

# A Case of Exploding Mangoes

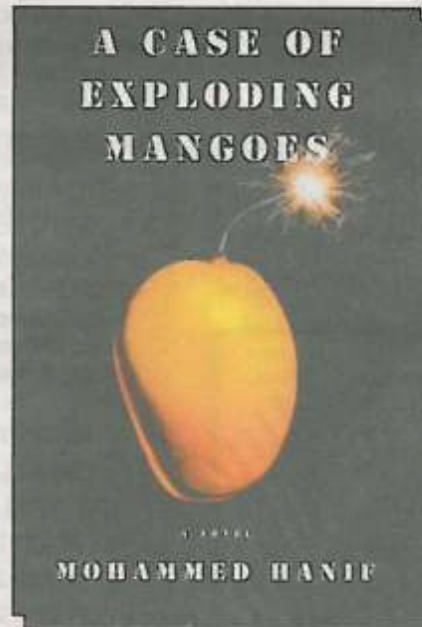
by Mohammed Hanif

(Jonathan Cape)

The age-old saying about a house owner chasing rats while his house is engulfed by fire has never been as brutally portrayed as in Mohammed Hanif's debut novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, in which he puts the leadership of Third World countries on trial. These countries have long since been cast in the mould of hopeless beggars perennially stretching their hands for aid, and this book gives us an insight as to why: their leaders are always busy doing nothing.

The story concerns Major-General Zia al Huq, the military leader of Pakistan, who came into power through a bloodless coup some 11 years previously. We never see what he did to justify the coup nor his position as the head of over 130 million people, but throughout the narrative we witness robust and elaborate plans for him to not only cling to power, but waste the state's resources searching for his imagined killers.

Given the scenario, the question arises: When do they govern? What do they have to offer the country and its citizenry? The answer, of



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course, is nothing. The masses may as well be sand in the wind, mere nuisances to be dealt with harshly, as done to the narrator Ali Shigri or the blind Zainab who, being punished for not being able to identify her rapists, unwittingly allows the world a glimpse of her country's sham leadership.

In the corridors of power, the stench of fear is palpable and overpowering. There is distrust and backstabbing among the generals manning the various structures of government, while the myriad problems in the country are overwhelmed by the whims of these charlatans. You almost feel sorry for the citizenry, but you don't. What are they really doing? Singing the praises of anybody who most satisfies their needs at any given point in time.

Sometimes the west is blamed for keeping quiet or colluding with these sycophants to ensure that their foreign policies are implemented. But a more important question should be asked: What are the people doing or intending to do to free themselves and live? A very serious obstacle to surmount by the inhabitants of this part of the world, but the thought will get under your skin.

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* may have been intended as a witty, humorous novel, but the imagery is that of a desert landscape that will need many oases to tame, and Hanif does not make it easy.

**Review by Ifedinma Dimbo**



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of a soon-to-be-published women's novel *She Was Foolish?* More details about the author, her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found online at [www.irishwriters-exchange.com](http://www.irishwriters-exchange.com)