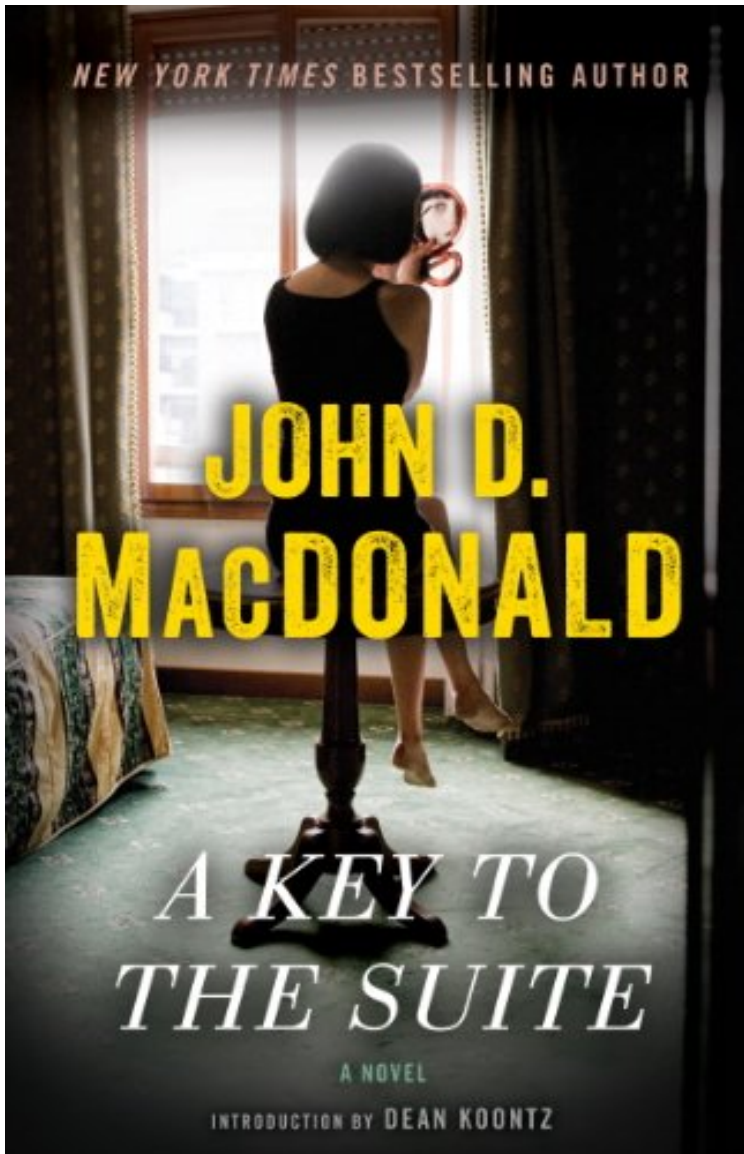


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A Key to the Suite: A Novel



Par John D. MacDonald
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA master of the thriller turns his talent for riveting suspense to the world of business. In this bold novel, John D. MacDonald exposes the backstabbing and betrayals, sordid deeds and savage maneuverings that take place behind closed doors.Introduction by Dean KoontzFloyd Hubbard arrives at a convention at a busy beach-town hotel with a mission from the top brass: ax a long-time manager in the sales team who has been slacking off for too long. Hubbards a loyal company man, but his background is engineering, not cold-blooded corporate warfare. Little does Hubbard realize that the first grenade has already been lobbedand hes the target.Cory Barlund has heard more than her fair share of odd requests in her years as a high-class call girl, so this ones right up her alley: pose as a journalist, seduce a visiting executive,

