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## The Asphalt Jungle

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William Riley Burnett authored some thirty-six gangster novels, including the classics Little Caesar (1929) and High Sierra (1940). The Asphalt Jungle, first published in 1949, tells the story of a half-million dollar jewellery heist which develops complications. In forty short chapters spanning 230 pages, the novel develops over a series of atmospheric scenes. Despite its huge cast of characters, the reader is drawn into the story of Emmerich, Reimenschneider, Gus, Schemer and Dix. Reimenschneider, just released from prison, has plans for a heist, but needs the financial backing of Emmerich, a rich and powerful lawyer. Emmerich, however, has troubles of his own, which he seeks to resolve with the help of a crooked private detective. The muscle is provided by Dix, "an out of work heavy" who despises the grubby city and his city-girl, Doll, and yearns to go home to the country. Schemer, who dreams of a settled home life with his innocent wife and their baby son, will perform the break-in. Gus, a hamburger flipper, who is "A Number 1 with all the big boys" and knows enough of what's going on in the city "to blow the whole administration out of City Hall", is the driver. Tensions develop as preparations are made for a robbery that each member of the gang hopes will change his fortunes. The planning unfolds against a backdrop of rumour, suspicion and double dealing. When things don't go according to plan, each man must find his own way of escaping.

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