



# Doppelgangster

*Laura Resnick*

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## **Doppelgangster** Laura Resnick

A struggling actress, a 350-year-old mage whose day job is protecting New York City from Evil, a skeptical cop—and double the number of wiseguys that there should be....

While working as a singing waitress in Little Italy, struggling actress Esther Diamond witnesses a mob hit. And right before getting whacked out, the victim tells her that he just saw his own doppio—a perfect double and a notorious portent of death.

Before long, more doppelgangers start haunting New York's mobsters, who are subsequently getting bumped off in mysterious ways. Meanwhile, Esther's new love-interest, Detective Connor Lopez, gets transferred to the NYPD's organized crime unit and is assigned to investigate these hits.

Determined to prevent the murder of more of her restaurant customers, which slayings will soon lead to a mob war, Esther tries to uncover the evil genius behind the deadly doppelgangsters. Along with a 350 -year-old sorcerer and an aging hit man, Esther delves deep into the world of wiseguys in pursuit of a ruthlessly mystical murderer

## **Doppelgangster Details**

Date : Published January 5th 2010 by DAW (first published December 1st 2006)

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Author : Laura Resnick

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# From Reader Review Doppelgangster for online ebook

## Leslee says

3.5 stars. Second novel in the Esther Diamond Series. This one was stronger than the first. Resnick has cleared up some of the annoying ticks that I thought stood out in the first, she's calmed down on the cutesy dialogue, it feels more natural, and I thought that the secondary characters were altogether more interesting and well written in this follow up installment.

In this mystery, Esther has unfortunately found herself without a paying gig when her off Broadway show is finally cancelled. She finds herself working at Stella's which is a restaurant that is a popular hangout for some very dangerous wise-guy types. Unfortunately, supernatural happenings are afoot when Esther witnesses a mobster getting killed right before her eyes, with no possible killer in sight.

Esther is an appealing protagonist, capable enough but also not uber powered to the point where she's getting out of situations she really has no business being able to solve. Worth a read if you liked the first book.

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## Kellie Sheridan says

Alright, I'll start off by saying I LOVED this book and then continue on by going right into complaining about it. My complaint isn't about the book itself, just a really irritating mishap by I assume, the publisher. This is not the first book in this series! When you open to the list of books in this series, this is the first one listed, followed by two with little \*'s to indicate they hadn't been published yet. The whole reason I read this book was I liked the look of book number three in this series (which has in fact, now been published). I was willing to take the time and start from the beginning and they let me down. /rant

I should probably mention, that not reading the first book in no way took away from the story. I loved this book and will continue to love it even though a swap in publishers made for one very annoyed Kellie.

All that being said, this book was hilarious! The title alone should tell you something. It was laugh out loud funny the whole way through. It was clever, witty and very well written. I loved the main character, Esther as well as her mafia "sidekick" Lucky. The older sorcerer Max was a little harder to get to know, but apparently that was what the first book was for. Sorry, I said I'd stop.

I love that the mystery had a mob twist on it. I'm not especially a fan of mob stories, actually I'm not sure I've ever read one but it gave this story some unique flair that I've never seen before. It really helped to build the world that Esther lives in and the people that populate her life. Her cop, would-be boyfriend, even manages to play a roll in how the various crime families interacted with the main character. I cracked a smile every time someone chimed in with "You date a cop!?"

I'll definitely be reading the next book in the series. I will not be going back to read the first though \*shakes fist\*

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## **Fiendishly Bookish says**

All Esther Diamond wants is a decent acting role that she can be proud of (and her typically Jewish mother can be proud of as well!) she'll do anything to get her to stop nagging. Plus, it would be nice to get a regular paycheck. And finally go on a hot sexy date with her police detective boyfriend. But it looks as if that's not in the cards for Esther. At least not while Mercury is in retrograde and her proverbial job as a singing waitress at Bella Stella's (the mob version of Casablanca) is soon to hit the skids.

