, becomes suspicious of Schultz and has him whacked. Following that killing, others plot against Genovese.

Genovese who is smart and ambitious, has designs on becoming the Boss of Bosses, or Mr. Big; perhaps underlying this aspiration is a hope to inoculate himself against execution. Crime Boss Albert Anastasia is bloodthirsty—everyone agrees that he likes to kill. However, he does not evade the brutal act he embraces—he is shot to death while luxuriating under a pile of steaming cloths. There is no doubt that murder and terror rules over all levels of the Cosa Nostra and does indeed serve as the great equalizer.

A Confluence of Events

In a sense, a perfect storm for success exists when gangland soldier Joseph Valachi "sings" to the Feds: the Justice Department charges the FBI to reign in organized crime; Valachi, terrorized by his potential execution, is ready to talk; and the Federal government is fortunate enough to chose the right lead investigator to work with Valachi.



In prior decades, the FBI largely ignores the criminal underworld—it even has a somewhat condescending attitude about it. The Agency's boss, Director J. Edgar Hoover, is obsessed with chasing down communists in the United States. However, once Robert Kennedy is installed as the US Attorney General, the Agency's focus changes abruptly. Kennedy is adamant that the real fight to be waged is against organized crime. Playing catch-up, the FBI scrambles to gain information into that murky world by setting up extensive electronic surveillance.

The FBI is astonished that what this "lowlife" Valachi is telling them matches their recently gathered intelligence. An important factor that leads to the overwhelming success enjoyed by the Feds in their conversations with Valachi, is that FBI Agent James P. Flynn is the lead law enforcement officer. Flynn is credited with being indispensable in the intelligence gathered from Valachi. He knows how to work Valachi—when to baby him, how to snap him out of a depression and, in short, how to win his confidence.

Without a lead investigator such as Flynn, who is smart and patient and who shows respect to Valachi, the government could not glean the invaluable intelligence that it is able to gather. To paraphrase AG Robert Kennedy, the information is invaluable in exposing an enterprise that thrives on human suffering and is devoid of morality.

The Cosa Nostra and Ethnicity

While it is true that Cosa Nostra members have to be "tough guys," what is more important than that is that they have to be Italian. Not even "mixed breeds" are allowed—only men who are 100 percent Italian can gain membership into that elite organization. Many of the crime bosses are born in Italy and use it as a refuge when they need to hide from US prosecution. Italy is their homeland, their safe-haven. One crime boss, Vito Genovese, is honored by none other than Mussolini himself when the crime boss flees to Italy from the US. The sense that there is an unconditional loyalty among the Italians emerges as a strong theme within this account.

A theory is presented in the book, "The Valachi Papers," that hints that there may have been some homespun logic to the demand for an all-Italian membership. The Italians are deemed to be successful in the underworld, in fact they take it over, due to three factors: Italians are fiercely loyal to one another; they are outstanding organizers; and, they, as a whole, despise law enforcement. With those dubious credentials, they go on to become a force that some consider a shadowy, second government—one that Valachi warns the Feds could never be completely taken down.

One chink in their mutual loyalty to one other is an internal problem that can be traced to their very roots. This stubborn conflict is difficult to dismiss and leads Cosa Nostra members to become suspicious and resentful of each other and even results in bloodshed. The Italian mobsters have both macro and micro loyalties. While they are loyal to each other as Italians, there is distrust between the Sicilian and Neapolitan factions which leads to an all-out war that lasts a year. As Genovese gains power, he

sees the downside of such internal conflicts and works toward eliminating the clannish attitude of the two sides.

Style

Perspective

The book, "The Valachi Papers," is told in the third person narrative and is based almost exclusively on an insider's account of the operations of the shadowy crime organization known as Cosa Nostra. Joseph Valachi was a soldier in one of the five New York City Families of the Cosa Nostra. He saw first hand the operations, structure and brutality of this crime syndicate. As the Feds learned more and more information from him and were able to confirm much of it with intelligence they already possessed, they came to the conclusion that Valachi had outstanding retention and a remarkable recall of dates, names and places. No better authority could exist to provide the information that Valachi handed over to the Federal authorities.

The prize-winning author, Peter Maas, is a well-established writer who has penned other non-fiction bestsellers that include, among others, the true story of New York City police officer Serpico's fight against corruption. It is obvious that Maas is a tenacious gatherer of facts and a great presenter of non-fiction. He provides a compelling and factual account of Valachi's important revelations that shook the very foundations of the once indefatigable Cosa Nostra.

Maas employs two methods in successfully relaying the story of Joseph Valachi. While the account glides easily along via Maas' superior skill in providing an interesting and easily understandable narrative, he supports his assertions with large sections that are direct quotes from Valachi. In these passages, the reader is able to understand the joy the FBI agents and Department of Justice felt when the simple words and careful details provided by this gangster were developing into an air-tight expose of a complex and powerful crime organization that, up to that time, had all but eluded the attention of law enforcement.

Tone

The overall tone of "The Valachi Papers" by Peter Maas is sober and straightforward and is reminiscent in style to that of an investigative reporter. Maas, who admits in the narrative that he grew fond of the old gangster (under lock and key, of course), does little in the way of romanticizing either the main subject or the criminal lifestyle that he represented and indeed partook of for many years.

There are anecdotal episodes and touches of humor mixed in with the brutality and cruelty that unquestionably dominates the account. For example, during his televised US Senate hearing, the US Senator from Nebraska is performing for his constituents at home, demanding from Valachi confirmation that there is no on-going Cosa Nostra operation in Omaha. Valachi looks confused and whispers for a few minutes with the Federal agent sitting next to him. The fuming Senator, awaiting the horrible news that



the mob has indeed invaded Omaha, is taken aback when Valachi, the inveterate New Yorker, responds, "Where the hell is Omaha?"

