

## Acapulco Undone

"King Peso" by Carmen Amato is a topnotch detective mystery. It is a stand-alone classic. By that I mean the narrative unfolds from the detective's point of view. The reader is given no more, no less information than the protagonist who is Emilia Cruz, the first female detective in Acapulco's police force.

I can say "King Peso" is a stand-alone because I've read the 1st-three eBooks of Detective Cruz: Cliff Diver, Hat Dance, Diablo Nights. Some years ago I found "Cliff Diver" an impressive debut, both as an engaging mystery and as a biting satire of the social quagmire that exists in Mexico. I'd forgotten many details of the plot and characters, but I had no trouble catching the drift in 4th-novel. With "King Peso" Carman Amato exhibits unparalleled command of the genre. The character of Emilia Cruz has come of age. She has fought her way through a male-dominated profession to gain respect from friends and foes alike. She has remained true to her ideals in the pursuit of justice. Her personal life is becoming more stabilized. All of which leaves her more time and energy to investigate crimes and pursue criminals.

As readers should know, Mexico has a small upper class of high rollers and masses of disenfranchised poor. The disparity harkens back to the age of discovery when Spanish conquerors became overlords to the aboriginals who provided the slave labor for silver mines and cattle ranches. More recently, the NAFTA trade deal has exasperated the income disparity as financial sharks from the north partner with Mexican aristocrats to launch factories powered by cheap labor. As well, Mexico is a convenient tourist destination for well-to-do foreigners wishing to escape frigid winters. So contemporary Acapulco is a wry mixture of hedonistic luxury and tragic poverty. You'll see resplendent resorts for wealthy tourists alongside neighborhoods without electricity or clean water.

Couple the above with a corrupt government where image and political correctness count way more than providing basic services. The rare government officer who tries to do an honest job is targeted for

assassination by the drug cartels. Emilia Cruz has to almost topple the whole house of cards before she can get the corrupt bureaucracy to function as it should.

Emilia Cruz is an iconic character. Having grown up in poverty and having to care for an "absent minded" mother, Emilia has fought very hard to become a topnotch detective. Kurt, her boyfriend, is the manager of a five-star luxury resort. He competes at Triathlon competitions. Yet most of Emilia's friends are from the poor neighborhoods where she grew up. She is the poster face of Acapulco as well as champion of the poor and downtrodden. She keeps a personal file of missing women who are routinely ignored by the established law enforcement. She sticks her nose into areas that are bound to rouse drug lords to order her snuffed. She must keep her eyes on the rearview mirror at all times.

"King Peso" is a 5-star mystery and a brilliant satire on the corrupt government officials. And don't think it only happens in Mexico. Government waste is endemic in both Canada and USA.