When Esther's favorite wiseguy customer Chubby Charlie Chiccante is gunned down in front of her after seeing his mystical doppelganger, she's drawn deeply into a web of magical intrigue and the mobster underworld. Who is creating the magical doppelganger assassins that threaten to start an all out mob war between New York's notorious crime families? And can she stop it before she ends up sleeping with the fishes too?

Doppelgangster is an energetic gangster tale with elements of the paranormal that is both witty and hilarious. At first, I didn't know what to expect when starting it. Was it a paranormal? Was it a mystery? Was it a thriller? Was it a romance? I was so pleasantly surprised to find that it was all of these things and more. Diving into Doppelgangster was like getting the best piece of the pie and slowly savoring each bite.

Resnick is in her element with Doppelgangster's dialogue. She's a powerhouse with it. The funny and engaging mobsterisms are rampant, clever, and her character interactions are simply gut busting. In fact the two most important aspects of Resnick's tale are the originality of her idea and the brilliant character interactions. Esther, paired with Lucky, Max, and Nelli at the behest of the Gambello's shy don makes this one of the funniest books I've read this year. I laughed non-stop throughout this book.

There is a small thread of romance between Esther and her slurpalicious detective Lopez. But so far, the mobster shenanigans ensuing have firmly placed the lovers on opposite camps: Lopez on the side of the law and Esther helping the "family". While this tenuous thread between the two of them was smoking hot, I suspect that we'll be seeing more of sexy Detective Lopez in Resnick's next novel. Especially the barest hint that he might not be what he seems, and could be psychically gifted.

If you want to truly be entertained, (and laugh out loud frequently) and enjoy storytelling at its best, give Doppelgangster a whirl! And don't forget Esther's first story in "Disappearing Nightly". Resnick's next installment is out August 2010 entitled "Unsympathetic Magic". Yippee!

A Fiendishly Bookish Review

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## **Cathy says**

Very enjoyable. Not a serious piece of literature, but just right for what it is.

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## **Kelly says**

Esther Diamond is between acting jobs. To make ends meet, she takes a job waiting tables at Bella Stella.

Connor Lopez, the cop who may or may not be Esther's boyfriend, is concerned because Bella Stella is frequented by the Gambello crime family, but hey, a girl's gotta make a living!

Before long, though, Esther lands in deep trouble. One of Bella Stella's regulars, Chubby Charlie, sees a perfect double of himself and then is murdered right in front of her. She's traumatized by the event, the tabloids are painting her as mob-connected, Lopez doesn't believe her version of events, and she's starting to suspect that Charlie's double was created by magic. When other doubles start popping up, followed by more murders, it's up to Esther to find the killer, with the help of Max, her centuries-old wizard friend; Lucky, an aging wise guy; and Max's new "familiar," Nelli, who may be a mystical creature but seems more like an ordinary, slobbering *Canis familiaris*.

What follows is a twisty, well-executed mystery plot laced with plenty of humor. Laura Resnick touches on some serious themes from time to time — these are gangsters, not Boy Scouts, after all — but *Doppelgangster* never gets too heavy or depressing. In fact, it's laugh-out-loud funny, the kind of book that makes me want to use words like "screwball" and "romp." Esther and her friends make a hilarious team, and I love watching them interact. My favorite scenes include Lucky teaching Max to use gangster lingo, and pretty much any scene involving the dog. (Max would of course correct me. I shouldn't call Nelli a *dog*. She's a *familiar*!)

*Doppelgangster* is a great mix of urban fantasy, humor, mystery, and maybe a dash of chick lit. It had me in stitches. I also recommend Resnick's first Esther Diamond book, *Disappearing Nightly*. You don't have to read it to follow *Doppelgangster*'s storyline, but it's worth tracking down anyway, just because it's fun!

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## James Tullos says

See my full thoughts here: <https://youtu.be/51Vj869IJ0E>

There's a scene in *Doppelgangster* where the protagonist beats an evil sorcerer with a dead chicken. That says just about everything, I think.

