

The Secret



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From Publishers Weekly A sequel to *The Predators*, Robbins's second posthumous novel opens with a flawless scene. Len Cooper is drinking gin and playing poker in his prep school dorm while two of his buddies masturbate over copies of *Hustler*. Comes a knock on the door, and grim news: Len's beautiful and adored French mother, Giselle, is dead, and his forbidding father, Jerry, is on his way to the school. The mix of comedy and tragedy, grossness and tender feelings, are described in vivid language at perfect tempo. Alas, the rest of the book is a long, slow downward slide, giving rise to suspicion that Robbins, who died in 1997, never revised the final draft. Alternately told from Len's and Jerry's points of view, the narrative chronicles the spectacular rise of the naughty lingerie empire Cheeks. The "secret"? Just ask Len's second wife, Vittoria, n?e Castellano, daughter of a capo, widow of tough guy Louie Luchese. Scanty as to motivation, obsessively covering (and baring) breasts and buttocks, Robbins's roman ? clef is more catalogue than story. Subplots explore sweatshop conditions, trade relations with China and technology millionaires, but all roads lead to nipple clips and crotchless panties. Empire-builders, fathers, husbands: the men in Robbins's world are, at heart, still teenage boys masturbating to *Hustler*. Perhaps that's Vicky's real secret. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Published

posthumously, The Secret is Robbins' sequel to The Predators (1998), which told the story of Jerome Cooper's rise to power after the Mafia kills his family. Jerome's story is continued along with that of his son, Len. Jerome is trying to raise the boy while keeping his affiliations with organized crime a secret. Len grows up learning that people are merely tools to achieve gratification and power. He becomes a lawyer, intending on making his own way in the world but gradually enters more and more of his father's world. In the meantime, Jerome has transformed a \$3 million nest egg into a billion-dollar chain of lingerie stores. As the company grows, the Coopers not only have to battle the Mob and a Chinese cartel, but perhaps more dangerously, their own passions. The story is chock-full of all the gritty characters and steamy sex that Robbins' fans desire. On the other hand, the characterizations are flat, the plot predictable, and the sex tiresome--not that the intended audience is likely to notice. Robbins is proving as prolific in death as he was in life. His next posthumous novel, slated for a late 2000 publication, is titled Piranhas. Eric Robbins See all Editorial Reviews

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