Maas portrays Valachi as the ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances. Valachi is the aging man whose wife and son have disowned him. The shunned squealer who must serve his time in isolation for his own safety. He is hurt when his in-cell hot-plate is taken from him. Valachi is insulted when Maas asks him about taking after an unarmed civilian with a baseball bat. He would never do that—albeit he admits involvement in upwards of thirty murders. However, the perpetration of murder and mayhem dictated by the crime bosses—that was part of his job, his duty. When Maas shows up unexpectedly for an interview, the jailed Valachi, who has no place to go and nothing to do, asks that Maas have more respect for him and make an appointment the next time he comes. Maas is brilliant at showing, not telling, the reader that Valachi probably was not a bad guy but just went down the wrong path. He is everybody's grandpa and everybody's eccentric old uncle. Despite the humanness that Maas cannot deny him, the reader recalls the misery this man was part of and falls short of feeling empathy for him.

Structure

"The Valachi Papers" is structured in a straightforward, mainly chronological order. It is divided into thirteen chapters with simple numeric headings. Maas does begin the account with the episode in which Valachi kills an inmate, mistakingly thinking the man was contracted to kill him. The experience, along with the pressure he's under, compels him to talk to the Feds. The narrative is launched from that point on in a basically chronological manner. The conclusion of the story reverts back to the first scene when Valachi murders a fellow inmate and decides to talk. During the narrative, at times it is necessary for clarity to recreate scenes that preceded the currently described episode, making it necessary for a limited use of flashbacks. Maas does engage the reader with a sprinkling of subtle cliffhangers at the close of some chapters. However, since the subject matter is known, or at least familiar, to all, there is not much suspense that can be engendered.

Following the conclusion of the story is a two-page long list of Valachi's arrest record. It is quite detailed and lengthy and will interest the reader to learn a little more about the man. The book ends with a detailed index of the characters and locations and other information contained in the account.

Quotes

"While the Cosa Nostra does not embrace all organized crime, it is its dominant force, virtually a state within a state—a 'second government' as Valachi puts it—painstakingly structured, an intricate web of criminal activity stretching across the nation, bound together in a mystic ritual that sounds like a satire on college fraternity initiations and at the same time caught up in a continual swirl of brutality, savage intrigue, kangaroo courts and sudden death." (Chapter 1, p. 2)

"'Where the hell is Omaha?' — Joseph Valachi" (Chapter 1, p. 24)

"The picture is an ugly one. It shows what has been aptly described as a private government of organized crime, a government with an annual income of billions, resting on a base of human suffering and moral corrosion." — AG Robert Kennedy (Chapter 2, p. 36)

"I came home with an education. I didn't learn much in that school, but at least I could read something and know what I was reading. Before I went back to Sing sing, I could hardly make out the street signs." (Chapter 4, p. 56)

"Organized Italian racketeering really did not begin to be a national force until the 1920s—prohibition, of course, was the catalyst. In addition to those old standbys—prostitution and gambling—there was now a new illicit commodity that millions of Americans craved: alcohol." (Chapter 4, p. 63)

"That was the end of this Shapiro. He was put in a drum full of cement—the kind they use for oil—and dumped in the East River. I guess he's still there." (Chapter 6, p. 120)

"Genovese is a man of Byzantine bent. If you went to Vito. . .and told him about some guy who was doing wrong, he would have this guy killed, and then he would have you killed for telling on the guy." (Chapter 6, p. 129)

"'Well, you won't believe it, but it's the God's honest truth. I never read nothing about myself. You know why? It only upsets my stomach.'" — Family Boss Frank Costello (Chapter 7, p. 134)

"On the evening of January 15, 1945, LaTempa swallowed some [antacid] tablets in his cell and went to bed. He never work up. An autopsy showed that he had enough poison in his system 'to kill eight horses.'" (Chapter 9, p. 179)



"Well, Willie Moretti had a hell of a funeral, lots and lots of cars and flowers. . . .Willie was not deserted because it was sort of, as we put it, a mercy killing, as he was sick." (Chapter 10, p. 197)

"His arms had been bound behind his back with wire, and he had been strangled with a clothesline. He was then doused with gasoline and set on fire. An autopsy report revealed that approximately thirty pounds of flesh had been sliced from Agueci's body while he was still alive." (Chapter 12, p. 250)

"I hope the American people will benefit by knowing what the job is like. If I was killed in Atlanta, I would have died branded as a rat anyway without doing anything wrong. So what did I lose?" (Chapter 13, p. 263)



Topics for Discussion

What is the structure of the crime organization known as the Cosa Nostra? What does Cosa Nostra mean? Who designed the hierarchal structure of the Cosa Nostra?

Why did Vito Genovese put a hit on Joseph Valachi while both were serving time in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary? Was Genovese correct about his suspicions?

What did the FBI call the Cosa Nostra? Where had Federal authorities heard the phrase "Cosa Nostra" before and what meaning did it have to them?

Who was the US Attorney General who directed the FBI to prosecute organized crime? Prior to this AG's orders, what was the focus of the FBI's attention?

What did Joseph Valachi's revelations about the Cosa Nostra do to the organization? Prior to Valachi's revelations about the Cosa Nostra, why was that crime organization able to operate so effectively?

Why did Italian men seem to have a superior ability in succeeding in organized crime? What ethnic conflict among some Cosa Nostra members was a continuing problem?

How did the Cosa Nostra bosses view drug operations? Why was there a reluctance among some Cosa Nostra bosses to get involved in drug trafficking?