This book is cheesy and stupid, but it very clearly understands that and is just having fun with it. There are some serious aspects to the plot but most of it is just an excuse for the characters to get into absurd situations, observe things with some snark, or run into other odd characters.

Speaking of characters, they're the thing that really makes this book fun. Esther herself plays a sort of straight man role, but that doesn't mean she isn't funny. She has a few witty observations and one-liners that make her a fun narrator. Then there's her wizard friend, Max, whose lack of understanding of the modern world never seems to get old. And all of the various mobster "Wise Guys" that they meet are such over the top Italian stereotypes that I couldn't help but laugh and shake my head whenever they... did anything really.

Not to mention that the mystery at the heart of the story is legitimately good. The audience is only given information at a slow drip, which means that you figure things out at around the same pace as the characters. It's not immediately obvious who's behind all of the murders and when I found out who it was, I felt genuine sympathy for them.

The one part of the story I couldn't get into was the romance between Esther and Detective Lopez. It's not that they don't have chemistry or that either of them are terrible people, it's just that life gets in the way of

their relationship way too often for me to feel like they would ever work as an item.

*Doppelgangster* is very much a tongue-in-cheek book that's poking fun at the urban fantasy genre. Even as someone who isn't much into that genre, this was a lot of fun to read. I recommend it for anyone looking for a lighthearted comedy or a mystery with a twist.

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## **Matt says**

I picked this up at my book club white elephant in the unwanted pile and felt with a title like doppelgangster it was the sort of book I might enjoy.

Esther Diamond is an out of work actress and to make ends meet while she is "resting" she takes a job at a notorious mob restaurant. Wise guys tip well. When one of her customers comes in terrified having seen his "perfect double" and is then shot in front of her by a bullet that somehow went round a corner she realizes something supernatural is going on. Soon more of these doppelgangsters are showing up heralding the deaths of more wise guys threatening to spark a gang war. the police are baffled the mob is worried so Esther teams up with her sorcerer friend Max, his dog Nellie, and retired mob hitman lucky to find out who is duplicating these gangsters and put a stop to it.

This is the second book in the series and I'd not read the previous one but that didn't seem to matter too much. This was a funny fairly clever urban fantasy type of story with a enjoyable protagonist and a cast of somewhat interesting characters. It's very silly but fun with it and doesn't take itself too seriously.

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## **Jamie says**

It's been a while since I reviewed the first in the series, *Disappearing Nightly*, despite owning the series thus far, but to explain that I'm going to get my first and only criticism out of the way right now. The books are wonderful **but** they read like cozy mysteries. So what's the problem (I hear you ask)? A cozy mystery is generally just under 300 pages, and you might not notice as you're reading it but your brain comes to expect this length after a while, especially if you usually read them in one go. The *Esther Diamond* books are uniformly just under 400 pages, and after you pass over into those last hundred pages your brain starts to tell you that this book is taking too damn long. You'll find yourself paying as much attention to the page numbers as you do to the plot. You might not think an extra hundred pages would be a big deal, but think of it like how your brain starts to react when a longer-than-average movie creeps past the two hour mark.

Also because my spellcheck absolutely despises the titles, which is insane because they're all awesome, but which is also totally understandable because I haven't spelt Doppelgangster right on the first try *once* during the entire first draft of this review.

*"His doppelgänger?" I repeated. "I've heard the word, but..." I shrugged to indicate that my familiarity with it stopped there.*

*"Understandable," said Max. "It's a very rare phenomenon, and the study of German mythology doesn't seem to have deeply absorbed your generation in the New World."*

*"Kids these days," Lucky said, shaking his head. "If it ain't on MTV, it don't exist."*

*"Indeed," said Max. "Plus 'doppelgänger' is hard to spell."*

(Laura Resnick, *Doppelgangster*, p.82-83)

But aside from that minor misgiving the book is a shot of pure entertainment. The author barely gives you any time to breathe before launching you into the next crazy scenario, and the characters are all memorable and distinct.

