



Freaky Deaky

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With the recent death of thriller writer John D. MacDonald, Elmore Leonard has emerged as undisputed king of the hard-boiled crime novel. His books are difficult to categorize. Some are police procedurals, but many, including the nearly heart-stopping *STICK*, might be termed “criminal procedurals.” *FREAKY DEAKY* is a little of both. Leonard demonstrates his virtuosity by shifting points of view so that the reader identifies with the detective in one chapter and with his quarry in the next.

The culprits in this case are two superannuated 1960’s characters who did time for blowing up federal property during the height of the anti-Vietnam War frenzy. One is a still very attractive but embittered and treacherous woman named Robin Abbott. She has deduced that she and her partner, Skip Gibbs, now a Hollywood stunt man and explosives expert, were informed upon by two hangers-on in the old movement. One of them, Woody Ricks, has since inherited an estate worth around one hundred million dollars. Robin wants Skip to help her scare Woody out of a portion of his money by setting off a few bombs.

The detective-hero, Chris Mankowski, wants nothing more to do with bombs. He is trying to get out of the Detroit Police Department Bomb Squad and into something comparatively tranquil, such as Sex Crimes or Homicide, but he is inadvertently drawn into the picture when he befriends a sexy young actress who claims she was raped by the loathsome Woody Ricks. Before the story is over, they all have to deal with Woody’s bodyguard/manservant Donnell Lewis, a former Black Panther who has his own sights set on Woody’s millions.

When a bomb goes off in a Leonard novel, it really goes off: “The rear end of the limo was glued to the cement, gray metal scorched black, tires burned off, both doors and the trunk lid gone. The car had been blown in half, the front end driven thirty feet across the backyard where it lay nosed into a bed of shrubs.”

The superior quality of his writing is attributable to artistic integrity, painstaking research, and considerable talent. His dialogue is as good as dialogue can be written; in *FREAKY DEAKY*, the black street dialect is pure poetry. Leonard never uses cliff-hangers, but his plots are full of twists and turns that keep the reader fascinated. He is unsentimental about human character in a manner reminiscent of Dashiell Hammett. In fact, Leonard is one of the very few crime writers who can stand comparison with Hammett, James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, and MacDonald.

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