and embarrass him in front of his colleagues. But after a night with Hubbard, Corys having second thoughts. Hubbards a good man. She might be falling for him. And the real hustlers are the ones on the convention floor. Praise for John D. MacDonald My favorite novelist of all time . . . No price could be placed on the enormous pleasure that his books have given me. Dean Koontz To diggers a thousand years from now, the works of John D. MacDonald would be a treasure on the order of the tomb of Tutankhamen. Kurt Vonnegut John D. MacDonald remains one of my idols. Donald Westlake Extrait One The gentle hand of a girl pressed him awake, and he looked up along a tailored arm at the gloriously empty smile of a stewardess. Fasten your seat belt, please. When he straightened in the seat and began to grope for the ends of the belt, she resumed her tour of inspection, looking from side to side, waking other sleepers. It would have to be a surgical technique, he decided. Their smiles are all too alike. A few minutes of deftness with the scalpel, cutting the frown muscles loose, rehooking the nerve circuits, and you would limit each of them to just two expressions--the habitual superior blandness or the dazzling smile. Perhaps with true corporate efficiency they had hooked the smile to the vocal nerve complex so that they could not speak without smiling. Prepare for ditching, would be said with the same smile as, How would you like your fillet, sir? But of course they had not yet been able to do anything about the expression of the eyes. They all looked at you with the same aseptic, merciless disdain, then walked away, germless Dynel hair a-bounce under the trig cap, tennis hips swinging the military worsted skirts, any bounce of breasts falling neatly within the maximum and minimum allowable limits as set by the airline. He ran the pad of his thumb down the line of his jaw, feeling the sandstone texture of the night growth of beard, and smacked his lips in self-disgust at the stale and clotted taste in his mouth. He was on the starboard side of the airplane, behind the wings, and as it tilted into the landing pattern, he looked out the port windows and saw the dawn jumble of the city, with random neon still on, paling in the grayness, and the shining eyes of some small cars in the small streets. The airplane slowed as the flaps were extended, and it felt tentative and less airworthy under him, so that he inadvertently tightened his buttock muscles and held his chest a little higher. There had been so much jet travel in this past year, a Super-Constellation felt like a flapping silly thing, rough and haphazard, like an old lady roller skating on cobblestones. An intrusion of history, he thought, to ride in this sister of the Ford Tri-motor, and to be killed in one would have certain ludicrous overtones. Snob, he said to himself. Fanciful snob at that, with the analysis of surgical smiles, and preference for dying up-to-date--but always fanciful when overtired, always that half step to one side of reality, so the world bulges into strange shapes. He saw, to the east, a dark gray velvet sea with a pink rim, delicate as porcelain, and then looked down at the racing, upcoming ribbon of warehouses, scrubby lots, auto dumps; then saw the landing strip lights, and tucked his anus up yet more firmly until he felt the yelp of tires, the second contact, the rolling that began to slow down. Then the muscles softened, and he unlatched the safety belt and stifled the sigh that meant--Hubbard, you made it again. Hubbard, the hero of progress. He remembered being told that when his grandfather bought a battery flashlight and brought it home, they made him go out into the yard to light it up. Dangers have become more joyless. Each horseless carriage shall be proceeded by a man on horseback carrying a red flag by day and a lighted lantern by night. He retrieved his hat and dispatch case from the overhead shelf and walked down the stairway on wheels into a curious damp warmth like that of a team locker-room a little while after the last hot shower has been taken. There were puddles on the ramp from recent rain. He marched with the others down an endless corridor, thinking that the air age is turning us into a race of pedestrians. The main part of the terminal was so savagely air-conditioned he felt chilled when the sweat of walking began an immediate evaporation. He found a mens room, whitely lighted, and as he was washing his hands he stared dispassionately at himself in the mirror and was mildly astonished he should look so tidy in that cruel light. The smut-shadow of beard gave him somewhat the look of imported syndicate muscle, but, he decided, of the upper echelon where the payoff goes into a numbered account and the shotgun stock is of Circassian walnut. But muscle, nevertheless, he thought sadly. The analogy works. Hubbard shoots the stock option out from under one Jesse Mulaney. He shoots Mulaneys name off the office door. This time it will be worse than usual because I do like that fat, fumbling, nervy, scared son-of-a-bitch--for reasons which escape me. He collected his suitcase from the baggage pen and headed for a distant door which seemed as if it might lead to taxicabs. He hefted the suitcase and wondered if Jan had repacked it with the kind of clothing he would need. Though she had yet to fail him, he always felt unprepared when he did not have the time and opportunity to do his own packing. This time there had been even less notice than usual, and Jan had hustled the suitcase to the airport at almost the last moment, with even her good disposition showing signs of erosion. He pulled the cab door shut and said, The Sultana, please. Sultana coming up, the driver said and

wrenched the cab away from the curb. They sped through the empty six o'clock streets on octagonal wheels with a continuous bounce, bang and rumble of springs and shocks. The interior stank of a harsh antiseptic vividly flavored with mint, a device which failed to accomplish its purpose, to conceal the illness of a passenger carried not very long ago. Hubbard rolled the nearest window down the rest of the way and lit a cigarette. The damp warm air blew in on him, coming from some endless cellar full of ripe mushrooms and old swimming trunks. On the causeway the air had a fresher, saltier scent. The street lights went out. An old man in what looked like bright yellow pajamas fled across the road in front of the cab and turned to shriek an obscenity. An ambulance sped past them with descending doppler scream, a prowler car close behind it.