Two new recurring characters are introduced in Max's new familiar, a Great Dane mix named Nellie, and mob hitman Lucky, who takes the mystical aspects of this case so well that he more or less has Esther on speed dial from this point forward anytime something weird comes up (since Esther's beau is on the organized crime beat, several future stories have connections to the mafia to guarantee plenty of personal conflicts). Nellie may just be a clever dog, but Max swears up and down that she's an entity of great intelligence so you'll find yourself second guessing her now and again. She's a great addition to the comedy of the series as adding a rambunctious Great Dane can turn any occasion on its head. (I promise the main group isn't going to expand to the point where they start resembling Mystery Inc.).

Another pleasing point was that this is one of the few books that set my head spinning by letting me think I've figured out the culprit, and boy was that rug pulled out from under me. The plot was ingenious and the characters fun and the whole book was an entertaining ride. *Doppelgangster* is probably one of the best books in the *Esther Diamond* series. The humor was hitting all the marks and not once did I find the plot getting boring.

#### **CHARACTERS:**

Detective Lopez was a well-cast straight man, Esther had just the right amount of bad choices and exasperation, and I'm thrilled that Lucky's part of the semi-regular cast from here on. I still can't figure out how Max is so far behind the times, though. Did he sleep through the last several decades? It would certainly explain all the problems he has in this book with the IRS.

#### **SETTING/WORLD BUILDING:**

The amount of research that must have gone into this book is impressive, and the facts are woven into the puzzle of the doppelgängers beautifully. The world building is still a little hard to swallow since I have a hard time believing a man so far behind the times has been protecting New York from Evil yet has managed to learn so little about the current century. Either he's been doing a very impressive job at keeping things under wraps, or nothing has ever happened until Esther came on the scene. And I'm not quite sure what to think of the world building in this novel *specifically*. It revolves around wise guys and two of the major crime families of New York, yet everyone talks and looks like they've stepped off the set of an old shoot-'em-up gangster movie. It's very entertaining and I believe it exists like this is Esther's New York, but now I want to know how much of that mafia golden age style has carried on in the Families of today.

*"So what I'm wondering is, did this doppelgangster whack Charlie?" Lucky said.*

*"Whack?"*

*"Hit," Lucky clarified.*

*"You think the creature struck him?" Max asked.*

*I said, "Lucky's asking if the doppelgangster killed Charlie."*

*"Interesting!" Max said to Lucky, "Your dialect fascinates me. May I ask where did you learned it?"*

*Lucky shrugged. "I'm from Brooklyn."*

(Laura Resnick, *Doppelgangster*, p.83-84)

(As you can tell from the above quote and the page it's found on, the series is one that's not shy about title-

dropping as quickly as it can. It's pretty adorable.).

#### **PLOT/SOLUTION:**

You'll think you've figured it out just in time for the bottom to drop out of your theory. A fantastic puzzle and a clever culprit, with a big climax and a special surprise for poor beleaguered Detective Lopez.

#### **OTHER ASPECTS:**

I may as well put the extra star here for the whole series. Excluding the first book, all the cover art in this series is done pin-up style and I absolutely adore it. It was the cover of *Mis-Fortune Cookie* that got me to pick up the series in the first place. But I'm removing a half star for Esther still expecting us to think setting a virgin-raping demon on the foe of the last book as a delaying tactic is funny. She only mentions it again once at the very beginning, but it still rubs me the wrong way. Especially since she spends the book battling her conscience over having eventually 'killed' the bad guy, but is still comically nonchalant over the rape. Also, how did that even work? What interest would a demon have in virgins since virginity is a manmade concept that means different things to different cultures? What definition was it using? How would their sexual organs even be compatible? Why did it have sex organs? I'm probably overthinking this but it's really been bugging me.

#### **THE VERDICT?**

And now I want to pick up the next one while I still have library books to read, dang it!

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#### **Alice says**

This is the second book in the Esther Diamond series. It's an improvement over the last book, though there are some indications the series might fall into some tropes I dislike.

