



The JUKEBOX QUEEN OF MALTA: A Novel

Nicholas Rinaldi

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From the heralded author of *Bridge Fall Down* comes this magical, mesmerizing love story in the tradition of *Catch-22* and *Corelli's Mandolin*.

The year is 1942 and Rocco Raven, intrepid auto mechanic from Brooklyn, arrives in Malta as the wireless operator for a small American liaison team. Rocco knows nothing of the Mediterranean island's rich history - its Neolithic caves, Copper Age temples, and fortresses built by the Knights of St. John. He knows only that the Germans and Italians are battering the place with bombs night and day, and as he stumbles onto the tarmac in the thick of an air raid, he sees little more than smoke and magnesium glare -- and heaps of rubble.

But nothing is as it seems on Malta. Rocco's barracks are a brothel; his commanding officer is an unparalleled genius who turns the war's misfortunes into personal profit; and the Maltese people, astonishingly, live as though there is no war -- dancing, drinking, laughing, loving. When, within days of his arrival, Rocco's barracks are bombed, he wanders deliriously through the devastated streets of Valletta until he sees an apparition -- a beautiful, ethereal woman. She is Melita, who spends her days delivering the jukeboxes her cousin builds out of shards of glass and twisted metal left in the wake of the bombings. Their connection is passionate and instantaneous, and they embark upon a tumultuous love affair despite the ruin around them. It seems Rocco has found a reason to live, a reason to fight. But the passing months of starvation, the deaths of friends and comrades, and the endless shower of bombs threaten to undo him. Rocco will do anything to escape the horror -- including jeopardize his love for Melita, and his very life.

The Jukebox Queen of Malta is an exquisite and enchanting novel, an account of love and war set on an island perilously balanced between what is real and what is not, with characters who test -- and testify to -- the resiliency of the human spirit. Music and bombs, romance and war, the jukebox and the gun exist in arresting counterpoint in this profound and deeply moving exploration of the redemptive powers of love.

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