Above the entrance to a strip joint was a forty-foot-high plywood silhouette of someone named Saturday Jones. The beach street wore a compacted, sodden litter that looked as if parades had gone by, honoring the more ancient perversions. The cab headed north past increasingly arrogant and fanciful hotel structures. A massive woman in white slacks and white halter strolled the lonely sidewalk with a small trotting dog on a leash. Hubbard had to look back to assure himself that the dog was not pale purple, but it was. The static fronds of all the palm trees were obviously the product of patience, metal shears and an endless supply of green enameled tin. The bursting beds of flowers were vulgarities perpetrated by thousands of busy-fingered, stone-faced little Polish women. The driver yanked the cab through a mausoleum gate and up a glossy acreage of asphalt. Before the cab plunged under the daring tilt of the cantilevered roof that sheltered the main entrance, Hubbard caught a glimpse of a huge black, white and red banner which said, Welcome APETOD!!! The cab stopped with a dual complaint of tires and brakes, and the driver said with dreary pride, Sultana, nineteen and a half minutes. A big doorman with a meaty, military face came gravely to take the two pieces of luggage. Hubbard paid the driver. Three stout disheveled men were standing in a patch of ornamental shrubbery. They wore tropical suits, ragged straw peon hats and big round convention buttons. Goddam it, Hank, one of them was saying loudly. Every goddam time we all agree I'm going to take the tenor, you come in and take it too. Now goddam it, dyah wanna sing it right or dyah wanna sing it wrong? The plate-glass door swung shut, and Hubbard walked on thick carpeting in a chill that felt five degrees lower than the terminal building had been. As he walked toward the distant registration desk, he puzzled over APETOD. Association for the Prevention of? Of what? Everything Tough Or Dirty. Sign me up, brothers. I will join. In remote corners and alcoves and setbacks of the lobby area, work gangs were sweeping, polishing, cleaning, rearranging. He looked at the complex vistas of ramps and glass, pastels and plastics, at all the contrived decadence of crypto-modern, and remembered that a friend of his had once described the decor of a neighboring hotel as being Early Dental Plate. The huge hotel, now being brushed and polished by the maintenance crews, was like some bawdy, obese, degenerate old queen who, having endured prolonged orgy, was now being temporarily restored to a suitably regal condition by all the knaves and wenches who serve her. The desk clerk had a varnished wave in his baby-pale hair, and adorably narrow little lapels, and a bruised and winsome little mouth to smile with, and the eyes of one of the larger lizards, unwinking, unforgiving. Mr. Hubbard? he said. He caressed his Cardex. Oh dear, he said. We have nothing reserved, no. Try American General Machine. Oh, yes! the clerk cooed. Yes indeed. Coming in today, with the convention. Lovely accommodations, sir. Eighth floor, north wing, with an ocean suite and other rooms.

I have it all reserved under a Mr. Mulaney. Would that be correct? A party of ten? That would be correct. Would Mr. Mulaney be making the room assignments for the group? Hell be happy to have me pick my own. What's reserved? The clerk drifted away and came back with a room chart sealed in plastic. This is a standard floor plan, sir, for all our north wing floors, with the numbers the same except, of course, the floor designation digit missing. Let me see now. You have the master suite at the end, a three-bedroom suite and this smaller adjacent suite and this pair of interconnecting singles and the three singles along this side. Um, yes. That would be ten, wouldn't it? Of course. Any of these three singles will be fine. But, sir, as long as you are the first one here, you could be on the ocean side. These are really the less desirable ... It's what I'd like, Hubbard said, and hoped the clerk wouldn't break into tears. Can you give me one now? Oh gracious, that might be a problem. APETOD had their farewell banquet last night. We might have to move you later in the day, give you some other ... Let me check with the housekeeper on eight north, sir. The clerk murmured into a phone, hung up and smiled in a sweet and happy way. Eight forty-seven is available, sir. We won't have to move you. Fine, fine, Hubbard said, and hoped the lad wouldn't collapse with joy. A soft chime summoned a bellhop who led Hubbard to the proper bank of elevators. They walked a long way down the total silence of the eighth floor. A housekeeping cart stood outside the open door of 847. A brawny monochromatic woman in white was stripping the twin beds. She looked at them with total hostility. This was supposed to be ready,