In the previous book, Esther, a struggling stage actress, found out that magic exists, and stopped a sorcerer who wanted to sacrifice leading ladies to a powerful demon. In this book, her familiarity with magic serves her well, as it's the only explanation for the bizarre deaths taking place at her day job at an Italian restaurant. People with mod connections are seeing perfect doubles of themselves, and then dying within hours. A hit man asks Esther for help finding the killer. Meanwhile, Detective Lopez has been moved to the department that investigates the Mafia, and he'd very much like for Esther to stay out of it before his conflict of interest gets them both in trouble.

The title probably would've been funnier if it hadn't been adopted as the name for what's killing mobsters, and repeated throughout the text. Still, it's apt, and eye-catching enough to make someone want to pick this up, if it's the sort of thing they'd like.

This book never pretends to be anything it isn't. It's silly, fluffy urban fantasy, and Esther well knows how ridiculous it sounds. In case she forgets, other characters are more than willing to laugh or disbelieve. That made me feel this book is more grounded in reality than most urban fantasy, despite its humor trappings.

There were times, though, when it seemed the humor might rely on the absurdity a little too much. I worried future books might start to string together wacky hijinks, for lack of any better ideas. It gave me flashbacks to the Stephanie Plum series, which I've give up on.

For now, though, I do plan to read the next book. We'll see if it lays the above fears to rest, and continues to



give me the fun melding of murder mystery and magic that I enjoy in these books. I also hope we see more Detective Lopez. Not because I particularly like him, but I like how Esther plays off him.

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## **Wing Kee says**

Solid genre book.

World: The world building is solid, nothing creative here and pretty much all the pieces here can be found in another book in the urban fantasy genre. That being said, it was still fun, the gangster angle was kinda stereotypical fun of the genre. The expansion of the cast of characters is also fun.

Story: Solid for the genre, pacing was solid and the banter and situations was pleaseing. There is nothing much to say about the book, it's a mob themed books with supernatural pieces. Esther is a fun character and the rest of the cast makes it a fun read.

Characters: Esther is solid, she's not entirely original just like all the characters but Resnick is good with dialog and the banter between the characters this time around was sun. There were a lot of Italian stereotypes which made me rll my eyes in a fun way. Solid.

A solid entry, a good junk food book.

Onward to the next book!

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## **Jennifer Wadsworth says**

This review is for the GraphicAudio.net version of the Esther Diamond series Books 1-7. Originally posted on 5/7/2018 at One Book Two.

I'm gonna break this Series Spotlight down into two sections: one to talk about the series and one to talk about the audio production because they both deserve their own spotlight.

### **Series**

Esther Diamond is a struggling New York actress. While working on an off-broadway play as a chorus nymph and understudy to the female lead, the lead actress disappears.

Enter Maximillian Zadok, a 350-year-old wizard, stationed in New York by the Magnum Collegium to fight mystical evil. Max implores Esther not to take up her understudy duties for fear she will go missing, too. Once Max convinces Esther that there is mystical evil afoot, Esther rushes to help Max find and stop the culprit before she becomes the next victim.

Meanwhile, the lead actress's disappearance is also being investigated by Detective Connor Lopez, a sexy Latino with blue Irish eyes. Lopez finds Esther intriguing and would like to get to know her better. Unfortunately, Lopez doesn't believe in mystical evil, even though Esther's tried to tell him that it exists. While he is strongly drawn to Esther, he fears she's unstable, dangerous, and possibly felonious. Their

involvement complicates his life and jeopardizes his job, but he has trouble staying away.

During their adventures, Esther, Max, and a number of their friends encounter evil sorcerers, demons, voodoo loa, zombies, vampires, spirits, cursed objects, missing corpses, mob hit men, death omens, drag queens, entitled young adults, harried production assistants, and narcissistic actors. The mysteries are intriguing and well written, but I think it's the main characters that really shine in the series. They are complex and layered, unique and intriguing, each with their own secrets that are slowly revealed over time.

