



King of Diamonds

Mr. Anthony J. Davis

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Based on true facts and characters, *King of Diamonds* is a novel that transports the reader to South Africa's tumultuous diamond and gold-mining days in the 1800's, when thousands of fortune-seekers fled there for riches. Many died of disease, violence or mine disasters. Most returned home as the paupers they arrived. Major figures of that era are portrayed, including ruthless empire builder Cecil Rhodes, Paul Kruger, the ill-tempered, British-hating president of the Dutch-controlled Transvaal, and an assortment of British and French speculators, who capitalized on the grueling conditions of the white and black miners. The story centers on Barney Barnato, another true figure and one of the few who did make their fortune from the mines. Born a poor London Jew, Barney has little formal education but is quick-witted and ambitious. Before setting off for Africa, he makes his living as a music hall performer and street boxer. In Kimberley, South Africa, he finds love with Fanny, a romance hampered by the objections of her father for religious reasons. Barney must fight for survival in raw, dangerous Kimberley. Five years later Barney Barnato is a wealthy man. As his holdings expand. Barney employs three of his nephews in the business, Woolf, Jack and Solly Joel. The three young men learn the diamond business quickly. Jack has an unfortunate run-in with the law and Barney bails him out and gets him back to England before his court hearing. Jack continues to run the London side of the business. Woolf and Solly take on a bigger responsibility as Harry reduces his involvement in the Barnato Company. To complete the consolidation of the Kimberley diamond mine, Barnato has to acquire a large holding owned by a French company that cuts his holdings in two. A bidding war erupts as Cecil Rhodes makes an offer for this holding. Barnato outbids him, but Rhodes counters with an offer to purchase the holding at a lower cost, in exchange for a 20% of the Barnato company. Barnato accepts only to find that he loses control. Rhodes proposes that they consolidate both their companies into one large mining conglomerate. De Beers Consolidated Mines is born, and Barney Barnato emerges as the largest shareholder. With millions in the bank, Barnato turns his attention to the recently discovered gold in an area that becomes known as Johannesburg in the Transvaal. He purchases mines, land and infrastructure in and around the new mining town. Befriending Paul Kruger, Barnato is able to influence Kruger's ambivalence to foreigners. This proves to be valuable when in 1896 a group of powerful mine owners become involved in a plot to overthrow the Kruger government. The abortive coup results in the arrest of the entire group. They are tried and four of the men, including Rhodes' brother, are sentenced to death. The others are given prison sentences of hard labor. Barnato threatens Kruger with the closure of all the mines in the Transvaal which would throw thousands of men out of work and cause riots. The intransigent Kruger initially refuses. On payment of substantial fines, all the men are released. An audit by the chief accountant of the Barnato Company finds an irregularity of more than one million pounds and lays the blame on Solly Joel, Barney's nephew. On a return voyage to England Barnato is murdered by his nephew Solly. At the inquest Solly insists that it was suicide and that Barney had been in poor health in the weeks prior to the voyage. The jury accepts this and Barney's death is ruled a suicide. Within a year, Solly's brother Woolf is murdered in Kimberley and Solly takes complete control of the Barnato Mining Company, the Barnato Bank and all of their properties.

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