the bellhop said. So who says suppose? So who knows about ready? Do forty-seven she says, so I do it. So do it, the bellhop said. Its all right, Hubbard said. It doesnt matter. He tipped the boy. The room smelled of stale cigar and a faint pungency of perfume. He took off his hat and jacket and loosened his tie. Sliding a glass door aside, he stepped out onto a tiny triangular terrace, just big enough for the chaise fashioned of aluminum and plastic webbing and one small metal table. The vertical sawtooth construction of the side of the building gave the terraces the illusion of privacy. A tall glass containing a collapsed straw, an inch of pale orange liquid, and a poisonous-looking cherry stood on the railing. He leaned on the railing and looked down at orderly arrangements of acres of sun cots, at two pools, one Olympic and the other larger and freeform, at a thatched bar and a pagoda bar, at the empty alignment of outdoor tables and chairs, and the lush calligraphy of the planting areas. The sun was behind him, shining on tall pale distant buildings, leaving the area below him in blue-gray shadow. The woman came out and snatched the glass, looked around for other debris, snorted and went back into the room. Now its done! she bellowed a few minutes later. As he turned, the corridor door slammed shut. He unpacked. Jan had done well. But there was no fond funny note, no silly present for him. Of course, he told himself, she had no time for such nonsense. Not this time. The room had the sterility of a place where no one had ever lived. The little stains and abrasions and scars had been cleverly added to make him believe he was not the last living man in the world. The machines did not want him to be too lonely, so they added these subliminal clues. He ordered up juice, eggs, cocoa and a morning paper. After he finished, he pushed the cart out into the hall, closed the terrace door, pulled the draperies shut. He turned a bedlight on, showered, put on his pajamas, got into bed. By then it was late enough to place the call to Jan. Was it a good trip, dear? she asked. Her voice was dimmed by the humming distance, flat and uninvolved. They tried to cut us off at the waterhole, but we fought our way out. What? I couldnt hear you, dear. Mike was belling. It was okay. I got some sleep. Thats good. Mike wants to talk to you. Daddy! Daddy! You know what, Daddy! Im limping! Now how about that! When you come home Ill be limping! Are you coming home now? Pretty soon, boy. When Jan came back on the line he said, Whats with the limp? Its very convincing, when he doesnt forget which leg it is. He turned his ankle and demanded a bandage. Hows the weather there? Tropical. By the way, Im in eight forty-seven. Have a truly hilarious convention, dear. Thanks so much. This wont be a picnic. You know what I have to do. Her voice was inaudible for a moment. ... not many picnics for anybody any more. I miss them. Thanks for calling. Keep in touch, dear. I will. I will indeed. Love you. Also, of course. Rest up, if they give you the chance. Bye. After he hung up he had a premonition of what could happen. The district man, whichever one had been stuck with the mechanics of the arrangements for the AGM group, would be over to check everything out. And he would find Hubbard was already registered and in, and he would feel terribly anxious to make certain that Mr. Hubbard was ecstatically content with everything.

Revue de presse Praise for John D. MacDonald The great entertainer of our age, and a mesmerizing storyteller. Stephen King My favorite novelist of all time . . . All I ever wanted was to touch readers as powerfully as John D. MacDonald touched me. No price could be placed on the enormous pleasure that his books have given me. He captured the mood and the spirit of his times more accurately, more hauntingly, than any literature writer yet managed always to tell a thunderingly good, intensely suspenseful tale. Dean Koontz To diggers a thousand years from now, the works of John D. MacDonald would be a treasure on the order of the tomb of Tutankhamen. Kurt Vonnegut A master storyteller, a masterful suspense writer . . . John D. MacDonald is a shining example for all of us in the field. Talk about the best. Mary Higgins Clark The consummate pro, a master storyteller and witty observer . . .

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