This series has magic, mystery, and adventure, but it also has humor, friendship, and relationship tension (not everything is rosy in this romance) that builds with each book. It's more glossy than gritty, on the lighter side of urban fantasy, but the protagonists have depth, and it's easy to care about them. I highly recommend the series for a fun urban fantasy read.

If you're not an audiobook fan, you can find the Esther Diamond series in digital and print formats at your favorite online retailer.

### Audio Production

I've mentioned on this blog before how awesome I think GraphicAudio is. They make audiobooks into full-production masterpieces. They're essentially radio-plays, for those of us who are old enough to have heard of those. There is a full cast of characters, so the voices are all different and the "he said" and "she said" of regular audiobooks aren't needed. There are music and sound effects in all the right places, which enhance the story greatly. As a big fan of audiobooks, I absolutely adore these productions. They are just so much fun!

GraphicAudio did a FANTASTIC job with the Esther Diamond series. I cannot imagine a better casting of voices, especially Colleen Delany as Esther Diamond, Thomas Keegan as Detective Connor Lopez, Bob Payne as Maximillian Zadok, and Tim Carlin as Lucky Battistuzzi. The voice acting is fantastic and really conveys the character personalities and emotional content of the story. The GraphicAudio actors bring each character completely to life in a way that only the very best voice actors can in regular audiobooks.

The background music and sound effects add such depth and dimension to the story that you really do feel as if you are listening to a movie. It's that much easier to feel the tension of being stalked when you can hear the footsteps behind you, or to visualize a street fight when you can hear the impact of fists, the grunts of the combatants, and the splash of blood on pavement.

I don't think I'm capable of expressing just how emotionally involved I feel when listening to GraphicAudio productions. It is an amazing medium for some genres, and I really encourage authors, particularly indie sci-fi and fantasy authors, to consider GraphicAudio for their books before any other audiobook company. Your listeners will experience a much richer version of your creation than I think you'll find elsewhere.

A rich creation is exactly how I'd describe the Esther Diamond series on GraphicAudio. Five stars for this superb production.

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### **Dangerous Romance Book Reviews says**

When I first saw the cover of Doppleganster, I was intrigued. I quickly learned I'd be circumnavigating the

world Laura Resnick created without the context of book one to walk me through. Preceding *Dopplegangster*, the first book in the Esther Diamond series, “Disappearing Nightly” which at the time was published by Luna, unfortunately disappeared almost overnight, likely because back in 2005 the publisher didn’t know what to do with it, and it was soon out of print.

It appears that DAW recognized the potential and bought the second and third books in the series, released them and is going rescue and reprint “Disappearing Nightly” and finally give it the home it originally deserved. I highly recommend buying *Dopplegangster* and the new *Sympathetic Magic*. Hopefully good sales will influence DAW (a Penguin Imprint) to get busy and publish book one.

Evidently, in book one, Esther became friends with Max, a 350+ year old wizard (who looks a youthful 70) and who with her help, defeated a bad wizard and they killed his evil assistant Hieronymus, something that had to be done, but weighs on Esther’s mind and something she can never tell her hopefully soon to be, cop boyfriend Connor.

Esther’s life never goes to plan and she always ends up a mess, looking like a mess, or trying to get herself out of one. It is almost a Lucille Ball kind of slapstick. She stumbles from one zany, crazy, silly, hilarious, mix-up to another. She’s like a pinball stuck in a game, being bashed around from one side to the other. Esther is just trying to find her way to that acting gig that will break her into the big time, trying to find some romantic time with the guy of her dreams, while being flung from one part of town to another, trying to solve the mystery and stay alive.

What is so fresh and wonderful about the Esther Diamond series is Esther is the ANTITHESIS of what has become the norm in Urban Fantasy. The biggest weapons she carries are her four-inch high heels. She doesn’t know how to fight. There is no mystery about her parentage, other than how does her Mother always know to call when there is bad news. She has no magical skills. That’s right...none. She isn’t going to become some magical Queen; she doesn’t go around bossing everyone around because the whole world depends on her. Nobody seems to depend on her, she’s just trying to survive on her own, and maybe keep her boyfriend alive from the things he doesn’t know about that go bump in the night.

