

BUMMY DAVIS VS. MURDER, INC.

The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Mafia and an Ill-Fated Prizefighter

by [Ron Ross](#)

Kirkus

Pugilist turned biographer Ron Ross spars with us in his debut, an account of the short, mostly happy life of fearless Al "Bummy" Davis (1920-45), a nice kid with a fierce left hook and a volatile, short fuse. It all took place in Brownsville, a land of gangsters in candy stores, of sudden death among egg creams. Everyone, readers may gather from this text, spoke in colorful argot filled with Yiddishisms: Gertude Berg joined with James T. Farrell, Henry Roth meets Damon Runyon. The street names, the people, the ambience, the very air are all quite accurate, but the set scenes, the dramatics, and especially the dialogue are frankly dubious. Although no one other than those involved can know last thoughts, intimate conversations, or amorphous motivations, Ross delivers them all anyway. He knows what Lepke Buchalter thought, what Albert Anastasia felt, what Kid Twist Reles said to his wife and just how that dirty bastard Reles took his fatal plunge from a window at Coney's Half Moon Hotel. Ross recreates what revered Cantor Yossele Rosenblat said to Bummy Davis (né Davidoff). And he clearly knows what Davis felt as he beat Tony Canzoneri in Madison Square Garden. It's a colorful tale that traces the life and times of an appealing street guy who keeps straight despite two gangster brothers. (Too bad John Garfield is no longer available for the title role.) If this reads more like a frisky novel than straight social history, it certainly has more brio and is more realistic than any ordinary history of life for some folks during Prohibition and after in Brooklyn. And it's funny too, in a Runyon Redux way, as present tense kayos the past. So maybe it's overdramatized: ya wanna make somethin' of it? Fluent and lively as a flyweight ten-rounder.