With its hypnotic, staccato rhythms, and words jostling, bumping, marching forward with edgy intensity (like lemmings heading toward a cliff of their own devising), The Cold Six Thousand feels as if it's being narrated by a hopped-up Dr. Seuss who's hungrier for violence than for green eggs and ham. In spinning the threads of post-JFK-assassination cultural chaos, James Ellroy's whirlwind riff on the 1960s takes nothing for granted, except that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Hurting from Las Vegas to Vietnam to Cuba to Memphis and back again (and all points in between), from Dealey Plaza to opium fields to smoke-filled back rooms where the mob holds sway, the novel traces the strands of complicity, greed, and fear that connect three men to a legion of supporting characters: Ward Littell, a former Feeb whose current allegiance to the mob and to Howard Hughes can't mask his admiration for the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King; Pete Bondurant, a hit man and fervent anti-Communist who splits his time between Vegas casinos and CIA-sponsored heroin labs in Saigon; and Wayne Tedrow Jr., a young Vegas
cop whos sent to Dallas in late November 1963 to snuff a black pimp, and who is fighting a losing battle against his predilection for violence: Junior was a hider. Junior was a watcher. Junior lit flames. Junior torched. Junior lived in his head. And behind these three, J. Edgar Hoover is the master puppeteer, pulling strings with visionary zeal and resolute pragmatism, the still point around whom the novel roils and tumbles. At once evil and comic, Hoover predicts that LBJ will deplete his prestige on the home front and recoup it in Vietnam. History will judge him as a tall man with big ears who needed wretched people to love him, and feels that Cuba appeals to hotheads and the morally impaired. Its the cuisine and the sex. Plantains and women who have intercourse with donkeys. The Seussian comparison isnt that far-fetched: Ellroys novel, like the childrens books (and like the very decade it limns), is flexible, spontaneous, and unabashedly off-kilter. Weighing in at a hefty 700 pages, The Cold Six Thousand is a trifle bloated by the excesses of its narrative form. But what glorious excess it is, as Ellroy continues to illuminate the twin impulses toward idealism and corruption that frame American popular and political culture. He deftly puts unforgettable faces and voices to the murkiest of conspiracy theories, and simultaneously mocks our eager assumption that such knowledge will make a difference.

--Kelly Flynn

**Personal Review: The Cold Six Thousand by James Ellroy**

Quick delivery; have no comment on tape quality because I have yet to listen to the book.

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