*Dopplegangster* (again, this is book two) starts with Stella losing her acting gig. The play she was in, “Sorcerer” is canceled. Being a struggling actress in New York is no joke. She is damn glad to be rehired at her old waitressing job, even if it is as a singing server at Bella Stella’s, a known and notorious Mob Hangout.

Unfortunately, her on again off again cop boyfriend Joe Morelli...oops, I mean Connor Lopez, a gorgeous hunk of Cuban and Scotch Irish parentage, doesn’t agree and thinks it is a dangerous place for her to work. He might have a point given the fact that there have been two mob hits there in the last five years and the owner Stella launders money for the Mob.

To make matters worse, Lopez has just been promoted to the OCCB task force (organized Crime Control Bureau,) and his job is to crack down on organized crime. Chubby Charlie, one of her Mafioso regulars, and Esther both see an exact walking, talking double of Chubby Charlie and then he is shot at his table, from an impossible angle. This doesn’t help Lopez’s employment prospects as everyone thinks Esther had to have seen the murderer and is covering. She finds herself in the middle of a murder investigation and on the cover of a New York Tabloid publication looking like a mob girlfriend in the middle of a mob war. In a very short period, wise guys begin dropping like flies just after they see their exact double, the cops want Esther brought in for questioning and chaos ensues.

The cops and the mob both think she knows more than she does. The only real people Esther can count on are Max, the Sorcerer with his trusty if slobbery familiar Nelli, a Wizardly familiar, in the body of a massive hound from another plane of existence, and Lucky, a retired assassin wise guy who knows the truth and surprisingly accepts it quite easily.

The scenes with Lucky are great. He's the kind of guy where if it was his job, and he had to do it, he'd kill you, but otherwise, if he likes you...he's gonna keep an eye out and try to help you out. And he likes Esther. Even though his concern is paternal, it is infuriating to Lopez, who cannot understand why Esther is hanging out with a mobster if she is innocent as she claims.

Connor can only protect her so much, he can tell she's lying, and various factions of the mafia are beginning to think Esther might be better off sleeping with the fishes. Connor also knows Max is hiding something and thinks he is a bad influence on Esther and he is incensed she is hanging out with retired mob enforcer, Lucky.

Esther just wants her agent to return her calls with news of a great acting job, and to have sex with her boyfriend. Given the situations she finds herself in, none of these things seems likely to happen any time soon.

The one-liners are hilarious, the side characters are incredibly nuanced and fleshed out, the heroine is hyper, smart and hilarious, and the hero is beleaguered. The book is much like Esther, an oddball mix. Part urban fantasy, part mystery, part screwball comedy harkening back to Katherine Hepburn and Carey Grant, It is a fun ride from start to finish. I just bought the third book, Sympathetic Magic, and I hope Esther and Lopez sort out their differences and get a HEA or at least get a chance to work off some of that sexual frustration. Given all that they've been through together, they deserve it.

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### **Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says**

I read this story in *Murder by Magic: Twenty Tales of Crime and the Supernatural*, and I loved it. It takes a fresh look at Made Men (aka Mafiosos). This time they are the victims of supernatural hits. Each victim appears to his cronies and performs his normal behavior minutes before he dies. Only it's not the victim. It's his doppelganger. This story managed to do something that I did not feel was possible. To feel sorry for mobsters. I am not a fan of mafioso types. But these guys died in awful ways, due to a supernatural curse. I loved the concept and thought it was very unique and interesting. Another plus of this story is how funny it is to see the mafia guys behaviors. The narrator was sympathetic, although he was another Made Man. And I actually found myself hoping that the culprit would be caught before another victim was claimed. You'll never guess who the perpetrator of these murders are. I started getting an inkling towards the end, but the clues come together in a natural procession. This story is unmissable. So grab a copy of the *Murder by Magic* anthology and read this story, if only to hope that these Made Men don't end up dead men. Or you can wait for the story to be released separately in January 2010.

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### **Brian says**

Took rather too long to get there. The beginning of the book has about nine chapters in a row of planning to

have conversations, traveling to conversations, talking about previous conversations, and so on. Just freaking have the conversation. As a result, the book drags. For a second book, one would think it's faster paced than the first one, so heaven help you if you start reading book one.

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## **carol. says**

<https://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2015/...>

I know what you are thinking: why did I read this when I apparently hated the first in the series?

The short answer: it has been a month of severe reading ADD.

The long answer: I'm enrolled in a class to advance my nursing degree when my employer announces they are merging my nursing unit with a critical care unit in four months. So all of a sudden, I'm also taking classes through work, one of which means trying to recover long-ago knowledge of cardiac rhythms. I had already requested *Kraken* from the library and had begged NetGalley for *Harrison Squared*, so I was afraid of Full Brain Syndrome. The Esther Diamond series by Resnick seemed to fit the bill for fluffy downtime reading. Being on the orderly side of the scale, I picked up the first book, *Disappearing Nightly*, and discovered in Resnick's introduction that the book has actually gone out of print, had the rights reverted, and was then 'updated' and republished. When I reached a particularly clunky world-building chapter (on page 90!), I decided to set it down.

Hoping it was a case of first book syndrome (her first UF book), I thought I'd give the second a quick spin. Reviews seemed to support that decision. Sadly, it was even less interesting than the first, and I wandered off somewhere around page 100. I came back to the first book, decided it was better than I originally thought but found the ending such a whopper of poor taste and decision-making that I gave it negative stars when I wrote the review. Went back to this one—because I feel this weird urge for ~~procrastination~~ completion—and lost interest again. It's probably that I'm the wrong audience—*The Sopranos* was the last time I was interested in organized crime—but it's also that it just isn't good writing.

Esther the actress continues to be mostly airheaded and dramatic. After witnessing a murder at her waitressing job, she is pulled into the mystery of apparent body doubles among the city's organized crime families. The cop she is almost-dating from book one is now on the Organized Crime Squad, so when he's assigned the case, he and Esther keep colliding. Their romantic tension is cute and probably the most well-developed aspect of the story. The band of merry men from *Disappearing* has been replaced with a sidekick from the crime family, Lucky, and Max's new familiar, Nelli. Through it all, Esther continues to agonize about acting jobs, the wizard continues to be almost useless, and Esther's interview skills continue to annoy. There's numerous small plot inconsistencies to add to the irritation. One example of a bigger plot hole comes from Nelli, who is initially able to identify the duplicates but is unable to identify one at a crucial moment.

The writing is flat-out awkward. For instance, Esther is trying to get a woman to come with her down into the basement/crypt of the church where Esther thinks she left a shawl. I'm not really sure why Esther decides she needs the ancillary character to go with her, but it becomes an excuse for a long, awkward dialogue about the crime family and the woman's three murdered husbands. Then Esther instead heads into the crypt with the priest and continues to pump him for information about the widow while she looks for the shawl. I still can't tell if it is a character issue or a writing issue, because Esther is very over-dramatic about insignificant

things she shouldn't care about. Esther 'gasps' hearing the story of one husband's death and puts her hand "up to my own throat" imagining a fight. Shortly after, she offers to help the priest search the lost-and-found for her shawl, is told it is only a cardboard box, and then is "disappointed. Also surprised" that her wrap has been stolen "from a *church*." The dialogues seem to be meant to provide the reader with red herrings and to provide information about the shawl and a weeping statue, but they are just awkward, practically screaming CLUE HERE!

It's great if you enjoy it, but I can't. It's like late-series Stephanie Plum (review) books with less logic and dumb magical elements. Besides, I just got a new set of library books in, including by Robert Jackson Bennett (*City of Stairs*), *Dry Storeroom No.1* by Richard Fortey, and *Afterparty* by Daryl Gregory (*We Are All Completely Fine*).

And there are always cardiac rhythms to study.

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